

HEALING HEREAFTER



**Finding Rational and Refreshing Answers
for Why We're Here
and Where We're Headed**

Jason Dykstra, MD

Healing Hereafter

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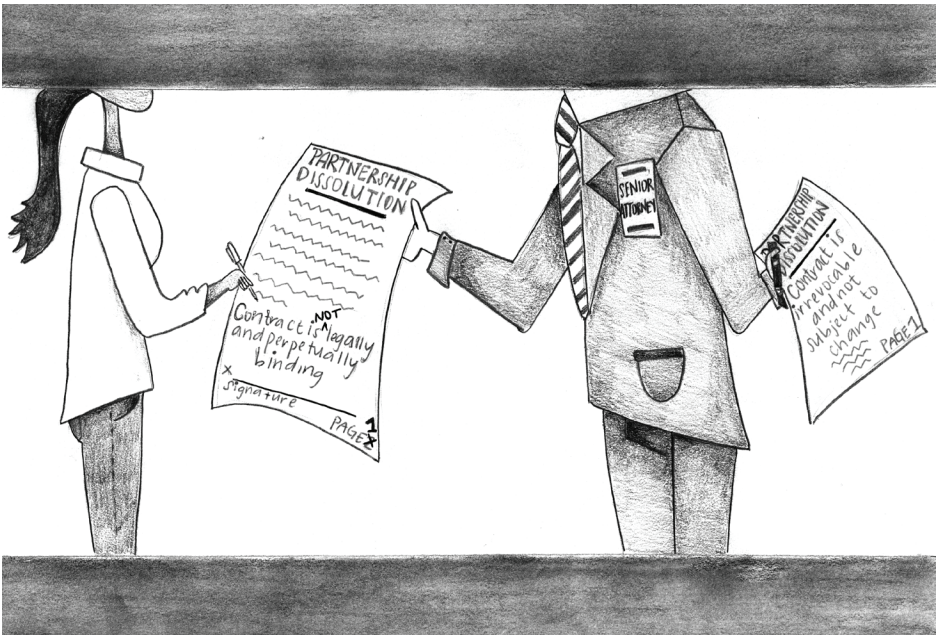
*For everyone who wonders
what the hereafter has in store for us,
and especially for those who want to know why*

*With deep gratitude and love
to my Savior, spouse, and sons,
who all significantly gave of themselves
to make this possible*

Booklet 6

Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, but Words Will Never Hurt Me

*Questions about what Hell is, how long people are there,
and whether or not they can leave*



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As you know, my workdays are largely spent talking into a microphone while staring at unbelievably expensive computer monitors. Occasionally I speak unintelligibly. Sometimes I speak unclearly. Always I speak quickly. I have a great deal of sympathy and gratitude for the poor person on the other end of that line who has to transcribe everything I say, especially if the way my voice sounds is anything like the way my writing looks! I routinely received “Needs Improvement” marks for penmanship as a kid. The need remains, because the improvement never came! So I can’t really be too upset when I pull up their transcriptions for proofreading and see typos scattered throughout my reports. After all, some are my fault, and most others are unintentional and inconsequential anyway. Many are hilarious.

The most innocent of these mistakes is the omission, or what I call the word wipe. Whether my speech was slurred like a drunken sailor or whether the typist was daydreaming about a voice much sexier than mine, some poor word gets wiped from the report. Not a big deal if the change is from “The patient’s left breast mass has virtually disappeared” to “The patient’s left breast has virtually disappeared,” at least after the patient verifies that all is well! However, if “Findings consistent with tumor removal persist” becomes “Findings consistent with tumor persist,” then we have a problem, don’t we? A slightly more insidious typo is made by the uber-type-A transcriptionists who I call “the commak-azes.” They have a love affair with commas, and they will toss undictated commas into my reports like a caffeinated

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cornholer. Most of the time, it's merely an annoying, bothersome nuisance, slowing, delaying, and, prolonging,,, my,,,,, workday,. But sometimes it's not good for the patient either. A "nearly complete traumatic tear through the gallbladder neck and its associated blood vessels" is not something you want, but I'd say "a nearly complete traumatic tear through the gallbladder, neck, and its associated blood vessels" is quite a bit worse! As menacing as the commakazes might seem though, the change-up is by far the most sinister of the transcription transgressions. Here, letters of a word are mixed up to create new ones. You might chuckle when "the sudden, extensive enema caused the patient's arm and leg swelling," rather than their sudden, extensive edema. Unless you're the patient, of course! But when "evidence of malignancy is not present" is typed as "evidence of malignancy is now present," an example that actually occurs occasionally, that mistake can have some awfully devastating consequences.

When words are used carelessly and harmfully, they can hurt. A lot more than broken bones. This booklet introduces us to the power of words and their misuse, not medical jargon, rather words characterizing the hereafter, like eternal and forever. Subtracting from, adding to, or changing these words can have disastrous effects. As with radiology reports, knowing exactly what words refer to is crucial in evaluating the truth about the biblical afterlife that a speaker or writer is attempting to convey. So let's see what the words eternal and forever have to say about themselves . . .

1

In previous booklets of *Healing Hereafter*, we discuss why there's a Hell and Heaven, where we go before Hell or Heaven, what both we and God do to keep us from Hell and get us to Heaven, and how our contribution can give us glimpses of Hell or Heaven here. But we didn't actually talk about Hell or Heaven much themselves, so now it's time. Since no one really likes to end a conversation on the topic of damnation, we'll get the former out of the way first. As impossible as it might sound, I truly believe we can discover what God is up to with the biblical Hell and why it makes sense. Remember that I'm always only after the most biblical, logical truth, and I hope we can find it together. Ready? Set. Go.

Let's jump right in with our first big question: Is Hell forever? Our conclusion depends on five concepts: how many people end up in Heaven, what forever literally refers to, what the expectations and actions of those who will go to Hell reveal about its longevity, the biblical origin of Hell, and whether or not God's willingness to forgive or restore various people groups throughout the Bible should be extrapolated eternally and universally. The words "all," "forever," "eternal," and "Hell" become exceedingly important in our discussion, so we'll do our best to define them objectively and responsibly. The significant majority of biblical evidence offered by both those who agree and disagree with a forever Hell centers on the five concepts above. Therefore, we will structure our exploration around them, also addressing other pertinent points and questions along the way as they arise.

Ironically, how long people are in Hell depends to a large extent on who is in Heaven. People cannot be in the former forever if they all eventually end up in the latter, right? So does the Bible claim that everyone will make it to Heaven? Does it teach "that Hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins and all will be reconciled to God," either immediately after death or via "an intense experience of correction" in Hell, during which "the love of God will melt every hard

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heart, and even the most ‘depraved sinners’ will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God?”¹⁻³ Bible verses have been offered to argue this, and it’s important to visit all of them to see what they say and what they don’t say. It’s also important so that you know I’m not withholding relevant passages from you that might be more challenging to address. To prove that, I’ll start with—and even showcase—what I feel is the most convincing passage in the whole Bible that has been used to support a universal human salvation in Heaven.⁴ Here is Psalm 22:26-31.

“The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!
All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.
All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!”

Obviously, the psalmist is painting a pretty awesome picture of some future time when God will reign, and many people will acknowledge his authority. But does this refer to Heaven? Although the Old Testament writers wrote a lot about the current heaven, they did not have a clear concept of the eternal Hell and Heaven, Gehenna and the New Earth. Even one of their primary words for forever carries with it inherent uncertainty, as we will discuss in Chapter 4. This uncertainty is expected for two reasons. First, let’s say God

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did describe Hell and Heaven in detail to an ancient Hebrew (we'll call him Reggie...Reggie Cohen). Understandably curious about his eternal destiny, Reggie asks how to get to Heaven. God explains Hell and Heaven to him but also reveals that Reggie can't get to the latter until someone perfect is willing to die in his place as a substitute for the consequence of death that sin brings. Reggie doesn't know anybody perfect and starts getting confused and depressed. God reassures him with the knowledge that several hundred years from then, a guy named Jesus will come to be that perfect substitute. Reggie appreciates being kept in the loop but lives the rest of his life a nervous wreck, knowing that when he dies there will still be no way for him to get to Heaven. And the only thing that might keep Reggie from being in Hell forever is some guy from the distant future that he has no historical evidence of and very little knowledge about. Informing someone that they have a problem—especially an eternal one—doesn't make much sense if there's not already a clear solution, right? If you were told that you had a terminal disease that would certainly kill you, would you find it helpful to also be told not to worry because someone in the next millennium will invent a cure and be able to time travel back to heal you? Probably not. Without the solution of Jesus in place, explaining Hell and Heaven is pretty futile, so it makes sense that God didn't feel the need to make them crystal clear to Old Testament writers. But we would expect that when Jesus *did* come along, he would teach a lot about Hell and Heaven, since these places would now have context and meaning. And that's exactly what he does.

The second reason it's not surprising that Hell and Heaven were nebulous concepts before Christ is that Lugg provides a way to be saved without a person having to know about Hell or Heaven by the time he dies anyway. Not to mention that neither Hell nor Heaven appear to be ready for human habitation yet, as explained in Booklet 3. But for our purposes now, we only need realize that it's not advisable to rely on one Old Testament passage to give us an accurate description of Heaven, given the confusion surrounding the descriptions of the afterlife we see prior to Jesus' coming.

