

**HEALING HEREAFTER**



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

**Jason Dykstra, MD**



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Visit the author's website at [jasondykstrawrites.com](http://jasondykstrawrites.com)

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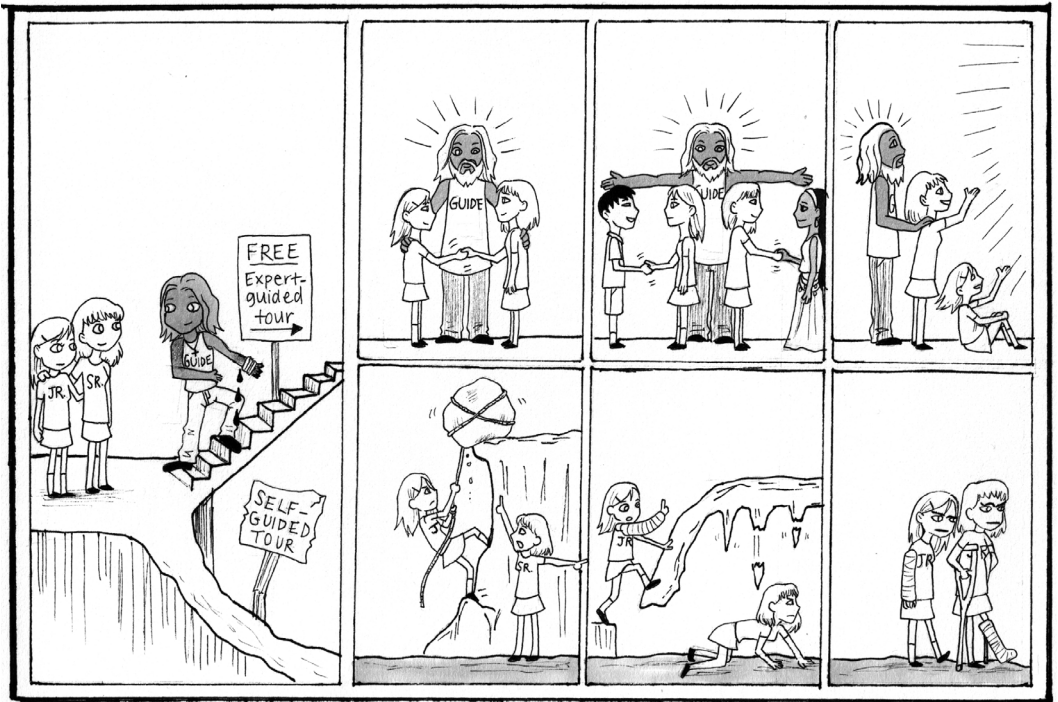
*For everyone who wonders  
what the hereafter has in store for us,  
and especially for those who want to know why*

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

## Booklet 8

### Having Your Cake and Eating It Too

*Questions about why Hell is the way it is, how Heaven can remain perfect forever,  
and what the biblical Heaven is like*



## *HEALING HEREAFTER*

Punctuating the rather sobering backdrop of sickness and death in hospitals are many moments of sheer hilarity that wrench you out of serious contemplation into fits of unbridled laughter. One experience in particular will always make me chuckle, no matter how much I try to suppress it. I was walking down the hallway to check on one of my patients, when suddenly I heard a loud voice. Inpatient floors are busy places during the day, and very few occurrences command enough attention to simultaneously halt everyone's hustle and bustle. This one succeeded. A very normal-looking woman not much older than me was sprinting down the hall toward the elevator with IV pole in tow, dressed in naught but a single hospital gown completely untied and open in the back, just flappin' in the breeze she created. As she passed me, the exclamations of joy emanating from her mouth unquestionably conveyed, "I'm freeeee!" This woman was motivated and apparently very fit, because she beat the pursuing security officers to an open elevator and managed to get the door closed. When or if they successfully retrieved her, I do not know, but part of me hopes that she at least got a few deep breaths of fresh outdoor air! She was obviously leaving AMA, against medical advice, and was quite content to do so. And although the combination of her enthusiasm and athletic prowess gave a lot of folks a free dose of laughter—which is the best medicine, after all—choices she made in exercising her freedom almost certainly landed her in a "captivity" much worse than her original predicament.

Our final story is similar, concerning a patient receiving therapy where my wife worked. And since you've listened to me long enough already, she's going to tell it! You ready babe? Ready as I'll ever be! Cool beans, take it away. Okay! A woman presented with recurrent pneumonia, the result of swallowed liquids entering her airway unbeknownst to



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her, called silent aspiration. She was instructed to thicken all liquids and given swallowing strategies to help reduce her risk. The patient was otherwise physically and mentally fit, coming from an independent apartment. She had run her own life and did as she pleased, so after a short time of therapy at our skilled nursing facility, she'd had enough. She was completely disgusted by thickened liquids and had made little progress in the use of her strategies. Very simply, she wanted to go home, no matter what the cost. After refusing a swallowing evaluation to prove that being released to independent living would be very dangerous, she demanded to be discharged AMA after all the necessary discussions had taken place. She was sent home with thickening powder and all of her swallow strategies written down on paper and with illustrations, which was everything she would allow to be done to inform her and help her. She understood and was capable of drinking safely; she just didn't want to. She died a week later in her apartment.

With few exceptions, people can generally exercise their freedom to accept or ignore medical advice, even the most accurate, compassionate, and applicable warnings. With our patients above, using freedom to choose AMA brought inescapable consequences, either temporary like captivity, or more permanent like death. On the flip side, using freedom to accept advice, even if it meant limiting themselves a little, would have allowed these women in the end to escape captivity sooner and preserve life.

So it is with the hereafter. Every one of us will make our free choice to pursue God or not God, and every one of us will experience the outcome of that freedom forever. This booklet finishes explaining how and why. We will all have our cake and eat it too; how it tastes is up to us . . .

1

Through the previous booklets of *Healing Hereafter*, we discovered what God was after when he created humans and how this purpose guides almost everything he does concerning the hereafter. Then we investigated what complicated the fulfillment of his purpose for us, what he did to fix it, and why his solution works. We learned how people go to Heaven, when they go there, and why they go there. We can even see unmistakable glimpses of this place of perfect community with God as it permeates the lives of those headed there. However, we also saw Hell for what the Bible really shows it to be, freeing ourselves from misinformation and manipulation. We didn't like the looks of it, and we're certainly not supposed to, but we did make some sense of it. Hell proved unre-storable but started to become understandable, and it will continue to become so before the end of this booklet. But first, let's take a breather from Hell, for Heaven's sake, and for the sake of you and me as well! Let's finally feast our eyes on Heaven for awhile before we enter the home stretch in our exploration of both places. I've certainly kept you waiting long enough, so take your sweet time enjoying this vision of truly unmistakable community with God for anyone who wants it!

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me, 'It

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is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children” (Revelation 21:1-7). “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true” (Revelation 22:1-6). This is Heaven, the New Earth, and it is beautiful! The Godmade Heaven isn’t preoccupied with clouds, harps, virgins, food, or ethereal detachment. It’s a flawless “new heaven and new earth” occupied by God, his people, and the perpetually perfect relationship between them, isn’t it? Exactly what we would expect from a God who never ceases to make sense. His purpose for us is finally fulfilled (Acts 17:26-28, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). Ahhhhh.

Just one last loose end to tie up, but to be honest, it’s a pretty big one. Yes, God’s purpose for humans is finally fulfilled in Heaven, but is it forever fulfilled? Could his purpose be thwarted, or could Heaven be ruined? Could human free will make the same mistakes and wreak the same havoc in Heaven that it did on earth? Is Heaven truly invincible, incorruptible, and unmistakable? Interestingly, these are questions that I have rarely heard people ask, and yet they are actually the most important ones of all! It’s crucial to understand Hell and why you never, ever want to go there. It’s exhilarating to learn God’s solution and experience a relationship with him. But if we reject Hell, accept the message of Jesus, and find ourselves in a Heaven that only lasts until somebody sins, we’re just back to where we are now, aren’t we? Nice weekend getaway, but Monday morning

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will inevitably come, won't it?