This is particularly true when an interpretation of that passage

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diametrically opposes the teachings of Jesus himself on the topic. Jesus teaches plainly that people won't be getting married in Heaven, because we'll "be like the angels" (Matthew 22:29-30), so there probably won't be "posterity," "future generations," or "a people yet unborn" there either, which is at odds with a universalistic interpretation of Psalm 22. And in Heaven people won't "go down to the dust" or not be able to "keep themselves alive," unlike in this psalm (Revelation 21:1-4). Plus, why would people need to "be told about the Lord" if they're already in Heaven with him? It's also important to remember that Psalm 22—just like every other psalm—is a poem. Poems certainly can be written to be interpreted literally, and maybe this is one of those, but maybe not. Regardless, a poem about some wonderful time in the future is much more likely to employ hyperbole or exaggeration—note the repeated use of the word "all" in this psalm—than formal instruction on Heaven by a Jewish teacher like Jesus.

However, the aspect of this psalm that sheds the most light on its meaning is its context. More than two thirds of Psalm 22 isn't about a time of future bliss at all; it's about one man being scorned, mocked, and insulted by "a pack of villains" (Psalm 22:16). Once he is delivered from this, he turns to his "people," "the great assembly," and "those who fear God" to encourage them to praise God. "All you descendents of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendents of Israel!" "Those who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him" (Psalm 22:22-26). David, a king of the Jews, is apparently writing to his people—God's people—recounting how God has rescued him and is therefore worthy of praise. Remembering God's provision was a big deal for the Jews. When they didn't, things went very badly, because forgetting what God had done for them led them to turn away from him and his goodness. When they did remember, things went very well. Notice how significantly the fate of the Jews changes from the one scenario to the other in Ezekiel 16:43-63, how the bookends of this passage perfectly exemplify this contrast (16:43, 61-63). It would make sense for God's people to "remember and turn to the Lord" in

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Psalms 22, but it doesn't make sense for anybody else. If you don't know this God and don't think of him as being actively involved in your life, then there is no provision of his to remember, let alone one that would cause you to "turn to the Lord," right?

Moreover, many Jews, especially in the Old Testament, believed that as God's chosen nation they had exclusive rights to God's blessings (Deuteronomy 14:1-2, Psalm 132:11-18), so it would be very unusual for David to suddenly break from that mindset for a few verses by claiming that God's people included everyone, especially the "pack of villains" he had just been rescued from! Since he is writing to people who predominantly considered only themselves to be God's people, telling them to praise God for deliverance that only they would recognize, offering a blessing of life forever to only "those who seek the Lord," and doing this all in poetic form with a known incomplete knowledge of the afterlife, perhaps it's more likely that "all the ends of the earth," "all the families of the nations," and "all the rich of the earth" in Psalm 22:27-29 refer to God's people scattered throughout the world, rather than everyone. Certainly the former interpretation jives better with the teachings of Jesus and of the New Testament that we explore throughout the next several chapters.

But maybe you're still not sold. Why can't we just consider "all" to mean "all" and be done with it? Well, both in the Bible and in our everyday lives, the word "all" often doesn't mean every last one. When Jesus claims "all who draw the sword will die by the sword," he isn't saying that every single person who's picked up a sword will get killed by one (Matthew 26:52). He's teaching a general truth that the violent will meet a violent end. Likewise, if you claim at a football game that all the fans in the stadium are cheering, you don't mean every last one. You mean it's generally true that fans there are cheering. So "all" not quite meaning all is a familiar, acceptable concept to us. This concept can apply to the afterlife too, and the Bible actually provides a conclusive example regarding the hereafter when "all" doesn't mean "all." "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, *all mankind* will come and bow down

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before me,' says the Lord. 'And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to *all mankind*'" (Isaiah 66:22-24). In Mark 9:43-48, Jesus quotes this passage, equating this fire with Hell. It's absolutely unequivocal here that "all mankind," both times it is used, only refers to those who haven't rebelled against God, those who aren't being burned with unquenchable fire in Hell. This made perfect sense to the Jewish mind; after all, look at the persistent Jewish resistance to non-Jews being included in God's salvation plan even centuries after Isaiah lived, decades after Jesus had come (Acts 28:17-28)! Jews contemporary with Isaiah or David would never have naturally assumed that "all mankind" or "all the ends of the earth" being saved would include every single human being, only those who were God's people. Isaiah proves that; therefore, it seems to be the best way to understand Psalm 22 as well.

What about other passages used to suggest that everyone will go to Heaven? Well, they also clearly describe the same sort of not-so-universal salvation evident above. In Psalm 65:2-4 "all men will come to God," but only those who are "overwhelmed by sins" and chosen by God—implying others who aren't—are "blessed" to "live in God's courts." We know that "all the nations will be gathered" before Jesus, but to be judged, not saved (Matthew 25:31-46). Merely being gathered to him does not at all imply eternity in Heaven, and for many in this passage the very opposite is the case! In Zephaniah 3:8-13 God "will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord." *May* call, not *will* call. God absolutely wants everyone to *have the opportunity* to call on him for salvation, but not everyone will experience it. He explains, "On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride." Again, "all of them" refers only to those who aren't removed for rejoicing in their pride.

In Joel 2:28-32, God pours out his Spirit "on all people." However, this takes place "*before* the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," which is judgment day. It happens *before* humans enter their final destinations of Hell or Heaven. If everyone is permanently

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indwelled by the Holy Spirit before judgment day, which guarantees salvation, then why is there a judgment day at all, particularly one that includes some clearly going to Hell (2 Corinthians 5:4-5, Revelation 20:11-15)? And if everyone is welcomed into Heaven on this day, then how could it be considered dreadful in any way? Joel is most likely telling us that God's Spirit is being temporarily unleashed on both saved and unsaved people to "prophecy" and "see visions," as it is in at least 20 other places throughout the Bible (e.g. Exodus 31:1-5, 35:30-33, Numbers 11:24-26, 1 Samuel 10:10, 11:6, 16:13-14, Numbers 23:27-24:9, Jude 1:7-13). What is certain is that this outpouring does not refer to the Holy Spirit indwelling all people as part of universal salvation, because Joel makes sure to clarify that only the person "who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 Paul states, "*In Christ* all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, *those who belong to him.*" Only those who are in Christ and belong to him will be resurrected to Heaven. Those who aren't and don't belong to him will not.

In Isaiah 52:5-10 and Ezekiel 36:22-23 "all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God" and "all nations will know that I am the Lord." But in both of these passages, God is specifically saving the Jews from places where God's name "has been profaned among the nations" and where "all day long my name is constantly blasphemed." These same nations are the ones who "will know that I am the Lord." Sounds more like a warning than an invitation to Heaven, right? God will save the Jews "in the sight of all the nations," implying that these nations are spectators rather than participants in salvation, and the context suggests this as well. Seeing God save others and realizing that he is the Lord does not automatically translate to being saved yourself, especially when you happen to be the nation God is saving people *from*, a nation known for the quite serious sin of blasphemy that we explore in Booklet 5. In Hell there will be plenty of people who know that God is God and that others have been saved.

We find something similar in Philippians 2:10-11 when "at the name of Jesus every knee *should* bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." If this means everyone *ought to* bow

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to Jesus, then it certainly does not imply that every one will. But even if it means that everyone *will* acknowledge Jesus' Lordship and bring glory to God, it does not imply that they will do so willingly, let alone in the repentant, humble way that would accompany the faith necessary to know and follow God. Indeed, we are given the two reasons *why* every knee should bow to Jesus, and neither of them has to do with humans wanting to. The first is because Jesus is exalted to the highest place. The second is for the glory of God. Reading the passage in context then, it is because Jesus humbled himself as a human and was willing to die for us that he is elevated to a status where everyone will acknowledge his Lordship, whether they want to or not. It has nothing to do with all humans willingly worshipping Jesus before or after God gives 'em Hell for long enough, does it? If anyone finds herself in Hell, she will know Jesus is Lord even *before* she gets there, simply because she has already had to submit to Jesus' authority in resigning her to that fate (Matthew 25:31-32). She doesn't have to like that Jesus is Lord—and probably wouldn't be in Hell if she did—but she does have to admit it, since well, there she is.

This is a familiar concept to us. Every one of us has begrudgingly accepted another's authority, whether a parent, a caretaker, a teacher, a police officer, a boss, or someone else. Even when they truly had our best interests in mind, as Jesus does, we didn't want them as our authority, did we? We wanted ourselves as the authority, so we paid lip service because we knew the truth of our subordination, even as we strove against it. In some cases we never stop striving against it, do we? There's a huge difference between admitting the truth and desiring the truth, the difference between Hell and Heaven in fact, and the first does not inevitably lead to the second. Revelation 3:9 provides a great example of this difference and also demonstrates again how some will be spectators of God's favor to others without being recipients of it themselves. According to the Bible, God will put us all into a place where we *admit* the truth—both for Jesus' sake and for his glory—but he will never make the unwilling *want* the truth, as if torturing us in a temporary Hell would accomplish that anyway. Even in Psalm 22, it's not because every human being is so grateful to God for being in Heaven that "all the families of the

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nations will bow down before him.” It’s because “dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations,” implying that some are only bowing because they have to, further supporting our conclusions regarding that psalm.