Perhaps it seems that in a perfect place with full access to God, we won't even consider using our free will to sin. But it's already happened twice before, once in the garden of Eden and once even prior to that. I realize that Satan, "that ancient serpent," will not be present to deceive us in Heaven as he apparently was in the garden (Genesis 3:1-7, Revelation 20:2, 7-10), and some people argue that he was the reason that humanity sinned.<sup>1</sup> But a tempter is not necessary for free-willed beings to sin or for perfect eternal life to be ruined, and whatever reason humanity's serpentine tempter was in the garden is not important. Our outcome would have been the same with or without him. "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by *their own* evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:14-15). After all, no one tempted Satan when he chose to sin, right? "The devil has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). Cool, that rhymes! I'm a poet and I didn't know...never mind. And in this *very* beginning—before *our* beginning—there was absolutely nothing but perfection, just like in Heaven! But there was free will, just like on earth, and it was Satan's and humanity's free-willed *desire* to know evil, not someone tempting them, that was responsible for their sin. Therefore, given the billions of angels and humans who will be in Heaven for all eternity, at least one of them would eventually use their free will to sin. If the greatest angel and the first humans sinned under essentially identical circumstances, so would somebody in Heaven, no matter how perfect it is there. So neither the absence of a tempter nor our immersion in perfection assures an unmistakable eternity.

However, aside from the devil no longer being around, there's a second difference between the garden of Eden and Heaven, one that *does* preserve a perfect hereafter. In the garden we have God, humans, and two trees (Genesis 2:7-17). In Heaven we have God, humans, and one tree (Revelation 22:1-5). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is nowhere to be found on the New Earth, is it? This is the tree that represents our most important choice. Although we can use our free will to choose all kinds of other things, this tree is the way that

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we were given to use our free will to demonstrate if we were satisfied with God and good or desired something apart from that, sin and evil. And although we all decided on the latter, many of us genuinely and persistently endeavor to do that less and less. As per Booklet 5, the hallmark of people who have the faith and deeds associated with God's promise of salvation is accepting the solution of Jesus to initiate a persistent, growing intimacy with him. These people will value and incorporate God and good into their lives in increasing measure, compelled by the Holy Spirit within them to consistently use their free will to choose what is not sin, what is not evil. They make Heaven unmistakable on earth, because they want to be unmistakable themselves, both here and in Heaven. God knows that they have used their free will to ultimately reject choosing to know evil, and in Heaven he will honor that rejection by removing that choice from them, so that they can't sin. "He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (1 Peter 1:4). No one here has fully escaped this corruption or these desires; that can only occur in Heaven. In Booklet 3 we see that God's nature is his MO, what he's all about, what he values. Perfect community with God involves a complete understanding and incorporation of what God values, so once he makes us perfect, we fully participate in his divine nature. Remember that a nature is not a fundamental component of a being, like a spiritual organ. We don't become God or part of God; we become what he's all about. We become good, and only good. We lose our sinful nature, our imperfect inclination to desire evil, in order to participate in the divine nature. We lose our ability to sin, making both us and Heaven unmistakable.

God is perfect because he has perfect knowledge and perfect power, which will always lead to optimal behavior. Theoretically, God can sin because he is truly sovereign and has free will, but he will never, ever do so. This is because sin is not alluring to him; it is always less than the best, something outside of and opposing his nature (James 1:13, Deuteronomy 32:4). Humans do not have God's perfect knowledge or perfect power, nor will they in Heaven, so we

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very well might sin there. We often don't follow God's example in doing what is best, which is why we need that part of our free will removed (Isaiah 48:17-18). Satan came the closest to God in terms of knowledge and power, but he still sinned in a perfect environment. So would we. Obviously, even the "best" Christians are also corrupted by evil desires on earth, but they will have no such desires in Heaven. All the other ways that they can use their free will remain intact; Heaven is no divine puppet show or forced tea party. However, no one on the New Earth will be able to choose to sin or know evil, as we will be "the righteous made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). Everyone going to Heaven has freely given God permission to remove this choice, as they all have faith that he can and will accomplish such perfect community and that it is the best. Our free will will have fulfilled its purpose in allowing God to fulfill his purpose in Heaven. Therefore, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will no longer be necessary. God lets us choose our way, so that he can get his way, by only letting those in Heaven choose one way, so that they can experience the best way. Then he and his own will enjoy the fruit of the tree of life and the water of the river of life, forever in perfect community: God's Heaven that is—and always will be—unmistakable!

## 2

**A**n unmistakable Heaven leads us to three consequent questions, which will require a few chapters to answer. However, these are some of the most important questions asked about the biblical afterlife, so we must do them justice if we are to heal hereafter. You'll be glad that we did in the end, and they'll apply many of the concepts that we've discussed, bringing this book toward a coherent close. First, Booklets 6 and 7 demonstrate that Hell is forever, but why does it have to be? Several answers have been proposed, and we'll explore each of them before getting to ours. Let's begin with the one related to the preceding chapter's explanation of an unmistakable Heaven.

Is it a limitation of free will—such as that experienced by Heaven's

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inhabitants—that keeps Hell’s inhabitants from escaping? Instead of having their ability to sin removed, will those who accepted or even embraced knowing evil have their ability to choose to know God and his goodness removed once they get to Hell? Is that why Hell has to be forever? No, because such removal of free will is unnecessary in Hell. The reason that God removes part of our free will in Heaven is not to preserve our desire to know him and his goodness. Our faith to desire perfect community with him has already convinced him enough to give us his Spirit, sealing our salvation in a relationship with him that produces persistent fruit. Rather, he makes us unable to choose evil in order to keep Heaven perfect, both for our sakes and for his own. He knows that we truly want perfect community with him, but he doesn’t know that we’ll never commit a single sin throughout all of eternity. He needs to be assured of the latter for Heaven to remain Heaven, and those who enter Heaven want him to be assured of this, so he makes them unable to sin. He has no such motive for altering this part of a person’s free will in Hell, does he? He doesn’t have to keep Hell either perfect or imperfect, so he doesn’t alter its inhabitants’ free will toward either end. In any case, he certainly wouldn’t remove the ability of those in Hell *not to sin*, as he does people’s ability *to sin* in Heaven. Human free will is left intact in Hell, although the way we will learn it is used by Hell’s eventual inhabitants may surprise you.

The second and likely most common answer that people offer to explain why Hell has to be forever is because the Bible says so. As per Booklets 6 and 7, the Bible does undeniably tell us that Hell is forever. Christians believe that the Bible represents God’s words and that God and his words will never change (Number 23:19, Malachi 3:6, Matthew 24:35). Therefore, it is argued that “God can never change or go back on any word ever spoken, for all eternity. That is one reason he cannot get someone out of Hell.”<sup>2</sup> The problem here is that God is trapped by his own words. According to this answer, if God does decide that Hell shouldn’t be forever in order to allow people to leave, they would still have to stay because regrettably God had already told them that it was forever. Of course, God’s words would have to change in this scenario anyway, an act that this

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answer forbids. But even if God doesn't change his mind and sticks with his words that Hell is forever, we are still left with the question of *why* he made that his word in the first place. Some are content to ignore this question, claiming that we don't need an answer since God doesn't need to explain his words. "Sending people to Hell isn't the only thing God does that is impossible to figure out."<sup>3</sup> Wrong. It's not a mystery that's impossible to figure out, and it *must* be figured out.

In Booklet 1 we learned the danger of inappropriately invoking mystery as an "answer" when a question challenges God's trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, or logic. Unfortunately, you may have been taught that "the Bible shows no tolerance for such questions when they are grounded in pride or insatiable curiosity."<sup>4</sup> Although that may be true regarding pride, what if that curiosity is only insatiable because a humble person genuinely seeking truth is continually given complacent, ignorant, or narrow-minded answers to absolutely vital inquiries? If God "wants all people to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:3-4), then by stating in the Bible that Hell is forever without telling us why, he calls into question all four of the above aspects of his character. And if there's sufficient evidence to doubt God's trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, or logic—and we're content not to resolve this doubt—then we are left with no decent reason to believe that anything else he says or does is reliable, good, consistent, or rational, right? It is very dangerous and misleading for a person to teach that "Scripture is satisfied to leave paradoxes unresolved" before he has been open-minded and thorough enough to be certain that these apparent paradoxes truly should be and truly are left unresolved.<sup>5</sup>

Some claim that in the midst of these apparent mysteries we can trust God's words without explanation because we can trust a God who would die for us.<sup>6</sup> Because "he went to the cross," some feel "we can trust him to decide wisely and fairly."<sup>7</sup> But being willing to die for someone—as great a sacrifice as that is—doesn't automatically make a person universally trustworthy, not even God. Many of you would truly die for one of your loved ones, but that obviously doesn't mean you've always been perfectly trustworthy with them, does it?