In Acts 3:19-23 God comes to “restore everything,” but for you to experience these “times of refreshing” there are once again clarifications. You must “repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.” You “must listen to everything Jesus tells you.” That includes all his teachings about Hell that we’ll soon explore. In fact, “anyone who does not listen to him will be *completely* cut off from his people.” Not temporarily, not until you change your mind, but completely. The validity of an argument for universal salvation in Heaven changes drastically when it’s derived from a passage in context rather than from the two words in that passage most supportive of that argument, doesn’t it?⁵ In Colossians 1:19-23, God is pleased “through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things,” but yet again, there is the caveat “if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” As demonstrated in Booklet 5, only those who maintain the faith God ties to salvation are reconciled to God, not everyone.

We are reminded of this persistent faith in the next passage that we have to review. “If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Timothy 2:12-13). One attempt to apply these verses to universal salvation quotes only the last three words, as it would be uncomfortable admitting that God disowns people.⁶ We’re going to acknowledge the whole passage. Notice the condition for reigning in Heaven with God: one must endure, continuing in faith as above. If you don’t persist, if you’ve had enough of God, if you’d rather dissociate yourself from him, he will allow you to do so. Hell is separation from God; it is everything he is not, complete dissociation. If God is to give us the choice to disown him, he has to be prepared to disown us as well. How does that work with God being faithful? Actually, they go hand in hand. What does it mean to be faithful? Is it not simply to do what you say? If you are faithful to your spouse, then you keep your promises and wedding

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vows, right? It's the same with God. Being faithful is part of who God is. For him to cease being faithful, he must cease to be God; he must disown himself. God has to keep his word. He doesn't break his promises, even if we faithlessly break ours. "He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction" (Deuteronomy 7:9-10). And I'm not sure how God remaining faithful and therefore not disowning himself means that everyone will go to Heaven anyway. But I am sure that God will keep his word, including the ones about enduring and disowning, the promises in Deuteronomy, and the clear messages about Hell and Heaven that we're finding throughout rest of the Bible. So ironically, God remaining faithful and keeping his word means that *not* everyone will go to Heaven, doesn't it? Those who disown God will be disowned, those who hate God will meet destruction, and those who want nothing to do with God will go to the place that has nothing to do with him. Alternatively, those who endure in their faith will reign with him, those who love and obey him will be loved by him, and those who want everything to do with him will go to a place that has everything to do with him. Just like he says.

From our exploration of the salvation process in Booklets 4 and 5, we found that the only two factors that affect whether or not a person ends up in Heaven are what is truly going on in that person's mind and what is truly going on in God's mind. We can get a decent but always incomplete glimpse into a person's mind, and there is always more involved there than we realize. As for God's mind, it has fortunately been opened to us quite significantly in the Bible, which would be expected from a God who wants his creations to make informed, practical decisions about their eternal fates. Not that we know all of God's mind of course, but if we're willing to look to the Bible at all for God's take on Hell and Heaven, we may as well also believe he would give us enough truth to be useful. So what does God think about who ends up in Heaven? Certainly, God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4), but that's not where he stops. Jesus clarifies this desire of God's, and if we're going to truly understand what's going

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on in God's mind, I'd say Jesus is our most reliable biblical resource, wouldn't you? He gives us the inside scoop. "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone *who looks to the Son and believes in him* shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up *at the last day.*" God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Yes, God absolutely desires everyone to be in Heaven, but they must also admit their need to believe in the message of Jesus to find eternal life. And there is a second condition as well. Jesus gives us a time-frame. Everyone who shall have eternal life enters Heaven "at the last day." Not when they die or whenever they've had enough of Hell. Not some directly on the day of judgment and others after a delay on many, many other days. On one last day. When is this day? Jesus elaborates just a few chapters later in John 12:48. "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." Same phrase, and it is now unequivocal that it does not refer to whichever day people die or potentially turn to God in Hell.

Aside from there being only one last day, for reasons explained in Booklet 3, people who reject Jesus are being condemned *to* Hell on this day, not being removed from it! If the last day refers to the days when people in Hell might repent and enter Heaven, then why is Jesus condemning others to Hell on the last day as well? A last day when people either shall have eternal life or be condemned sounds a lot more like judgment day in Matthew 25:31-46, doesn't it? And it certainly is consistent with the vision of the actual last day we are given in Revelation 20:11-15. The last day is obviously the day of judgment, the one day *on which* every person's eternal fate is realized, not any day after that. So after a more comprehensive look, what has Jesus taught us about who God is planning to see in Heaven? Heaven will be populated by those who have faith in Jesus' words—regarding the gospel, Hell, and Heaven—prior to the day of judgment, so that he can raise them up on that day to give them eternal life.

Alright, time to debrief. The first concept tied to the longevity of

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Hell has been investigated: whether or not everyone will eventually be in Heaven. We discovered the importance of the word “all” and understanding precisely who it refers to in the Bible, whether all of everyone or simply all of a subgroup. Often it’s the latter, which can dramatically affect how God’s words are interpreted. Then we looked at a list of passages used to argue for universal salvation, discovering that none of them actually do so when taken in context and as a whole. Finally, we discovered who God is planning to see in Heaven and confirmed that it is only those who comply with his conditions, even though he desires that everyone will. The truth is, *none of us* knows exactly *who* of us will be in Heaven; we are only told exactly *how* we would be in Heaven. This uncertainty cannot be used to claim that everyone might, because the Bible clearly teaches otherwise (Matthew 7:13-14). But it does compel us to be extremely reluctant to label any particular person as saved or unsaved when they die. In that regard, all we know is that not all of us will be saved, which means that there is no escape from Hell for the rest.

2

One down. It’s time for concept number two regarding whether Hell is forever or less than forever. Plainly, we can’t know if anything in the Bible is “forever” or not if we don’t impartially and accurately discover what is meant by this term. If there are literary and logical reasons that “all” doesn’t always mean all in the Bible, are there similarly objective reasons that “forever” doesn’t mean forever? Let’s find out! The main Greek and Hebrew words translated as “forever” or “eternal” in the Bible are *aion* and *olam*, respectively. There are several potential translations for these two words, and no authors should assume the authority to pick or write about only the ones that agree with their opinions. I will give you all the definitions that I could find for these words, straight out of dictionaries in the order that I randomly found them. I used online lexicons to make access easy for you, and every dictionary I could find at the time of

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this writing is represented, written by those with Christian, Hebrew, and secular perspectives. The definitions and sources are referenced, so you can easily double-check me. This transparency might seem a bit tedious, but it allows the reader to validate the author's words, which can be difficult to accomplish otherwise. For example, Rob Bell approaches these terms more casually in his book *Love Wins*, offering only a couple definitions in support of his argument without any citation or reference section to confirm their validity.⁷⁻⁸ In contrast, I believe it is better to objectively give you all the information so you can make an informed decision instead of subjectively providing only a small fraction of the information, requiring you to accept that the omitted majority is insignificant. I want you to be equipped to discover for yourself what is most likely to be the truth, rather than just expecting you to take my word for it.

Aion. This is the predominant Greek/New Testament term often translated as “forever.” Its definitions in *Strong's Greek Lexicon* are “an age, perpetuity, the world, a Messianic period, course, eternal, and forever.”⁹ In *A Greek-English Lexicon* we find “period of existence, lifetime, age, generation, posterity, all one's life, one's destiny or lot, long space of time, of old, perpetually, forever, eternity, space of time clearly defined and marked out, epoch, this present world, and”—just so you know I've included them all—the name of various divine beings and spinal marrow.”¹⁰ *The Lexicon to Pindar* gives us “span, course of life, existence, and marrow.”¹¹ *A Homeric Dictionary* offers “lifetime or life” (they clearly weren't as into bone marrow as others).¹² *Kypros-Net* yields “lifetime, generation, and eternity.”¹³ Finally, *greek-bible.com* defines *aion* as “forever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity, the universe, and a period of time.”¹⁴ Only three of these definitions are decidedly not forever: generation, this present world, and marrow. As demonstrated in this chapter, *aion* is repeatedly used to describe the longevity of God, life in Heaven, and time in Hell, so unless these three concepts are confined to a generation, this present world, or bone marrow, we cannot definitively claim that God, Heaven, or Hell are not forever simply based on the definition of *aion*.

But what about the other definitions, the ones that aren't definitely

finite but could be? Since this book is about the hereafter, we're willing to entertain the notion that humans live beyond their physical deaths, so one's "lifetime" "destiny," "lot," or "period of existence" does not have to end either. An "age," "epoch," "span," "long space of time," "posterity," or "the universe" doesn't necessitate an end (e.g. the final age, the post-dinosaur epoch, etc.). And obviously, "an unbroken age," "perpetual," "forever," and "eternity" don't end at all. Even "a space of time clearly defined and marked out" does not demand an end. "From this moment forward," "happily ever after," "every moment starting now," "always," "eternal," and "forever" are all concepts that are well defined and marked out. We know exactly what they refer to, yet they don't have an end. Since we can't make at least one definition of *aion* that could be referring to Hell *necessitate* an end, we cannot conclusively argue that Hell has an end.

And what about all the *other* definitions for *aion* that could describe Hell, several of which (e.g. an unbroken age, perpetual, for all one's life, one's existence, eternal, and forever) directly oppose the notion that Hell is temporary? Unless there is literary or contextual evidence to disqualify them—and we will soon learn that there isn't—they must be offered as viable options. Unfortunately, sometimes they're not included, as in *Love Wins*. "*Aion* has multiple meanings, one we'll look at here, and another we'll explore later."¹⁵ "The first meaning of this word *aion* refers to a period of time with a beginning and an end."¹⁶ "Another meaning of *aion* is a bit more complex and nuanced, because it refers to a particular intensity of experience that transcends time."¹⁷ "That's what *aion* refers to—a particularly intense experience."¹⁸ Aside from the observation that neither of these definitions is validated by reference or necessarily has an equivalent to any of our dictionary definitions applicable to Hell—none of which require "an end" except "generation," "this present world," and "marrow"—no other meaning for *aion* except these two is provided. We are either left to believe there are only two—which we know there are not—or that the others have nothing to do with the longevity of Hell. Except they do, don't they? Quite a bit in fact, so we cannot responsibly disregard them.

Clearly, it isn't admirable or convincing to build an argument for

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a temporary Hell by adding subjective, unsubstantiated definitions for *aion* as support or by ignoring objective, confirmed, dissenting definitions. However, we also cannot conclude that Hell is eternal simply because the latter exist. Therefore, even though none of our applicable definitions are definitively finite while some of our applicable definitions are definitively infinite, can we confirm that the most objective and accurate biblical meaning of *aion*, as it relates to Hell, truly connotes forever? Actually yes, and in multiple ways.

First, Jesus himself literally tells us so. He teaches that whoever leaves everything behind for the sake of God's kingdom will "receive many times as much in this age, and in the age (*aion*) to come eternal (*aion* as an adjective) life" (Luke 18:29-30). Note that *aion* is not used by Jesus for "this age" as it is for "the age to come." That's because there actually is a Greek word that refers to a period of time with a beginning and an end, and Jesus chooses it to describe "this age:" *kairos*, not *aion*. Everywhere *kairos* is found in the dictionaries above, it is defined as a fixed, definite, or limited time, as well as a critical season of opportunity or decisive epoch. In none of these dictionaries is there any definition to suggest an indefinite or unending time period. I encourage you to check the references to confirm this.¹⁹⁻²³ Well that's interesting, isn't it? "This age" is a finite period of time, which correlates well with the interpretation of "this age" as our lives before Hell or Heaven. Moreover, these lives are also a critical and decisive season of opportunity! As we further confirm in Booklet 7, this opportunity is none other than our choice to end up in Hell or Heaven. And as far as the meaning of *aion* is concerned, we are now aware that Jesus knew of and used the word *kairos* when he wanted to describe a finite period of time, such as "this age." Yet only a few words later, he chooses not to use *kairos* to describe "the age to come." He uses *aion*, which *does* offer definitions consistent with eternal or forever, unlike *kairos*. And in case his motive for switching from *kairos* to *aion* is in any way unclear, he amplifies the noun *aion* with the adjective *aion*!

Therefore, the most accurate reading of Luke 18:29-30 then, is that whoever leaves everything behind for the sake of God's kingdom will "receive many times as much in this limited period of time

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(*kairos*)—which is a critical and decisive season of opportunity—and in the eternal time period (*aion*) to come, eternal (*aion*) life.” Jesus intentionally uses *kairos* and *aion* to make the distinction that our hereafters are not finite, but forever, and that there is a critical opportunity to decide something “in this age,” before we get to “the age to come.” And Jesus doesn’t only select *aion* to describe Heaven, but also Hell. At least ten times in the New Testament, *aion* directly refers to Hell or eternal punishment, mentioned four of those times by Jesus himself (Matthew 18:8, 25:41, 25:46, Mark 3:29, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Jude 1:7, 1:13, Revelation 14:9-11, 19:1-3, and 20:10). If I bothered to tell you numerous different times that your house was burning down and you had no reason to believe that it wasn’t, you’d take me seriously, wouldn’t you? So we have no way to argue that *aion* is definitely temporary, Jesus uses it to distinguish an unending period of time from a finite one, and there is no doubt that it consistently applies to Hell.

A second way we know that *aion* truly connotes forever when referring to Hell is to more thoroughly compare what else it refers to. Obviously it is applied to Hell, but literally scores of times, it is also used to describe the longevity of both Heaven/eternal life (e.g. John 3:16) and Jesus/God (e.g. 1 Timothy 1:17). If we decide that *aion* means temporary as it relates to Hell—without any linguistic or contextual support—there’s no reason we shouldn’t conclude that Heaven and God are both temporary as well. People like the idea of Hell being temporary, but they’re quite a bit more reluctant to define eternal life and God that way. But there’s no holding a double standard when defining the same word, unless you have a really good reason to do so. In this case, we don’t. For some of you, this is not a problem, as you may be quite comfortable believing that Hell, Heaven, and God *are* all temporary. You choose to use *aion* both according to an accepted definition and consistently across the board. I can respect that. However, there are several ways the Bible conveys Hell, Heaven, and God as being forever without using the word *aion*, as we’ll see in the next several chapters.

Third, aside from what other biblical evidence there is for the eternal nature of Hell, Heaven, and God, there is a linguistic way

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to be assured that *aion* means forever also. It is used in a fashion that *only* allows us to employ the “perpetual,” “eternal,” and “forever” definitions. At least 21 times in the New Testament, *aion* is repeated multiple times in a row, once to describe eternal life, three times to describe Hell, and 17 times to describe God. The term is “*aion* (singular) and *aions* (plural),” “age and ages,” “forever and ever.” The use of the singular and plural nouns together, not just two repeated singular nouns (two ages), encompasses all the ages—not just one or two—regardless of whether they’re temporary or not. True, biblical writers could have endlessly written “*aion* and *aion* and *aion* and *aion* and *aion* and *aion* and *aion* and *aion*, etc.” to denote forever, or the more mathematically savvy among them could have simply written *aion* with a line over it, but the former would have killed a lot of trees for all that paper, and the latter would have had to wait 1200 years for the vinculum (that little line) to be invented. Bummer! What’s a New Testament author to do when he wants to describe the age to come as “forever” in a decidedly green and timely fashion? Easy, just consolidate each *aion* you’d have to write out into the plural *aions*. *Aion* and *aions*. One eternal age to come or all subsequent ages put together. You pick, the term includes both. No ages to come are excluded. How else could you possibly convey the idea of forever better than this? And if both “*aion*” and “*aion* and *aions*” simply refer to a temporary age, then why make the distinction? Why repeat the term sometimes and not others? Why use the plural form at all? For temporary Heaven’s sake, why waste the ink? At least three times, God is emphasizing to us that Hell is really, seriously, and unequivocally forever.

I find it interesting that God uses this emphasis only once when referring to Heaven, but three times when referring to Hell, and 17 times when referring to himself. This may be coincidence, but maybe not. If God wants to specially emphasize a concept as forever, he’s most likely to do so regarding concepts that we’re less likely to believe are forever. God knows we don’t have trouble believing in eternal life in Heaven. He can get away with just *aion* for that, although he does reassure the few skeptics out there with one “*aion* and *aions*.” Hell is a tougher sell. Has God anticipated the resistance humans would offer to an endless Hell by emphasizing with these words that it truly

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is forever three times more than he does for Heaven? Perhaps he is saying to us, “I know Hell is a difficult concept, and I know there will be people who tell you that it’s only temporary. But it truly is forever and ever, and you need to understand how serious that is, as well as how much I am truly saving you from.” I don’t know, but it sure makes sense, doesn’t it?

And it’s not just Heaven and Hell that are forever. God abundantly uses the *exact* same term to describe himself. “*Aion* and *aions*” is not used to describe anything else in the Bible, just Heaven, Hell, and God. Of course, it’s no surprise that a God who names himself “I AM” and constantly reminds us of his everlasting nature throughout the Bible would specifically emphasize the concept of forever most frequently in regard to himself (Exodus 3:13-15). However, he also chooses to apply the identical term conveying the identical emphasis to Heaven and Hell, and to nothing else. It’s as if he’s telling us, “If you have trouble with Hell being forever, I’ve specially emphasized it three times to assure you that it is. If you still don’t believe I mean forever, I’ve chosen to describe myself using the same language. As far as future longevity is concerned, I’ve left no doubt at all that Heaven, Hell, and I are the same. If you believe I’m forever, you must believe Hell is forever as well.” From a linguistic perspective, these three passages about Hell (Revelation 14:9-11, 19:1-3, and 20:10) represent an essentially insurmountable obstacle for those portraying it as temporary—and it shows. For example, they are kept absent from you altogether in *Love Wins* and in *The Love Wins Companion*—apparently hoping you won’t notice—even as you are encouraged by the latter to avoid studying only “the kind of passages that prove your point.”²⁴ I want you to notice all the evidence, even if it means a little more explaining on my part, because only then can you bring yourself to a truly informed, accurate, and objective conclusion.