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More importantly though, if some of God's words call into question God's trustworthiness, what reason do we have to believe that his other words—like those telling us that he died for us—are trustworthy? We have to believe that God's words about dying for us are reliable before his death for us can demonstrate that he is reliable enough to trust his words about dying for us, let alone his other words that Hell has to be forever, even though these other words call into question the reliability of his words about dying for us! It's a circular argument to claim that trusting some of God's words make God trustworthy enough to trust both those words and his other words, particularly when those other words question God's trustworthiness to begin with. Instead, if we can figure out *why all* of God's words—including those stating that Hell is forever—needn't cast doubt on his trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, or logic, then we have no need to trust him just so that we can trust him. Rather than answering why Hell is forever with "The Bible says so" and invoking mystery when someone asks why the Bible says so, we're going to find reasons why and discover how they maintain—not erode—God's trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, and logic in the process. But first, a few other ways that people explain how Hell must be forever.

A third suggestion is that "God has fashioned our lives in such a way as to show us how a momentary decision can have repercussions that last a lifetime." To summarize an author elaborating on this proposal, since this "is the nature of the reality into which we have been created," "when it comes to our entire—eternal—lives, Jesus teaches that this momentary life has an eternal trajectory, that the response we make to him has eternal consequences." "The Bible says that human life is lived, then, on one of two trajectories: toward either eternal life or eternal death."<sup>8</sup> If I understand this argument correctly then, God created this reality to involve many decisions with far-reaching consequences, so Hell has to be forever simply because it happens to be one of those decisions. In other words, God decided that the choice to go to Hell or Heaven would be a forever choice, so it is. In reality, this explanation accomplishes nothing more than the last one, telling us that Hell is forever just because God or the Bible says so. And when we ask *why* there are only two trajectories, *why*

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our choice of Hell versus Heaven must be one with eternal consequences, and why God would forever withhold himself from anyone, we again find that the only response is a disappointingly dismissive appeal to mystery. “God withholds from us many truths we’d love to know.” “Sometimes even the best biblical answers leave a lot unanswered.”<sup>9</sup> This may be true regarding questions that do not need answering, but questions that legitimately cast doubt on God’s trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, or logic *do* need answering, and why Hell has to be forever is one of those questions. Punting this question into the bleachers of mystery and unresolved tensions is not the best biblical answer.

Fourth, some argue that Hell being anything less than forever would diminish the magnitude of what Jesus’ work accomplished. “If Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection didn’t deliver us from an eternal Hell, his work on the cross is less heroic, less potent, less consequential, and thus less deserving of our worship and praise.”<sup>10</sup> This argument confuses the very different questions of why Hell was forever *before* salvation in Jesus was available and why Hell is still forever *now that* salvation in Jesus is available. Before Jesus came to make Heaven a potential residence for humans, the only final destination an imperfect yet immortal human spirit could go to was the only final destination without God and his goodness: Hell. And without an alternative location for such a spirit, there could be no escape. This forever Hell is what Jesus came to save us from, so if somehow we could have gotten out of Hell without Jesus, then yes, the resulting less-than-forever Hell would diminish the magnitude of what Jesus’ sacrifice was to accomplish. Therefore, this argument does provide a supplementary explanation to why Hell had to be forever *before* Jesus came. However, it is not a valid explanation to why Hell is forever *now that* Jesus has come. Whether Hell lasts for one day or for an eternity for those who reject the gospel that is now in place, the death and resurrection of Jesus will always provide salvation from a forever Hell, because without Jesus, Hell would have *had* to have been forever for everyone. In other words, the magnitude of Jesus’ work is not diminished in any way by how long people who reject the gospel are in Hell, because we all would have been in Hell forever if he hadn’t

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come, so this argument is invalid.

Moreover, it bases the punishment for our sin on how much glory and prestige Jesus gets rather than on the actual offense committed. Remember that the punishment of physical death for sin is just and logical. Death is the ultimate consequence of sinning and knowing evil, and it had to occur because the resultant imperfect humans, ineligible for God's perfect goodness, had no other eternal option but an existence in Hell, a place where God is absent. This chosen existence was forever because there was no way out without Jesus. Our just and sensible God bases the punishment on the crime. Conversely, God's justice and logic are sacrificed if Hell has to be forever simply because Jesus' death and resurrection don't get enough recognition otherwise. Imagine Judge God the Father saying to you, "Well, justice only demands that Hell lasts twenty years, but because I'm worried that Jesus won't be adequately worshipped as a praiseworthy hero, I'm gonna bump up your sentence to eternity." That's just not just. Let's say that two people are equally guilty of murder and each sentenced to twenty years in prison. Graciously, the family of the victim offers full pardon to both, but only one accepts it. Is it just or rational for the judge to then *increase* the sentence of the other convict to life in prison simply so that everyone better appreciates the generosity of the victim's family? Of course not! His offense is no different before or after the pardon is offered, and his punishment should not be either. Neither does Hell have to be forever just to make Jesus' work seem more gracious. Clearly, it does not.

We run into a similar problem with a fifth explanation of why Hell has to be forever. This theory states that infinite punishment in Hell is necessary because we have offended an infinitely great and perfect God.<sup>11</sup> Instead of basing the punishment on the magnitude of what Jesus accomplished, the punishment is based on the magnitude of who was being offended or sinned against. Once again, the problem is that the punishment is not based on *what* the actual offense was. Let's head back to the courtroom to illustrate. Two more murderers are being sentenced, each for killing one of a pair of equally innocent men. Is it just or rational for the judge to sentence the first murderer to life in prison because his

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victim was a senator, while sentencing the second to twenty years in prison because his victim was a homeless man? Of course not! The offenses are the same regardless of the person offended, and the punishments should be identical as well. God has clearly determined that the biblical punishment for sin is physical death, which is just and rational for all the reasons we've already discussed (Genesis 2:16-17, 4:22, Romans 6:23, James 1:14-15). If eternity in Hell were the punishment for sin, then Jesus would not have adequately taken our punishment on himself by merely dying. He would have had to spend forever in Hell to fully endure our sentence! But he can act as our substitute because the punishment for sin is physical death. The eternity in Hell that results is an unavoidable byproduct without Jesus' death and resurrection to provide a way out. God does not unjustly upgrade the punishment for sin from physical death to a forever Hell just because we picked the wrong guy to offend. Rather, he determines a just punishment for sin and teaches that Hell must be forever for better reasons that we'll unpack soon.

But before we finally do, there is still one more explanation offered by others why Hell must be forever that we need to explore. As we know, faith is the one human initiative tied to salvation. It also seems clear that people in Hell would know for sure that the gospel is true because they're in Hell for not believing it. Therefore, if they then choose to believe that the solution of Jesus is the only way to be saved, it is argued that this could not be a true act of faith, because their knowledge leaves no uncertainty left to have faith in. Consequently, they would not be able to be saved and must stay in Hell forever.<sup>12</sup> The problem here is that the initiation of salvation is not dependent on how much or how little evidence we have to back our faith up; it's dependent on what that faith is in. God does not provide salvation to people just because they have totally blind faith, without any experiences or reasons to believe what they believe. In fact, this kind of faith is extremely dangerous, because it would just as legitimately lead you to believe that a flyswatter, your four-year-old niece, or Hitler was God, as it would lead you to believe that God was God. Those who argue that we should just have faith in God because he's God need to realize

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that a person on the other side of the world (or street) has already taken this advice, applying that same exact faith to a completely different deity. Blind faith without evidence or validated experience to support it is only useful if you happen to select the correct deity by sheer luck; it can never help you know if you have. If God values your blind faith in him, then he has to value someone else's blind faith in horoscopes, David Koresh, or Allah just as much.

Instead, the Bible encourages the use of evidence and experience to bolster our faith. We find Paul "explaining and proving" the gospel, and "a large number" of people are saved as a result (Acts 17:2-4). Jesus assists the salvation of many by performing miracle after miracle, citing them as evidence that he is the Messiah (Luke 7:18-22). And God constantly reminds his people to remember what he has done for them in the past to allow validated experience to amplify their future faith in him (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:17-19). No doubt (pun intended), when Thomas demands to see Jesus' wounds before being certain of the resurrection, Jesus would rather have had him believe without seeing. However, he does not claim that Thomas is unable to have faith once this undeniable evidence was presented. In fact, he tells Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed" (John 20:24-29). Even when the resurrection was undeniable to Thomas, he could still have genuine faith that Jesus had returned to life, because faith is not dependent on the amount of uncertainty that it is able to espouse. It's dependent on its object. Thomas' faith was possible and legitimate because it was faith in Jesus, even if it was a baby step rather than a leap of faith. Similar faith would be possible in Hell. True, folks there have evidence all around them that the biblical Hell is for real and have experienced the consequences of their rejection of Jesus at judgment day. As with Thomas, these folks would have essentially no remaining uncertainty regarding who Jesus is, but it would still be possible for them to exercise genuine faith in him or not. They could potentially still believe that God can and will do what he says and that what he says is the best or not. They could potentially still choose to consider Jesus as the only solution for sin or not. And they could potentially believe everything else God says in his words or not.

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There is room for faith with Thomas, and there is room for faith in Hell, even if it would only be very weak faith. However, while this faith could conceivably play a role in them believing the Bible's gospel, it would also lead them to believe the Bible's teaching that Hell is forever, so we would not expect these folks to demonstrate any anticipation of salvation. We will see that this is precisely the case. Therefore, Hell can't be forever just because there can't be faith there. Theoretically, there can be faith, and it would lead to the realization that Hell is forever, but aside from "because the Bible says so," it would not lead to an explanation *why*.

### 3

**I**n this chapter then, we will try to explain *why* Hell truly *has* to be forever. As we do, I want to acknowledge that this particular subject is likely the most onerous one we will address. Therefore, if any part of what follows is emotionally difficult, I readily encourage you to embrace any disgust regarding Hell's existence and duration. There is literally nothing that should be more vile to us than Hell. And while you do so, remember that I don't claim that this book's answers to why Hell is forever are incontrovertible truth. But they are certainly the best I've been able to discover, and I hope that you'll stick with me to the end to ascertain whether or not they make sense. I firmly believe that they do and that God does as a result.

Here they are! Remember, those in Hell fundamentally want an existence apart from God and what he's all about. That's why they ended up where God and good are absent, but that's also part of why they'll stay there. Of all the people in the Bible for whom Hell is their final destination, not a single one exhibits the faith in God required for salvation. Even though we now know such faith is theoretically possible in Hell, it is evidently not practiced. This is the first of the two reasons why Hell is forever. Apparently, those in Hell are freely *fixed* in their unwillingness to be in the Godmade Heaven. When we see people object to God on judgment day when they aren't admitted

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into Heaven, are they telling him how much they want to know him and experience perfect community with him? No, they expected admittance because they thought that they had done enough moral or spiritual acts to *earn* their way in (Matthew 7:21-23). They were trying to enter Heaven according to their own criteria, in a way other than the narrow door that God had opened for them. Even after they knew that they couldn't get in, they didn't demonstrate a desire to know God and become like him, the will of God for those who are saved (Luke 13:24-28). They wanted a manmade Heaven, not the Godmade one. A Heaven where they could make the rules, where they didn't need Jesus himself—only works with Jesus' name attached to them—to get where they wanted to go. They demonstrated no desire to know God in community with him. In other words, they wanted the manmade Heaven called Hell.

Likewise, the rich man from Luke 16:19-31 shows no desire for a Heavenly existence either. True, he's in Tartarus—not in Hell yet—but you get to both the same way, and the one always leads to the other, for reasons that perhaps now are becoming even clearer (see Booklet 3). We know that he was “in torment” and “in agony in this fire,” and yet he never shows even a hint of desire to leave! It seems obvious that if you or I were in his shoes, upon seeing Abraham and Lazarus, we'd immediately negotiate or just plain beg to be pulled out of pain and into Paradise! Or would we? The rich man does no such thing. He wants Lazarus to come *to him* to cool his tongue, but if he actually thinks that Lazarus might make the trip, wouldn't he at least ask to be brought back to Paradise with him? How hard would that be, and considering his circumstances, what harm is there in asking, even if he knows deep down that it wouldn't be possible? But he doesn't even ask! And the only reason he wouldn't ask, the only reason *we* wouldn't try to do the same, is because people who are in Hell continue to not want to go to the Godmade Heaven. Even in agony and even as he acknowledges that it would be better for others to choose differently than him, the rich man demonstrates no desire to leave his predicament for God's alternative. This might seem surprising at first until we remind ourselves that a great many people among the living persistently act the exact same way—they demonstrate no desire to

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inevitable, persistent deeds associated with faith in a relationship with God through Jesus described accurately by the notion of turning resolutely in a certain direction, holding fast to an opinion, and rendering one's mind constant (Matthew 24:13, 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Colossians 1:22-23, 1 Timothy 4:16, Hebrews 3:14)? And constancy and perseverance are also seen in those who do not want to know God or be in Heaven in perfect community with him. Those who blaspheme and revile against his Spirit being inside of them to produce intimacy with him and behavior that reflects Heaven don't want to know God or have perfect community with him, a desire that consequentially becomes an eternal sin (Mark 3:28-29). Everything we have discussed above is consistent with a chasm between Hell and Heaven that is set fast partly because the free will of those who choose to dwell in one place or the other is equally constant.

Because we hold fast to our fixed opinion and because God can't achieve his purpose for humanity by forever putting off judgment day and the resultant habitation of Hell and Heaven (if he did, we'd end up in a pointless earth/Hell/Heaven fusion that can never be perfect), God limits the imperfection and suffering of our pre-judgment existence by giving us this physical life to decide. The only exceptions are those without meaningful access to the gospel during this life, who will be justly given what God deems to be an equivalent opportunity/period of time in Lugg to demonstrate the faith that God is looking for and to be exposed to the message of Jesus (see Booklet 3). By the time the last day arrives, God will have given all humans a more than reasonable amount of time to tell him what they want their eternal destiny to be, and he will be understandably unwilling to delay the fulfillment of perfect community with him any longer. He is anything but hasty in judgment, and he will have kept those who yearn to be with him waiting long enough. It's already been thousands of years for some of them after all, including many who had been destitute, persecuted, mistreated, tortured, flogged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, sawed in two, and killed by the sword for their faith (Hebrews 11:35-40). Even off in the future when judgment day approaches, God encourages these martyrs to "wait a little longer," allowing even more to be saved before the last day comes (Revelation



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leave their predicament for God's alternative.

OK fine, *so far* nobody in the Bible has wanted to leave a destiny in Hell for an eternity in Heaven, but maybe they are the exceptions. What about humanity as a whole? Surely in general, people would express this desire, right? I'm afraid not; in fact, the Bible *unanimously* indicates otherwise. Two of these indications are in the previous narrative itself. Recall that Abraham explains that the rich man and Lazarus can't ever get to each other, as "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 (Luke 16:26)." You might have assumed that this chasm has been fixed by God, that he is the one who keeps his people in Paradise/Heaven and the others in Tartarus/Hell. But notice the language used here. Abraham implies that people in Paradise might "want to go" to Tartarus, perhaps to help relieve human suffering, since they are able to witness it there. But does anyone "want to go" from Tartarus to Paradise? Shockingly, no! Abraham's wording is curiously altered when referring to the unsaved, with no other conceivable motive for the change except a desire to reveal that none of them wants to leave! And this revelation is confirmed by the very actions of the rich man he's talking to, who never once considers asking to get out of Tartarus, even though he does think to ask for a drop of water!

Moreover, when we examine the definitions of this word "fixed," the Greek word *sterizo*, we find something quite remarkable. Certainly, the word means "to fix, make stable, set fast, strengthen, and make firm," and these definitions obviously apply to this verse. But in every Greek dictionary that I found, there was an additional definition suggesting something more. In *Strong's Greek Lexicon* we learn that *sterizo* can mean "to turn resolutely in a certain direction." In *A Greek-English Lexicon* the idea is "to hold fast to an opinion." At [greekbible.com](http://greekbible.com) we find "to render constant or confirm one's mind."<sup>13-15</sup> When I stumbled across this, I was shocked at how applicable these seemingly peripheral but persistent definitions of *sterizo* are in Luke 16:26! "Fixed" does not only apply to the longevity of the chasm, but to people as well, doesn't it? Could it be that one reason the chasm is fixed is because the people on either side have fixed their wills as well? Are not the

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6:9-11). “The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:3). So God “has set a day when he will judge the world with justice” because he will have patiently waited far more than long enough for us to make our choice and because he understands the constancy of our mind in the matter anyway. God knows that some people want Heaven, God knows that the others want Hell, and God tells us that once they get there, they simply won’t change their minds. Not because he decides that, but because they do.