Let’s summarize our discourse on *aion* then. God gives us a word that can mean forever and applies it repeatedly to Hell. He uses the same term to describe Heaven as well, so we can’t say it’s temporary for one but eternal for the other. He uses multiple repetitions of the word when explaining Hell so we know he really means it’s forever, and he applies the identical definition of forever and ever to himself

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to make us absolutely certain that that's also what he means when he talks about Hell. Alright, it's time to give poor *aion* a rest and move on!

3

The biblical passages above denoting Hell as “forever and ever” aren't only omitted from arguments for a temporary Hell (Revelation 14:9-11, 19:1-3, and 20:10); they're also missing from the argument some make that while Hell is forever, people's existence in Hell is not.²⁵ This perspective is called annihilationism, and it asserts that the inhabitants of Hell eventually cease to exist, rather than being consciously present there forever. From an emotional standpoint, it's not clear to me why non-existence should universally be considered preferable to even a Hellish existence. Although I know it's an imperfect analogy, just as many of us would consider spending our life in prison favorable to capital punishment, we might also consider existing forever in Hell preferable to not existing at all. Plus, downgrading the biblical Hell from eternal torment to cessation of being won't exactly convince many to believe in it if they don't already, right? But there are some who understandably might prefer the latter, so arguments offered in support of annihilationism should be entertained and are listed as follows.

First, the Bible states many times that those who are saved will inherit eternal life, so some people assume that those who do not inherit this eternal life must therefore cease to exist. The glaring problem is that the Bible is not at all silent regarding those who are not saved, and what it has to say repeatedly falsifies this assumption. To no one's satisfaction, these folks will experience darkness forever (Jude 1:13), everlasting ruin (Psalm 52:1-5), eternal fire (Matthew 3:12, 18:8, Mark 9:43, Luke 3:17), wrath forever (Jeremiah 17:4, John 3:36), everlasting destruction (Psalm 92:6-7, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46, Jude 1:7), everlasting disgrace and contempt that will not be forgotten (Jeremiah 23:40, Daniel

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12:2), and eternal decay (Mark 9:48). Annihilationists might respond by saying that darkness forever or everlasting ruin and destruction could refer to the cessation of existence, and that's possible. But those terms can also be applicable during existence, and the fact that people who cease to exist cannot experience wrath, cannot be punished, cannot endure disgrace or contempt, and cannot decay makes this response much less credible.

What about the eternal fire? Annihilationists might admit that the fire in Hell is forever but claim that people don't necessarily always exist within it. But what's the point of this lake of burning sulfur being eternal if its only purpose is to house those who will immediately be annihilated in it? Five seconds after judgment day everyone in Hell will have ceased to exist, but the fire still needs to burn forever? That's one Hell of a gas bill for absolutely no reason! Even if they're there longer than five seconds before ceasing to exist, these same questions remain unanswered. Revelation 22:14-15 provides confirmation of non-annihilated folks existing in Hell, and Revelation 14:9-11 leaves no doubt that this lake is eternally present because the residents are eternally present as well. The "punishment of eternal fire" in Jude 1:7 implies that the fire is there at least partially for punishment—not for decor—and if there's nobody to punish, there's no reason for the fire to be eternal. Since the Bible clearly does not teach that only those with eternal life have eternal existence, the biblical opposite of eternal life is not annihilation. Rather, as Jesus plainly states in Matthew 25:46, the biblical opposite of eternal life is eternal punishment, including the fire, wrath, disgrace, contempt, memory, and decay that can only be experienced by beings who still exist.

A second argument made by annihilationists focuses on four passages (Matthew 10:28, Philippians 3:18-19, Hebrews 10:39, and 2 Peter 2:12) that speak of a person being destroyed in a way that seems to involve the hereafter, and these folks equate such destruction with annihilation. Let's examine them. The word for "destroy" in Matthew 10:28 is *apollumi*. In *A Greek-English Lexicon*, *Strong's Greek Lexicon*, and *greekbible.com* the primary definitions are "destroy fully/utterly," "cease to exist," "kill," "perish," "die," "to be undone," "demolish," "lose," and "mar."²⁶⁻²⁸ Incidentally, the third source also offers the secondary

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definition “to devote or give over to eternal misery in Hell.” The first five definitions could be consistent with annihilation, with the others equivocal or against annihilation. The critical observation to make though is this: although God “*can* destroy both soul and body in Hell,” we are not told that he *will* engage in this type of destruction. Rather than teaching us *that* people might no longer exist in Hell, the clear point of this verse is to teach healthy, respectful fear of a God so powerful that he *is able* to destroy—even potentially eradicate—an individual there if he wants to. However, since the verse does not say that he won’t do so, we must look at the uses of “destroy” in the other three passages to bring us to a comprehensive conclusion.

The Greek word for “destruction” in Philippians 3:18-19 and Hebrews 10:39 is *apoleia*, and a review of *A Greek-English Lexicon*, *Strong’s Greek Lexicon*, and *greekbible.com* yields no definitions specific to annihilation or ceasing to exist.²⁹⁻³¹ The first source simply offers “destruction” as the only primary definition, which is not entirely helpful, but the second source lists “ruin” as a primary definition. *Greekbible.com* somewhat equivocally gives both “utter destruction” and “ruin” as primary definitions, but it interestingly adds “the destruction which consists of eternal misery in Hell” as one of its secondary definitions. In 2 Peter 2:12, the Greek word *phtheiro* is used, and the only suggestion of annihilation, the meaning “cease to be,” is found in a single secondary definition, and only in the first source. Two of these sources, including the first, offer “ruin” as a primary definition, and all three use “corrupt” as a primary definition, not annihilation.³²⁻³⁴ These primary definitions reflect how we use “destroy” today as well. Although occasionally we employ it to denote a cessation of existence—like when we destroy a computer file—much more often we use it in the context of ruining or corrupting something, even though it still very much exists, such as when a car is fully destroyed in an accident, when a team gets utterly destroyed in a sports match, or when a family is completely destroyed by alcohol abuse. This second connotation of ruination or corruption appears to be more common in the Bible as well. It certainly is consistent with the “everlasting ruin” mentioned in Psalm 52:1-5, and the definitions offered for “destroy” in Philippians 3:18-19, Hebrews 10:39, and 2

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Peter 2:12 support the more predominant use of this connotation as well. Plus you can't be corrupted if you don't exist, right?

Taking all four passages together then, there is *hypothetical* annihilating destruction in Hell based on one primary definition for one word in one source in one passage, and there is *possible* annihilating destruction in Hell based on one secondary definition for one word in one source in one other passage. The primary definitions for each word in all three sources in the three passages describing non-hypothetical, definite destruction suggest otherwise. Moreover, the "everlasting destruction" we've already encountered in Psalm 92:6-7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 affirms that "cease to exist" or "cease to be" is not the most responsible choice in the case of Hell. Destruction cannot be everlasting if no one exists to be destroyed five seconds into it. I encourage you to check the dictionaries to peruse all the meanings of *apollumi*, *apoleia*, and *phtheiro*, so that you can confirm what I've stated yourself.

For all three of these words, there are the definitions "perish" or "die," and it is the concept of eternal death, rather than destruction, that generates the third annihilationist argument, which claims that eternal death is synonymous with the cessation of existence. The term "eternal death" does not occur in the Bible; rather, we already know from Matthew 25:46 that the opposite of "eternal life" in Heaven is "eternal punishment" in Hell, not eternal death. Since the argument can't be made on those grounds then, it is made using the two biblical references to the fiery lake of Hell constituting a "second death"—the first death being physical death—in Revelation 20:14 and 21:8. Because those who are saved are saved from death (James 5:20), apparently the claim is that this second death in Hell must refer to annihilation, because how can you exist after you die? The obvious conundrum is that we exist after our first death, so why wouldn't we exist after the second one? If death is inseparable from non-existence, then no one would exist after physical death to endure a second death in Hell, right? And the same Greek word, *thanatos*, is consistently used to describe both physical death and the second death, so there is no justification for assuming that the latter means annihilation if the former does not. Not to mention that none of the definitions

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for *thanatos* in any of the dictionaries above even remotely suggest annihilation.³⁵⁻³⁷

Fourth, there are a few Old Testament passages that annihilationists reference to suggest that the wicked are eventually consumed, but these passages either talk of destruction or perishing—which we’ve already addressed—or clearly refer to physical death when the wicked are “no more,” are “consumed,” or “vanish” (Psalm 37:1-40, 104:35). But for those who are still not convinced, the Bible itself seals the deal. Both Revelation 14:9-11 and 20:10 leave no doubt that all the inhabitants of the lake of burning sulfur will be “tormented day and night forever and ever.” In the end, when you look at everything the Bible has to say to find the conclusion most likely to be true, it is clearly not annihilationism.

Right now you might be thinking, “Wow, this guy really wants to make Hell the most horrible, awful place it could possibly be!” Not at all! From an emotional standpoint, I would be quite happy with a Hell that is no more than annihilation, or a Hell that is not forever, or a Hell that doesn’t exist at all, just as you might! But the biblical Hell is what it says it is, and our desires have no authority to change how God describes it. That concession might leave you very angry or significantly saddened, and I totally sympathize with that. But God doesn’t leave you with merely a depressing description, and neither will I. We’re still toward the beginning of understanding all that he teaches us regarding Hell, and we’re not supposed to like it. Not one bit. But when all is explained in this and subsequent booklets, we’ll find that God does not inconsiderately expect us to just suck it up and believe in an eternal, conscious Hell solely because that’s the way he wants it. Instead, in Booklets 2, 7, and 8 we learn that that’s *not* the way he wants it, but that Hell must be that way for several very logical reasons that have a lot more to do with us than with God. So keep reading, even when it’s tough; there’s still more to unpack! Our digression into annihilationism came on the heels of exploring *aion*, the New Testament word translated as “forever.” Next we’ll unpack an Old Testament word translated as forever: the Hebrew word *olam*.

4

O*lam*. Its definitions in *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon* are “concealed, the vanishing point, time out of mind, eternity, always, ancient, anymore, continuance, everlasting, long, of old, perpetual, and at any time.”³⁸ In *Rakefet*, *olam* is described as a “long duration, long past time, great antiquity and therefore also occasionally used for the future, and the world or sphere.”³⁹ Although we do see scattered Old Testament references to the afterlife that resemble those in the New Testament (e.g. Psalm 15:11, 21:4, 73:23-24, 133:3, Isaiah 65:17-19), they are infrequent and incomplete, as if the authors were still grappling with it, not quite sure. Like *aion*, *olam* has no definite end, but unlike *aion*, *olam* carries with it an ever present uncertainty. We do not find “concealed,” “to the vanishing point,” or “time out of mind” in our definitions of *aion*, but we do with *olam*, because the Hebrew Old Testament writers didn’t know exactly what was coming. The details were hidden, beyond sight, or outside of their mind’s ability to fathom. Unlike in the New Testament, God had not yet fully revealed the concepts of Hell and Heaven as destinations for humans. As we have explored in Chapter 1, this makes sense because these locations don’t have much meaning anyway until you have Jesus’ work of salvation to explain what they are and why they’re there. Also, in Booklet 3 we discovered Lugg as another explanation for why these folks didn’t need to have a clearer picture of eternity at the time they lived. Their perception of the afterlife was not necessarily wrong or dismissible, simply incomplete, and this book incorporates—rather than dismisses—their worldview into its final framework of the hereafter. For now, all we need to know is that *olam* had no definite end in their minds, and part of the reason was because the end was too poorly-defined to see. As this uncertainty prohibits *olam* from being definitively declared to mean forever or not forever, I will not use it to argue for a forever Hell.

On the same grounds, it cannot be used to argue that Hell is temporary. Even as this is acknowledged, *olam* is still used to argue

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that because the Old Testament writers were shady on the details, “forever is not really a category the biblical writers used.”⁴⁰ However, *olam* is a word found only in the Old Testament, which was written in Hebrew. The Christian doctrine of Hell is derived mostly from the New Testament, which was written in Greek, not Hebrew. The contribution from the Old Testament is present but smaller, because its writers knew little about Hell, which is apparent in the very definition of *olam*. Therefore, the word *olam* has virtually no bearing on the doctrine of Hell at all. *Olam* and Hell are essentially found in different testaments of the Bible written hundreds of years apart in different languages. So why do people try to connect them? Because they need a forever that’s not forever, even if it has nothing to do with Hell, so that they can extrapolate that to every forever we find in the Bible. *Olam* is applied to Jesus’ words on Hell, but Jesus never used the word *olam* in the Bible, because Jesus’ words are all in the New Testament and therefore are recorded in Greek, not Hebrew. Furthermore, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin were the predominant spoken languages in Palestine during Jesus’ life, not Hebrew. Therefore, it is completely inaccurate for one to assert that “Jesus isn’t talking about forever as we think of forever” based on a reference to *olam* in the Old Testament.⁴¹ In stark contrast, Jesus frequently *does* talk about forever—represented in Greek as *aion*—as we think of forever *and* applies it to Hell, doesn’t he?

We’ve spent significant time on *aion* and *olam* to help you understand how they are mishandled, but my purpose in sharing this extends far beyond these two words alone. You have also now been introduced to several ways that any person, clergy or comrade, might misuse words and definitions from the Bible to argue an opinion that they have. Be cautious, as trusting them too easily might lead you down the wrong path, whether only for this life or for forever. Such misguidance is exemplified in *Love Wins*, which not only inappropriately relies on *olam* to portray Hell as transient; it also fails to mention an important second Old Testament word that means forever, one that *is* appropriately applicable to eternal judgment, both linguistically and contextually.⁴² It is the noun *ad*, and none of its meanings carry with them the uncertainty present with *olam*. Instead, they closely resemble those of *aion*! The available definitions of the noun

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ad in *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon* are “eternity, everlasting, old, perpetually, and world without end.”⁴³ *Rakefet* does not include definitions for *ad* as a noun, but all of the definitions for its verb form *adah*, such as “continue” and “advance into perpetuity,” bear the connotation of endlessness as well.⁴⁴ Moreover, *ad* is used as a noun in two places to describe those who would be unsaved. “Though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever” (Psalm 92:7). “For the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9). It is simply not true that “the closest the Hebrew writers come to a word for ‘forever’ is the word *olam*,” but now it is obvious why we are led to believe that.⁴⁵ The Old Testament may not have as much to say about Hell as the New Testament does, but what it does say is quite clear. And unlike *olam*, *ad* associates the fate of the unsaved with a forever that *has* to mean forever! Speaking of forever, that’s about how long I’ve been yammering about words that mean forever! The second concept tied to the longevity of Hell, how the Bible defines forever and eternal, has been addressed. Let’s leave the domain of dictionaries and read a story instead.

5

It’s time for the tale of “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” and it’s found in Luke 16:19-31. As explained in Booklet 3, this account most likely refers to actual people, and Jesus offers this narrative to highlight several truths about the hereafter. It also provides an excellent backdrop for exploring the third concept connected to Hell’s longevity: what the expectations and actions of those who will go there reveal about the duration of their stay. Are the words and deeds of humans intimately associated with this doom consistent with a transient Hell or a forever Hell? With this question in mind, spend a minute or two—that’s all it will take—and read the story, so it will be fresh in your mind and so you’ll know I’m not making anything up. Lazarus,

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the beggar, goes to Abraham's side when he dies, and the rich man goes to Hades. We know from Booklet 3 that Hades cannot be Hell (Revelation 20:14); instead, we learned that the rich man's location in Hades is consistent with Tartarus, a part of Sheol/Hades inhabited only by those who will inevitably reside in Gehenna/Hell. We also recall that Lazarus and Abraham can observe and converse with the rich man because they are not in a place consistent with the current heaven or the New Earth/Heaven, but rather in the Paradise of Sheol/Hades. This place is also understandably termed Abraham's Bosom, which is "in the New Testament and in Jewish writings a term signifying the abode of bliss in the other world." "It is plain that Abraham is here viewed as the warden of paradise."⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ Because the rich man's fate will eventually be Hell and because Lazarus and Abraham's final destination will eventually be Heaven—and to compare our findings with conclusions others draw about Hell and Heaven from this story—we will call their respective locations "Hell" and "Heaven" in this chapter, gleaning whatever information from them that we responsibly can. Here we go!

A rich man, who "lived in luxury," and the beggar Lazarus, who was "covered with sores," both died. The rich man went to Hades, "where he was in torment," and Lazarus went to be with Abraham, the patriarch or head honcho of the Jewish race. The rich man sees Abraham and Lazarus across "a great chasm" and says, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." Abraham says the rich man has already received good things in his former life, and that "between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." Acknowledging his own hopeless situation, the rich man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them, so that at least *they* won't join him in his torment in "Hell."

This story provides some of the clearest evidence in the whole Bible that Hell is forever, but it has actually been used to argue the opposite, largely based on a reinterpretation of why the rich man is there to begin with. Does the reason for his fate offer any hope that

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it can be changed, and do his words and deeds demonstrate that he concurs? The argument for a transient Hell proposes that the rich man considers himself better than Lazarus and is asking him for water because he thinks Lazarus should serve him. The thought is, “when you get someone water, you’re serving them.” “The rich man still sees himself as above Lazarus. It’s no wonder Abraham says there’s a chasm that can’t be crossed. The chasm is the rich man’s heart!”⁴⁸ Once he stops being arrogant and humbles himself to God, the chasm will disappear, and he can cross, because “even the most ‘depraved sinners’ will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God.”⁴⁹ Therefore, “Hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins and all will be reconciled to God.”⁵⁰ Let’s evaluate these claims.