The Bible has consistently supported this notion above and continues to support it below. Much of the book of Revelation—particularly Chapters 6, 8, 9, and 16—consists of God bringing justice on those who embrace evil rather than reject it, those who must bear the fair punishment for their wrongs against him, humanity, and the earth. They experience in themselves the suffering that this sin brings, since they are unwilling to have it removed in Jesus. What happens on earth during this time is frightening, agonizing, and devastating, just about the worst set of circumstances imaginable. Downright Hellish. And at the end of each wave of wrath, we are told of these people’s reaction. “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it’” (Revelation 6:16-17)? These people don’t want to get closer to God, they’re trying to get farther away! Hell-like punishment isn’t causing them to pursue God; instead, in Revelation 16:9-21 “they cursed God” thrice and “refused to repent” twice following his justice. Hey, I get that nobody enduring such calamity is going to be favorably disposed toward the one who is bringing it on them, even if they are ultimately responsible for it. But the third response of these people proves again—and even more convincingly—that after such Hellishness, people were not just afraid of God, and they weren’t just mad at God; they *still* wanted absolutely *nothing* to do with him and his goodness. They still were pursuing Hell. “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that

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cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Revelation 9:20-21).

God gave them as close to Hell on earth as one could imagine, and if anything, it made them *less* likely to want perfect community in Heaven, not more. In addition to comprehensively bringing justice to this world, perhaps a second purpose in God exerting his wrath will be to give these folks one last, extra-large warning to prove that those ignorant of it don't want him and never will. Or maybe he's trying to prove that to us through their responses. “Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declares the Lord Almighty.” Take one guess where the remains of the folks in this verse end up. Gehenna. And the deeds that they are known for are very consistent with a desire for death, not life (Jeremiah 7:30-8:3).

Let's face it, Hell is a lousy correctional facility, and *not a single* biblical example demonstrates that *anyone* going there will *ever* want the Godmade Heaven in exchange. This is the first reason why Hell is forever. Not because God even remotely relishes the thought of people in eternal torment, whether or not they would have changed their minds to desire Heaven. Hell is forever because its inhabitants will evidently *always* want it over wanting him and Heaven. In fact, the Godmade Heaven would be Hellish for them! “Who wants to be rescued?” asks one of Hell's imagined residents, when being offered a theoretical chance to be allowed into Heaven in C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.<sup>16</sup> He and the other residents “won't like it at all when we get there” and would “be far happier at home” in Hell!<sup>17-18</sup> Perhaps your objection to an eternal Hell has stemmed from a sympathetic vision of humans crying out for deliverance from Hell, longing to escape, while God looks down every now and then apathetically. Hey, if that's what's going on, I can understand your hesitation to believe it. But the vision that we get from the Bible couldn't be more different. God will never “say to someone truly humbled, broken, and desperate for reconciliation, ‘Sorry, too late,’” because biblically, that someone will not exist in Hell.<sup>19</sup> “The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end.” “The doors of hell are locked on the inside.”<sup>20</sup> *Nobody*

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ending up in Hell is begging for God, and *nobody* is desperate for escape to the Godmade Heaven, are they? And God? As we learned in Booklet 5, his response to Hell and human suffering is as opposite to apathetic as possible, isn't it? God doesn't need to remove people's choice in Hell to know him and his goodness, because he knows that they won't ever want to. They have fixed their minds.

But that's only half of the answer. Even if judgment day weren't final, no one initiates salvation in Hell because no one in Hell exercises the faith that what God says is the best, the faith that always leads to intimacy with God and incorporation of what he values. On the contrary, those who want Hell want a place where God and all that he's about are absent; therefore, the rest of the salvation process will be absent as well. God won't be present to seek for faith (which evidently won't occur in Hell anyway) and specially predestine, Jesus won't be present in word or deed to be the solution, and the Holy Spirit won't be present to guarantee salvation and help enact the necessarily persistent deeds that result from this faith. There will be no God in Hell to enter into a relationship with. *Every single component*—both human and divine—of God's salvation process for us will be absent from Hell. This is the second reason why Hell has to be forever. If God's purpose for humans is eternal perfect community with him, then he must give us a free-willed chance to choose to find him in Heaven or to choose existence apart from him in Hell. And if God's role in our salvation process is absolutely necessary, then the decision to be in a place without God is also a decision to be in a place without any opportunity for salvation. In order for God to give us the free will that is required for fulfilling his purpose in creating us, Hell *has* to be forever.

The only ways that it wouldn't have to be forever are if God abandoned his purpose for humanity, if free will was not mandatory to accomplish his purpose, or if God was not necessary for salvation. If God abandons his purpose for us, there would be no Heaven and no perfect community with him, which is unhelpful. If free will was not mandatory, God would have to settle for meaningless "community" with mere extensions of himself, like puppets or dolls at a tea party, which is pointless. If God was not necessary for salvation, humans

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would have to find a way to erase their imperfection and become perfect on their own, which is impossible. Hell must be forever because humans who won't have the faith to be with God pursue an existence without him and therefore pursue an existence without any hope of salvation. Ultimately, without an eternal Hell there could be no Godmade Heaven, and it is clearly not consistent with the God of the Bible "that Hell should be able to *veto* Heaven."<sup>21</sup>

God is not suddenly changing hats on judgment day, becoming a fundamentally different being, a loving heavenly father transforming into a cruel, mean, vicious tormentor, as he is accused of in the argument for a temporary Hell.<sup>22</sup> After all, the only difference in the way that our God and the God of a transient, corrective Hell supposedly transition at judgment day is sending people to Hell because they *constantly want* to be without him versus sending people to Hell to "melt every hard heart" to *coerce them to want* to be with him.<sup>23</sup> We just learned how well the latter turns out, didn't we? And is it more cruel, mean, and vicious for God to let you choose your own destination or to beat the Hell out of you in inevitably forcing you to choose intimacy with him? And since God does not use the latter approach to pursue many living *now* who are heading for Hell—waiting to give 'em Hell there instead—then is it not the *latter* God who is transforming into a cruel, mean, vicious tormentor? The former God is the one who does not change hats! He is the same God before judgment and after judgment. Humans are the same before judgment and after judgment. The only thing that does change is location. Those who want eternal perfect community with God will want it before and after judgment day and will inhabit the completed new Heaven and New Earth, where God will join them as well. Those who do not want eternal perfect community with God will not want it before or after judgment day and will inhabit Hell, where their absence of saving faith and their choice to be apart from God's saving work will keep that existence fixed. Nobody forces them to want this, God doesn't want them to want this, and they all have an equal chance to show him that they don't want this. I hope they *all* take advantage of this opportunity while they still can. So the first question an unmistakable Heaven leads us to finally answers why Hell must be forever.

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But answers don't mean that a forever Hell doesn't hurt. It may be hurting you very, very much. And here at the end of our exploration of Hell, it's time to acknowledge that. To recognize the fears, the accusations, the despair, the guilt, the anger, and the uncertainties that have been—and may still be—passing through your mind for exactly what they are. Never would I expect you to ignore them, never would I ask you to disregard them, and never would I carelessly belittle them. Hell is revolting and it can be seen as nothing less. Take whatever time you need to despise it, loathe it, and revile it, but please return, for as we focus forward on Heaven, there will never be a need to look back!

### 4

The second question about an unmistakable Heaven concerns suffering or sadness there due to memories from our life on earth. Won't we mourn those we knew who aren't in Heaven? Won't we regret whatever mistakes we had made or suffering we had caused on earth? Won't we still feel the sorrow and pain of the difficulties we had here? Won't we ever wish to go back and relive our favorite parts of this life? The answer to all of these questions is a resounding no! And the reason is clear. "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17). When we enter Heaven, we will have virtually *no* memory of this life, and God states this fact twice to get his point across. At first this might seem appalling. How in Heaven could I bear to not remember my life here? Recollections of my spouse, my kids, my family, my friends, the good times, just gone? Yes, but with them goes every memory of suffering and failure, of sadness, death, mourning, crying, and pain. When people enter Heaven, God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things *has passed away*." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making *everything new*!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are

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trustworthy and true" (Revelation 21:4-5). Again, God doubly assures us that this is the case. Heaven cannot be Heaven any other way. Part of removing our ability to sin and know evil there necessarily involves eliminating *all prior* knowledge of evil if we are to exist in a place of perfect community with God. Now I realize that this may have just hit you like a ten-ton Tonka truck, so I will make it my duty in the next several chapters both to demonstrate all the reasons why this *must* be the case and to unveil the resulting Heaven that is *far* more perfect and exciting for *everyone* there than the suboptimal Heavens that many of us have settled for. So however surprising this might be for you, stick with me for just a little longer.

Even though we'll confirm that bringing memories from our physical lives with us to the New Earth is inseparably intertwined with the knowledge of evil that is associated with them, being *informed* of facts about these lives after we are already on the New Earth does not have to be. I am not claiming that we will never again be aware of events that transpired during our physical lives. I see no reason why God can't offer us many details about our relationships and activities here, but virtually any information we'll have about this current life will be relearned, not remembered. I can't say if God will answer questions about this life on request or if he will only share with us that which he feels we truly need to know. I suspect the latter, since at some point our inquiries would require an answer that would necessitate an understanding of evil. Regardless, what I can say is that favoring relearning over remembering allows God to teach us about ourselves, our lives, many of our loved ones, and our salvation without exposing us to suffering. Even explaining what sin and death are, which is essential to appreciating God's solution of Jesus, can be done neutrally and without experiencing evil, as long as we have no memories about those things that would associate them with suffering. After all, God told Adam and Eve about sin and death in the perfection of the garden of Eden before they eventually chose to experience evil and suffering, right (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:2-3)? Obviously, he can do the same for us, except that we will no longer have the choice to sin. And Adam and Eve were also fully capable of enjoying perfect community with God without any memory of some prior life. We will be as well,

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won't we? Only when we are unable to retain memories of our pre-Heaven lives and truly start with a clean unmistakable slate can God guarantee an existence that frees us from every experience of past suffering and any creation of new suffering. Sign me up!

And even though that's one huge perk of the Godmade Heaven, it's far from the only one. God never decides something just for the Heaven of it, especially not Heaven itself! His New Earth makes sense. Consider your skills and interests. Recall how exciting it is to achieve proficiency in something, experiencing new wonder and thrills with every advancement that you make. Rather than just getting to the New Earth and already knowing how to do a bunch of stuff, you get the thrill of relearning a hobby that you love *again*, except this time without faulty teaching or frustration! Just about all of us have watched children master a new skill while secretly wishing that we could still have that same joy and wonder in simple achievement. So we shall! Another important perk of relearning rather than remembering on the New Earth is a fresh start to relationships. As in familiarizing ourselves with a hobby, don't we cherish the thrill of newly forging an intimate bond with others, whether a close family member, a beloved spouse, or a lifelong friend? We call this time "the good ole days" or "the honeymoon period," and we often long to or even try to relive it, don't we? God could have us merely recognize our loved ones in Heaven and take up the relationship where it left off, but the unique satisfaction of that reunion would no longer be uniquely satisfying once you've seen your departed spouse every day for a year there, would it? And you'd still want to relive the "good ole days" anyway, right? In the Godmade Heaven you can live the "best ole days." With *everyone* there. Imagine God introducing us to whatever family and friends are present, telling us that on the old earth we were committed to and enjoyed being with each other, then letting us joyfully forge a relationship anew as we desire! And we could do so without awkwardness, baggage, strife, mistrust, shame, or betrayal, unless you're looking forward to eternally remembering all these things.

But it just keeps getting better. A totally clean slate concerning our interests and relationships ushers in a reality on the New Earth that we will never experience here, despite Herculean efforts to do so:



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true equality. You're gonna love this. Because we won't remember our former life, there will be no "ways things are done" or "comfort zones" to have to break away from. The new relationships that we develop will automatically be more diverse, non-segregated, and inclusive, simply because there will be no familiarities or traditions holding us back. The status quo makes it hard for those interactions to occur easily or fully, doesn't it? There is no earthly status quo in the Godmade Heaven. That's part of the reason it will be so healthy not to be overly focused on our loved ones from this life. We will then be much more free and willing to know *everyone* without culture shock, preconceptions, or inhibiting memories of the past.

But even better than equality in our social circles, there will also be healthy equality in our circumstances. No one who received a poor education on earth is going to have to catch up to those who experienced a better learning environment, because we won't remember our educations, bad or good. No one with immature social skills because of disability or rejection will have to be brought up to speed with the attractive or funny, because everyone will start relationship building together. No one who was dealt a life of great difficulty will be at odds with those for whom luxury and ease were the norm, because all norms will be forgotten. No one who died in the womb or with chronic mental incapacitation will have to stare blankly with nothing to contribute to the conversation as everyone else recounts numerous stories and memories from earth, because there won't be any. No one whose parents were absent or who was unable to have children will smile because they have to in Heaven, while being surrounded by parents obviously enamored with their own kids. No one who was unable to find or stay married to a spouse will remember their loneliness as they are forced to endure the countless, ecstatic reunions of husbands and wives. And no one—*no one*—whose family and friends are not in Heaven will stand in isolated memorial of them, until someone finally breaks away from their hugs, kisses, and reminiscing long enough to say hello. These memories will not exist in the perfect, Godmade Heaven. These memories *cannot* exist in a perfect, Godmade Heaven. Heaven is not about a person who wants the loved ones she's waiting to find there. Heaven is about people who want the God they're

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waiting to find there! The relearned—not remembered—New Earth is the biblical Heaven, the logical Heaven, and the best Heaven by far.

But while that might be so, I want to respect that there may be significant reluctance in you to accept this. After all, this Heaven of equality is not what has been portrayed by some who have taught on this topic. For a first example, you might have been taught a Heaven of comfortable segregation, where “we will enjoy becoming connected with *our* people, who do things in a familiar way, who speak a familiar language. It is a people with whom we will be totally comfortable.”<sup>24</sup> “We don’t really like things that are utterly foreign to us.”<sup>25</sup> These authors have essentially described the opposite of Revelation 7:9-10.

You have probably also been taught a Heaven of sheltered Christians who have demonstrated that they really only care about other sheltered Christians. Here are examples for illustration. “Should we think that God would give us a wonderful, loving relationship with family and friends for forty or fifty years, only to be terminated, never to be enjoyed again? Impossible!”<sup>26</sup> “That is *the* glory of Christ’s kingdom that we can anticipate with joy and excitement. Reunion with our believing loved ones and friends, together in fellowship with Christ himself. What a phenomenal prospect! Celebration and fulfilling fellowship with loved ones—ongoing, unending in Christ’s kingdom. What could be greater?”<sup>27</sup> Well, for any Christian who actually has—gasp!—predominantly non-Christian family and friends, what could be worse, right?

Third, you may have been assured of a Heaven of memories, with 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 often used as evidence that loved ones will be remembered there. However, this passage undeniably describes the resurrection of every person who is saved—not specifying those we know in any way—and tells us to comfort and “encourage one another with these words.” But because people so strongly desire biblical evidence to indicate they’ll recognize family or friends in Heaven—when there simply is none—they miss the whole point of what Heaven is and teach others to do the same. “*The* comfort comes from the prospect of reunion. Little comfort this would be if in the reunion we could not even recognize one another.”<sup>28</sup> “The thought of seeing that loved one again and spending eternity with him or her is *the greatest comfort to a believer.*”<sup>29</sup> “There would be *no point* in these words of consolation

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if they did not imply the mutual recognition of the saints.<sup>30</sup> So there's no consolation whatsoever in the salvation of millions and millions of people? So the saved who have no believing family or friends can't experience "the greatest comfort" Heaven has to offer? So there's "no point" in the encouragement that humanity has an escape from death and Hell and can be resurrected to eternal perfect community *with God* to fulfill the purpose for which it was created? I guess not! After all, what comfort or point could there possibly be in Heaven if I can't recognize Aunt Tina? You know, I have a sneaking suspicion that "the God of all comfort" has made a Heaven *even better* than remembering and reuniting with Aunt Tina, as hard as that might be to believe (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). A Heaven that's centered on eternal fellowship with him, not her.

Finally, you may have been taught that the isolated folks in a Heaven of memories won't feel jealousy, sadness, or loneliness because they can't! It's *Heaven* for Heaven's sake, and all they need is God, right? But if all that *they* need is God to be content, happy, and included, then all that *you* need is God too! How can people argue that the memories and relationships of their lives here are so vitally important for Heaven to be Heaven, if in the same breath they claim that such things are completely unnecessary for someone else? And if they are truly necessary, then Heaven can't be Heaven for those who don't have them, right? Besides being pretty insensitive, this "God will take care of them" response is self-defeating, isn't it? Our memory of earthly life is not at all essential to an unmistakable Heaven; in contrast, it is essential for such memory to be absent from an unmistakable Heaven!\*

## 5

**L**et's more closely scrutinize our remembrances to discover specifically why they would cause suffering and imperfection in Heaven. There's a lot more wrong in our reminiscence than you might realize!