To start, there is little indication that the rich man is arrogant or thinks he’s better than Lazarus. All we know about the rich man before he dies is that “he was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.” We know that Lazarus longed “to eat what fell from the rich man’s table,” but we don’t know if the rich man knew this or even if he had met Lazarus before he died. He does know Lazarus’ name *after* they die, but he is also able to identify Abraham, a person he would not have met while alive, assuming Jesus would be considering Lazarus and the rich man his contemporaries. Since he therefore could only have learned who Abraham was after dying and had clearly done so before the start of this story, he may very well have met Lazarus then too. The text gives us no further clues, so what can we conclude? Well, most of you have purple, fine linen, or the material equivalent in your wardrobe, live in relative luxury every day (at least when compared to beggars), and are exposed to people—whether you are aware of them or not—who long for even a little of what you have. Does that automatically mean you are arrogant or think that you’re better than them? It might, and it seems reasonable to question at least some measure of selfishness in the rich man’s character while he’s still alive, but certainly no one should confidently assume that without knowing something more about you or him, right? We would need much more information before we could responsibly make such an accusation, especially of such a degree of arrogance that it’s keeping people in “Hell”!

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And what about after the rich man dies? This is where Abraham truly exposes the rich man's conceit, or does he? "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things." So...where is the arrogance? I don't know, because no one else has anything to say about the rich man in the text. Unfortunately however, many "facts" have been extrapolated about him *outside* of the text. "In fact, he (*the rich man*) ignores his neighbor, who spends each day outside his gate begging for food."⁵¹ Apparently, the rich man is "still clinging to his ego, his status, his pride—he's unable to let go of the world he's constructed, which puts him at the top and Lazarus at the bottom."⁵² But the Bible never tells us that these two men had even met each other while alive, nor does it ever accuse the rich man of being proud. Again, maybe he was, but all we really know is that he was rich compared to beggars, just as almost all of us are. Does that automatically make us conceited as well?

So we don't really have a lot of *real* facts on this man's reputation. But perhaps it's the rich man's request, rather than his reputation, that betrays his pride. Let's read it again. "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." The arrogant do not ask for pity, do they? As far as we know, the only two people the rich man sees are Abraham and Lazarus. Abraham is the first of the Jews, the patriarch of his ethnic group, "the man" or "the boss," as we would say. The rich man is understandably thirsty and there are two people to bring water to him. One is arguably the most important human personae ever to a Jew, the other is not. Who do you *think* he's going to ask to bring him water? If you desperately needed relief, and the only people who could give it to you were your highly respected, venerable grandfather or the person you know the name of who's next to him (we'll assume they're both healthy and able), who would you ask? It's not prideful to ask someone for water to begin with, and when someone who's agonizingly thirsty asks me to get some for them, I don't feel they're arrogantly demanding that I serve them, do you? Besides isn't it *more* arrogant to ask grandpa to get you some water than cousin Timmy or whomever else? And why should we assume that the reason for the rich man's request is pride,

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when he's already given us a very obvious, rational, and well-stated motive, "because I am in agony in this fire"? Plus, arrogant people take all they can; they demand more than they need. What does the rich man ask for? Only the water from the *tip of a finger*, just enough to cool his tongue. Not a glass, a gallon, or a truck full of mountain-spring Aquafina, just a single drop. Doesn't even have to be ice cold. The man is being tormented in "Hell" and asks for the most sensible, least offensive person he sees to bring him a single drop of water, begging for pity because he is burning in agony. Obviously, this man is not being arrogant. A simple straight-forward story, one anyone can easily understand, is repeatedly wrangled to make it "complex," "multi-layered," "nuanced," and "loaded," just to "end it all with a twist," because that's the only way the face value meaning behind the story can be wrested from the unsuspecting reader and replaced with the opposite conclusion.⁵³

And it gets worse. After Abraham explains the very good reason why Lazarus can't come relieve the rich man (stay tuned), the rich man begs for Lazarus to warn the man's five living brothers, "so that they will not also come to this place of torment." He makes his plea again in verse 30. This man is so prideful that he is no longer even concerned about himself? He is so conceited that he wants his five brothers to hear the gospel? He is so arrogant that he begs twice for them to have the information they need, so that they can get to "Heaven"? Apparently, if you're incapacitated and instead ask someone else to reach loved ones with the gospel because you want them to go to "Heaven" someday, you are conveying a conceit worthy of "Hell"! Can we agree that something's just not right about that?

So especially after the rich man dies—and possibly even before—he is not being arrogant. If he's not arrogant, then the chasm keeping him in "Hell" doesn't refer to his arrogance, waiting to disappear once he is humbled, does it? I'm not sure how much more humble he could be by the end of this story, and yet there's still a chasm, and he's still in "Hell." But we already knew that, didn't we? How does Abraham describe the chasm? It is "fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." The chasm is fixed, not temporary. *No one* can cross in either

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direction, not even “those who want to.” Taken in context, this implies that Lazarus may have wanted to cross to help the rich man, which would suggest that even Lazarus detected no pride in his request. We can’t be sure of this implication, but we would expect such charity in “Heaven.” Why else would anyone want to go from “Heaven” to “Hell,” but to help someone in agony? But Lazarus can’t. No one can. Ever. Forever. This is why this story is applicable to the actual Hell and Heaven, even though it would technically be taking place in Tartarus and Paradise. As we have confirmed and will continue to confirm, there is no transfer from Tartarus or Hell to Paradise or Heaven. Ever. Forever. Neither then can the argument be valid that Hell or Tartarus retains its name or identity only until a person allegedly leaves to go to Paradise or Heaven, after which “it will have not been Hell” or Tartarus to them.⁵⁴ No, in the Bible, Tartarus/Hell and Paradise/Heaven remain as they are, separated paths, and the text is clear that the chasm dividing them is much more all-encompassing and permanent than just one man’s speculated arrogance.

The chasm isn’t the only problem though. The characters’ reaction to the chasm tells us that Hell is permanent also. Abraham has made his opinion clear in verse 26, as we know. Lazarus is silent in “Heaven,” so we can’t get much input from him, but Abraham says that he can’t cross over to “Hell” even if he wanted to anyway. So what does the rich man think about the longevity of “Hell”? Notice that he does not ask to be able to come over to “Heaven” to get water, nor does he ask to be able to return with Lazarus to “Heaven” once he is potentially brought water. You’d think if he were arrogant, he’d expect Abraham to honor a request to come over to “Heaven” or to return to “Heaven” with Lazarus, but he doesn’t even ask for either! It’s as if he already understands that he can’t cross over to “Heaven” even before Abraham tells him; otherwise, why wouldn’t he try to do so or at least ask to do so, particularly if he’s in as much agony as he seems to be? Because he gets it. He knows that he’s in “Hell” forever, and he acts like it, doesn’t he? After Abraham confirms his predicament, does the rich man seem surprised or complain, as we would expect someone to do who had thought up until that moment that his situation was only temporary, especially if he actually *was* arrogant?

He should be shocked and outraged! But he's not. He takes the news in stride, because he already knew that "Hell" was forever. In fact, accepting that he can find neither escape nor relief, he no longer asks anything for himself at all, not even a drop of water. He immediately begs for the well being of his brothers, since they still have a chance, not yet being where he is. Everybody in the story gets it; no one argues or is surprised about "Hell" being forever.

6

Well, we've now tackled three of five concepts associated with the longevity of Hell: learning who will end up in Heaven, discovering what the Bible means by "forever" and "eternal," and learning what peoples' reactions to experiencing a fate in Hell teach us about how long they'll be there. We'll comprehensively explore more of these reactions when we discuss *why* Hell is forever in Booklet 8. But for now, instead of focusing on what individuals *in* the Bible thought about Hell, we're going to investigate what the original readers *of* the Bible understood about the concept of Hell. Whether or not they would have believed it to be forever is the fourth concept tied to Hell's longevity, so let's attempt to get their take on the matter.

The Greek word translated "Hell" is *Gehenna*. There are numerous biblical allusions to Hell or eternal punishment that do not use this word, as we discuss throughout Booklets 6 and 7, but here we're only looking at the word itself. The literal meaning of *Gehenna* in the New Testament is "Valley of Hinnom," which is an actual place outside Jerusalem. This valley also appears repeatedly in the Old Testament, called Gai Ben-Hinnom or "The Valley of the son of Hinnom." It has been argued that Gehenna was Jerusalem's city dump, a place that was always on fire, where animals gnashed their teeth. Sounds kind of like Hell, and not many places could have been more nasty than that, so this portrayal of Hell is proposed as one that "Jesus' listeners would have been familiar with."⁵⁵ This theory of an unpleasant but not eternally tormenting locale stands in contrast to the more well-known

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concept of Hell, as if Jesus were saying to his audience in Matthew 5:29, “It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna, a place as nasty as the city dump but not eternally significant.” To illustrate, *Love Wins* upholds this not-so-bad Hell with “If you believe in an actual Hell, you can always say, ‘Yes, I do believe that my garbage goes somewhere,’” and ends with a definitive “Gehenna, the town garbage pile. And that’s it. Those are all the mentions of ‘Hell’ (*referring to Gehenna*) in the Bible.”⁵⁶

So *is* that it? Did the Bible’s original audience merely think of Hell as a place like a city dump that would be unpleasant to visit but without any eternal consequence? No, most likely not, especially during the time Jesus talked about it. It is far more biblical and logical that Gehenna is the name for Hell for much more sinister and rational reasons than being an alleged garbage pile. The city dump theory is originally derived from a commentary on Psalm 27 written around 1200 AD by Rabbi David Kimchi.⁵⁷ He was born and died in France, with no record I can find that he ever left Europe or saw Jerusalem.⁵⁸⁻⁵⁹ In Psalm 27 there is nothing about garbage piles, Hell, Gehenna, or the Valley of Hinnom (or of the son of Hinnom), but he makes a passing reference to the valley by stating, “Gehenna is a repugnant place, into which filth and cadavers are thrown, and in which fires perpetually burn in order to consume the filth and bones.” Any more modern reference to this concept of Gehenna uses that statement as its original source material. So the earliest and best evidence we have is a single comment on a psalm that has nothing at all to do with the comment by a man who lived well over 1500 miles from Jerusalem and nearly 1200 years after Christ! Even if we give him every benefit of the doubt possible, since his description uses the present tense, the very most we can conclude is that Gehenna was a city dump in 1200 AD.