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\* If you're wondering how God or angels might remember sin and suffering in an unmistakable Heaven if humans can't, look here.<sup>31</sup>

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To start with the obvious, it's not just undergoing an evil event that results in the "mourning or crying or pain" that we will no longer experience on the New Earth; it's the *memory* of that event too, isn't it (Revelation 21:4)? In many ways, being able to recall an incident of suffering is far worse than actually enduring that incident, since the event is only finite, but the memory can last indefinitely! In fact, I challenge you to accurately define what human suffering is without including the *recollection* of experiencing past or present evil. Impossible, isn't it? That's because memory *is* suffering, and suffering *is* memory!

Even worse, recalling an evil event does not only revisit past suffering, it spawns *new* grief that the event itself did not! Getting seriously injured causes pain, but remembering it causes despair because of foolish decisions or jealousy due to disability. Getting betrayed by a friend causes shock and anger, but remembering it produces distrust of other friends and raises self-esteem concerns. Losing a spouse causes sadness and loss of a relationship, but remembering it can induce social withdrawal, self-neglect, and a sense of worthlessness. I could go on and on. This is why God promises that "you will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood" (Isaiah 54:4). Human memory of suffering is nothing less than suffering itself, and it cannot be separated from it; in fact, memory often represents the *only* significant suffering that results from an event, even very horrible ones! Consider the sexual abuse of young children. If there were no memory of the abusive incident, assuming that there was no consequent injury or STD, would any suffering of the abused result from that event? No, right? Essentially *all* of the pain and agony derived from such an act of sexual abuse is due to remembering it! And as anyone who has undergone a particularly painful experience knows, that memory continues to cause at least some measure of suffering for the rest of one's life, even in the most healing earthly environment. Even those who champion the retention of our memories in Heaven unwittingly admit that any parent who has had to bury a child "can testify that a heart broken in this way *never* heals. A parent may be able to get on with life, but she *never* gets over it."<sup>32</sup> That's why the Godmade

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Heaven is uniquely able to *fully* heal hereafter. There will be no evil experiences, but even better, memory of them will be absent as well, helping to disable both the awakening of old suffering and the production of new suffering! Then—and *only* then—can there be “no mourning or crying or pain.” “The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them *all*” (Psalm 34:19). Now we know exactly how this can be true.

Clearly, the suffering of memory is most poignant when we consider how people on a perfect New Earth could possibly reminisce about those who are in Gehenna without undergoing tremendous mourning and crying and pain. The simple and biblical answer is that they won’t reminisce about them, both because “the former things (*and therefore the former people*) will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” and because humans on the New Earth cannot form equally distressing new memories about those in Gehenna, as they are not present to observe them when God and his angels are (Isaiah 65:17). However, the belief that we’ll remember on the New Earth the former things of this life cannot adequately address this problem. Once again, we will see how such a position forces not only incomplete, but immensely troubling conclusions.

Here are the explanations I could find of how humans on the New Earth might witness their friends and family members in Hell without suffering. First, “When the saints in glory, therefore, shall see the doleful state of the damned, how this will heighten their sense of the blessedness of their own state, so exceedingly different from it.”<sup>33</sup> I was literally nauseated as I just typed that. How could you *ever* watch someone you love suffering in Hell and think, “Now I’m even *more* glad that I’m here and not there!” And even if you mean it with the most well-intended and grateful motives, how could any of this occur without *you* mourning or crying or suffering great pain?

Another answer sometimes offered is that we will “enjoy Heaven knowing that a loved one is in Hell” because we will understand and approve of the justice of their assignment.<sup>34</sup> However, the answer does not address the question. True, on the New Earth—and hopefully even by now for all of us—we can understand the justice of Hell and approve of the way that God has arranged things. But

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confirming the legitimacy of our friend's and family's predicament does not explain our enjoyment of Heaven in spite of their predicament! Even here we see loved ones suffer at the hand of their own free will, and we acknowledge the justice and legitimacy of that grief, but that certainly doesn't mean we like it or never suffer with them!

But as appalling as the first two explanations are, a third reason that the New Earth could remain perfect for us in spite of observing loved ones in Hell is even more astonishing. "None of our loved ones will be in Hell—only some whom we *once* loved." "We will not love those in Hell because when we see Jesus as he is, we will love only—and will only *want* to love—whoever and whatever pleases and glorifies and reflects him."<sup>35</sup> Whoa. And it is suggested that this lack of "natural sympathy" toward our loved ones occurs because they will somehow lose their humanity in Hell, essentially becoming animals "beyond pity"!<sup>36</sup> Let me give you a moment to recover. I respect people's honesty in following their opinions on this matter out to their inevitable conclusions, but it only serves to demonstrate how problematic and unsettling they really are. Moreover, if we don't love those in Hell, then how do our earthly memories about loving these folks remain intact? Do they just become neutral since our love for Jesus overwhelms them? After all, we loved them even though we probably knew that they had chosen Hell while they were yet alive, so how would either their damnation or our heightened love for Jesus somehow decrease our love for them on the New Earth? Instead of uncomfortably forcing ourselves into one of the above explanations, we're better off believing God's words that we won't remember people in Hell at all. The suffering of memory is otherwise inescapable on the New Earth.

Therefore, memory of our pre-Heaven lives is a dominant—if not *the* dominant—generator of human misery. But it is also a primary source of human misinformation. Just stop for a moment and think how many of our memories are either inaccurate or completely false. Like trying to glean truth from a line of a hundred politicians playing the telephone game, most every detail that we encounter has been repeatedly skewed by bias, even if innocently, although often knowingly. The way that you interpret someone's actions, the way that

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your friend recalls a story, the way that a salesperson or company can schmooze you, and the way that the media spins news that you have no other way of obtaining are all everyday examples. Haven't you ever been shocked to discover how different a person can be from the perception you had based on such poor information? Even our most longstanding, cherished, personal memories can be entirely misleading. Perhaps like me you've had a fond recollection of a significant event in your childhood sealed in your mind for decades. And then out of nowhere comes *the picture*. The undeniable proof that your memory of that event was *nothing* like the real thing! For me this picture betrayed how chubby and unflattering I was as the lead to a musical, when I had previously imagined myself to be quite the stud in that role! But—after “misplacing” the evidence—I was forced to admit that my mind's picture was created from a parent's explanation of the event, recurrent visits to its location, and peripheral information and emotions that my brain used to fabricate a childhood fact that really didn't happen at all like I “remembered.” Much of the time, memory is misinformation, whether it's biased, deceived, or just totally false. This is why I have made such a persistent effort in this book to point out how facts get manipulated and miscommunicated, and despite that, I have probably even unwittingly misinformed you myself somewhere along the way! If so, my apologies! This is also why I am making such a great effort now to convince you that we will not retain our mistaken memories of pre-Heaven life once we are on the New Earth.

Would God allow such falsehood to endure, especially the numerous ways in which we have been misinformed about *him*? Do not such erroneous perceptions bring misunderstanding, distrust, anger, and suffering in our human relationships as well? And considering how extensive and long-standing our inaccurate knowledge is, how could it ever be removed without completely dismantling any organized, meaningful recollection of our true memories? “But when perfection comes, *the imperfect disappears*. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

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Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:10-12). Paul doesn’t say that our imperfect knowledge is supplemented by or restored to more accurate knowledge on the New Earth, and he doesn’t say that he refined or added to the ways of childhood with mature ways. Rather, such an imperfect understanding completely disappears there. God, who fully knows, will not pick through every one of our memories, taking out all the bad ones. He will put our imperfect pre-Heaven memory behind us, causing it to disappear. Then for the first time, we will truly see reality face to face as he deems it necessary to share with us, instead of through the partial reflection of misinformation. Forev-ermore, our memory will be unmistakable!

Those who still maintain that we’ll remember our physical lives on the New Earth try to avoid the suffering and misinformation of memory by arguing “we’ll be capable of choosing not to recall or dwell on anything that would diminish Heaven’s joy.”<sup>37</sup> But how could we possibly choose which things we’d no longer like to recall or dwell on without recalling or dwelling on them? The mere act of sifting through millions of unpleasant memories to compile our list would produce substantial suffering as each one is remembered! Moreover, we could never remember all of the painful memories to tell God to erase anyway, at least not until they came to mind later on in Heaven, once again making it imperfect. And don’t forget (pun intended), the New Earth must *always* be perfect, not only once we decide to get rid of our unwanted memories.