Assuming the best circumstances, how many city dumps—or any manmade locales for that matter—remain intact, still performing their function, after 1200 years? Cathedrals and palaces are still here, but only a few still function as they did when they were built, and considering the amount of time and the historical and financial wealth invested in these edifices, there is certainly a lot of motivation to

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maintain them. But a garbage pile? Do you know of any landfills today that were being used as such 1200 years ago? And given all the events with rather significant local impact that occurred between 0 AD and 1200 AD (the destruction of Jerusalem, the fall of the Roman Empire, the total chaos of the early medieval period, the rise of Islam, the Crusades, etc.), we have plenty of reasons to believe that the Valley of Hinnom looked substantially different in Jesus' time than it did in 1200 AD.

But we don't have to assume this change over time, although others assume *no* change over time. We have evidence. A wide variety of experts, including a Duke professor of Christian Origins (Davies), a Duke professor of Hebrew Bible (Bailey), a Southern Baptist Seminary professor (Beasley-Murray), two prominent German authorities on rabbinic literature (Strack and Billerbeck), a preeminent explorer of the Holy Land (Robinson), and two Israeli archeologists (Reich and Shukron), amongst many others, agree that there is no evidence that Rabbi Kimchi's 1200 AD trash heap was present anytime before then, or even then for that matter. They find "no support in literary sources or archaeological data from the intertestamental or rabbinic periods. There is no evidence that the valley was, in fact, a garbage dump." Even Josephus, a secular Jewish historian who wrote about 40 years after Jesus lived, made no mention of a trash heap in Gehenna, which would be unexpected considering the practical (stench), social (death), safety (fire), health (disease), and governmental (city sanitation) implications it would have involved. Please see the referenced sources to validate the above claims and for more information.⁶⁰⁻⁶² They are quite convincing.

And there is further evidence from the Bible itself. If you read all twelve passages using Gehenna in the New Testament, you will not find a single descriptive term that would be associated with a city dump—except fire—which is mentioned in five of them. Just fire. If I told you there was a fire in a valley next to an ancient city, would you consider that sufficient evidence to conclude that I could only be referring to a garbage dump? Would garbage dump even be your first thought? Probably not. And we are told more about this fire. Four of the five times there is fire in Gehenna, it is only present *after* people

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die, so Jesus is not referring to fire in Gehenna that his audience can see, but fire that some of them will experience only after they're deceased. Even if Jesus was referring to their burning corpses in the trash heap someday, that doesn't exactly denote a temporary, corrective experience for these folks, does it? Only James 3:6 describes a fiery Gehenna before people die, but only in reference to the tongue and how hellish it can be when we use it to sin. And James' target audience is "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1), so unless these Jews have traveled hundreds of miles to come to Jerusalem to literally lick a pile of refuse, their tongues are not being "set on fire by Gehenna" the burning city dump, are they?

But there's even more about Gehenna's fire. It's "eternal" (Matthew 18:8-9), "never goes out" (Mark 9:43), and "is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). In *Love Wins'* effort to describe Gehenna as a not-quite-as-bad city dump alternative to the biblical concept of Hell, which is forever, it quotes all 12 references to Gehenna, except that in Matthew 18 and Mark 9, it leaves out the forever bits.⁶³ Using only parts of Jesus' sentences to argue the opposite of what he said is abusing God's words and manipulating one's audience. That's not something anyone should get away with or be commended for, is it? Instead, based on a whole slew of experts in several different fields, on a well-known historian who was actually there around Jesus' time, and on the Bible itself, we can best conclude that Gehenna was not a city dump to the original biblical audience, and this concept would not have been something they were familiar with.

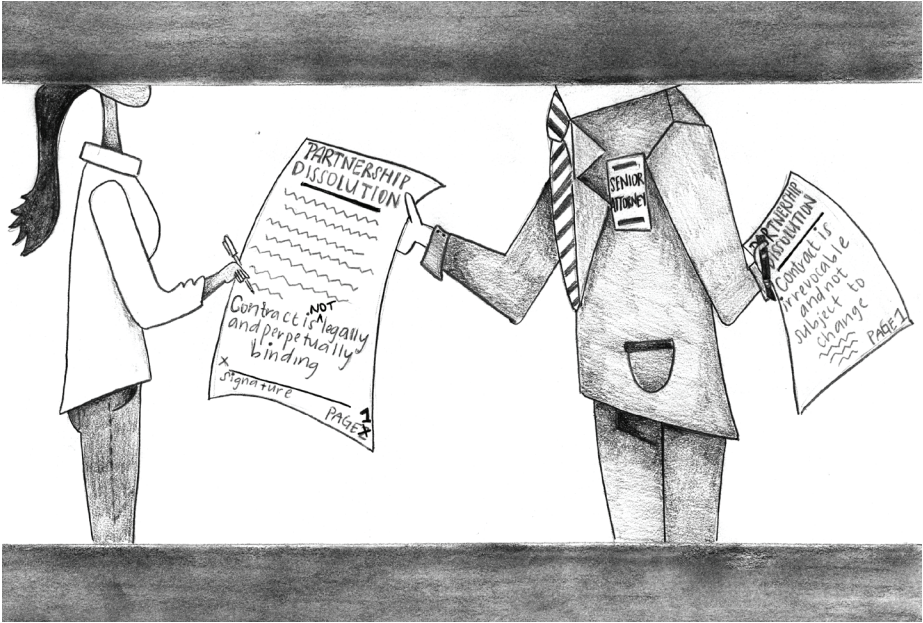
So what was Gehenna, and why is it the name for Hell? The flaming garbage pile is an inadequate explanation, but I still need to replace it with something better, right? There's actually a perfectly rational—albeit sinister—reason this valley is used to depict Hell, one that the original New Testament audience *would* have been very familiar with. We learn some important details in the Old Testament passages describing this valley that add to our knowledge that there is eternal fire there, references excluded from "all the mentions of 'Hell' (*referring to Gehenna*) in the Bible."⁶⁴ Gehenna/The Valley of Ben Hinnom is also called Topheth (2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 19:6). Biblically, it is a place of unquenchable burning filled with the blood of

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the innocent, where people sacrifice their own children for all kinds of causes and idols, where numerous things are worshipped in place of God, where birds and beasts eat carcasses that are so numerous that there is no room for more, where there is no joy or gladness, and where evil kings and those who rebel against God go and continuously rot (2 Kings 23:10, 2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6, Isaiah 30:33, 66:24, Jeremiah 7:30-34, 19:2-9, 32:35). The unquenchable burning correlates well with Gehenna's eternal fire in the New Testament. This is no city dump, is it? It is not morally neutral and simply unpleasant. It is a place of death, sin, violence, judgment, and punishment. Happiness is absent. God is absent. The kind of place that makes you sick just to think about. Not the kind of place you'd ever want to be stuck in. The Jews were raised living and breathing the Old Testament. Jesus' audience knew very well about this valley and all the suffering, evil, and eternal punishment associated with it. There's no smelly city dump in Jesus' repeated warnings; there is suffering, evil, and eternal punishment. That is Gehenna. That is Hell. The first four concepts tied to the longevity of Hell have led us to more responsibly and accurately understand what the words "all," "forever," "eternal," and even "Hell" itself mean, to those experiencing what it's like, to those who originally heard or read about what it's like, and to us today. Hell is forever, and it's eternally important to understand that.

Deep down, all of us know that words hurt us far more than sticks and stones. And when the words we're subtracting, adding, and changing concern our final destiny—instead of just a radiology report—they harm us a lot more and for a lot longer . . . like forever.

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A trusted representative with perceived authority is offering a contract to a woman who is considering dissolving a partnership with her associate. Having anticipated her uncertainty while desiring to honor her choice, her associate wrote the contract to clearly and repeatedly highlight the permanent nature of the arrangement, so that she could make an informed decision. However, believing that it would be better for everyone if the contract was made more agreeable, the associate's representative employs his perceived authority to try and make the associate seem nicer and less blunt. However, this can only be accomplished by adding words, subtracting passages, and changing how the pages are presented, as the contract is quite clear as written. After doing all three, the representative encourages the woman to commit to an arrangement that will result in an outcome opposite the one he is misleading her to expect. Perceived Christian authorities sometimes attempt to alter and misrepresent the words of God, particularly those clearly written to warn us of the consequences of dissolving future partnership and association with him. God is nice for being blunt, honoring our free choice while informing us well, so that when we decide, we don't find ourselves stuck in the scenario opposite the one we allowed ourselves to sign up for.

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STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES . . .

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