Others attempt to get around this by claiming that God will remove only the bad recollections, rather than leaving the selection up to us.<sup>38</sup> But whether it is humans or God choosing the memories to be removed, both approaches encounter still another problem. The deletion of any recall of suffering or misinformation would render us utterly confused! How could good—or even neutral—memories make sense without any associated bad ones? Wouldn’t *remembering* the details of your victory over cancer be baffling if you couldn’t recall what it felt like to have cancer or the suffering that you were freed from? Wouldn’t *recalling* the specifics of a reconciled relationship puzzle you if you couldn’t remember why you had to make-up



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or the emotional difference before and after? And how would we make sense of altruism at all when the very act of suffering that we can't remember is the very good that we want to remember? Our memories of good involve so many established detailed and interwoven connections with our memories of bad that they cannot be separated without rendering them nonsense and rendering us pleasantly demented, as if we were eternal residents in a not-so-Heavenly nursing home.

This is not a problem if we are simply *informed* of earthly good by God in Heaven. He can—if he deems it best—tell us of cured disease, healed friendships, and the altruistic solution of Jesus in completely coherent ways, without sacrificing our joy or appreciation and without us experiencing an ounce of suffering. For example, he might reveal to you in Heaven that your body was previously hurt so that you couldn't do many things you enjoyed. But you learn that God used that injury to increase your love for others experiencing similar predicaments. God announces that because you helped them and shared the gospel with them, people you cared about are on the New Earth as a result. His story is completely coherent, and you would obviously feel immense joy and appreciation upon hearing it, even though you wouldn't experience any of the memories of your injury or its associated suffering that you did on earth! This is because God is able to relay the information on a clean canvas. He can paint a picture of good that still makes sense without the bad, because it's independent of our recollections. If instead, we bring him a canvas with millions of inseparably interwoven good and bad established earthly memories, removing only the bad leaves us with no less nonsense than if we removed the cross from the canvas of Rubens' *The Elevation of the Cross*.<sup>39</sup> Instead of Jesus being crucified, he's crowd surfing! On the New Earth, we will not constantly think, "I remember so many wonderful things, but I can't recollect why they were so great or how they got to be that way." Our pre-Heaven lives will not be disjointed sequences of events with intermittent amnesia wherever a morsel of evil or falsehood snuck in. How meaningless such a memory would be!

Some might protest, claiming that God would fill in the gaps with

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respective morsels of good and truth, but that would make it even worse. First, it would no longer be our memory that we're retaining anyway; it would be part ours and part God's. And if God can perfectly replace some details of our former lives, then why can't he perfectly reteach us all the necessary details of our former lives and simply leave our imperfect memories behind to disappear? Second, many good events that we remember wouldn't have arisen without an evil or false event immediately preceding it. For example, let's say at a meeting your boss writes you a glowing evaluation that promises a big promotion and gives it to your jealous coworker to deliver it to you. Instead, he tells you the higher-ups were upset with your performance and were planning to let you go. This falsehood and its resultant grief cause you to understandably resign before you have a chance to be terminated, which results in the discovery of a new job with much better pay and benefits! After staying at this new company for 40 years, enjoying retirement, and eventually passing on to the New Earth, God erases the suffering and falsehood of your coworker's lie from your mind. In place of this evil, God inserts the truth of your old boss's approval and its resultant joy. But now your memories make absolutely no sense. You left your job right after finding out that your boss was going to promote you? I mean you're no longer suffering and you know the truth, but if this Heavenly memory swap occurs for every recollection of grief and misinformation from your earthly life, you would be absolutely flummoxed by the sequences of its events! Instead of reminiscing incompletely, we'd reminisce incoherently! Again, how meaningless such a memory would be! And many of the "memories" wouldn't even be ours anyway. The only way out, aside from removing our memory of pre-Heaven life altogether, is for God to reinstate human memories of suffering and misinformation, along with the imperfection that inevitably comes with them.

So without accepting God's teaching that our imperfect memories will be left behind to disappear once we inhabit the New Earth, we are left with quite a conundrum! Despite the numerous times you may have been told that you'll remember your life here once you get to Heaven, biblical and logical support of this belief has been anything but apparent. One author assures us, "You will

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recognize your loved ones, and your fellowship will continue in a greater dimension, unabated. It will never end. What a glorious thought!"<sup>40</sup> What he fails to comment on even once is our recognition of loved ones in Hell. That's a bit of an oversight. Then we are informed that on the New Earth we'll receive "new minds that focus only on truth and righteousness," even though our memories of this life would necessitate that we can ponder the misinformation and evil that occurred here.<sup>41</sup> We receive the encouragement that our earthly friendships "will continue in a far more fulfilling realization in heaven. Wrong thoughts, faulty motives, suspicions—they will all be absent in heaven."<sup>42</sup> Well, absent except for all of the memories of the wrong thoughts, faulty motives, and suspicions that plagued many of our friendships on earth, right? It's proposed that our memory "will be restored and amplified, untarnished by sin," yet we are offered no explanation how, besides the problematic responses above.<sup>43</sup> There will be "no potential for shame," even though we would be able to recall every shameful thought or action that we've exhibited on this planet.<sup>44</sup> "We'll be capable of choosing not to recall or dwell on anything that would diminish Heaven's joy," but at the same time "we'll still remember the darkness and dangers of this life. We'll contrast our past experiences with the light and safety of the New Earth, and we'll be profoundly grateful."<sup>45-46</sup> Apparently Heaven's joy and profound gratitude are inversely proportional on the New Earth. Every experience we choose not to recall in order to gain joy is an experience we won't remember to have gratitude for! Once we really think about it, discover the dearth of evidence for it, and cringe at the arguments offered in favor of it, the opinion that we remember our pre-Heaven lives once we're there is surprisingly unequal, unbiblical, and inconsistent, isn't it?

## 6

**S**o why is the belief in a Heaven of memories so prevalent? Why has it been so chronically embraced and commonly held by

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Christians? Well, that's just it. It's because belief in Christianity itself is so chronic and common to the vast majority of those who adopt and teach a New Earth full of family memories, the reuniting of old friends, and remembrances of life as they knew it here. Their religion and the promise of Heaven that it grants them is so ingrained in their past and in their mind that crucial questions about the New Earth that are legitimately disturbing and deal-breaking to others are either never addressed or "answered" merely with "because the Bible says so" or by invoking mystery. This is precisely why many folks experience recurrent doubt about their faith, doubt that never seriously threatens such longstanding convictions but also doubt that never fully goes away. And their beliefs are not just chronic; they're also common. A huge part of the reason that Christians cling to a Heaven of earthly memories is because their memories here are predominantly of people who end up there! When Heaven includes almost all the people who they already spend their quality time with, it's emotionally easy to ignore the serious problems with the perfection of a Heaven of memories, especially alongside a Hell of horror. The chronic and common faith within their sphere of experience leads them to give suboptimal and even hurtful answers to those from a very different sphere who only want a reason to believe. The Heaven of blissful Christian memories holds little joy for people without them; at best, they can look forward to hanging out with God while everyone else is scrap-booking their life on earth. Actually, that sounds a lot better than scrap-booking, but my point is clear, right? Christians, for the good of your own beliefs and for the good of others, start thinking of what the Godmade Heaven would be like for *those* folks, not for you. If you do, your doubts and their questions will finally vanish to reveal a perfect New Earth that is good for *anyone*!

Those for whom Christianity is neither chronic nor common may find it easy and exciting to ponder the New Earth through fresh eyes. But if it's difficult for you, trust me, I understand. Perhaps you think it likely that my words reflect bias against those who have been surrounded by Christians all their lives, but think again. I am one of them! I do not definitively know of *anyone* in my family who

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is not a Christian, and my friends, coworkers, and I live in one of the most sheltered Christian bubbles on the planet! It's a great place, but we are seriously in need of spreading out! If my words challenge your idea of Heaven, then they have certainly challenged what mine used to be as well. It is staggering how little of the Bible infiltrates Christian beliefs about the New Earth, which is even *itself* a term that many Christians aren't familiar with! And perhaps the primary culprit that silently leads many to assume a Heaven of memories instead of the New Earth of the Bible is a concept called continuity.

A continuous Heaven is one where our existence seamlessly transfers from life beforehand to life in Heaven. Our names, appearances, memories, skills, accomplishments, and relationships would all be maintained, as if we were simply crossing the border from a country called Yesterday Heaven to a country called Today Heaven.<sup>47-48</sup> Likewise, proponents of a continuous New Earth would argue that this eternal human dwelling would contain much of the same topography, geography, and organisms as the one we have now; in fact, most claim that this earth and the New Earth are the same planet.<sup>49</sup> It would be continuous, just as its people were. Of course, they acknowledge that there are a few biblical exceptions to this continuity. Humans would have perfect new bodies with possibly new abilities, since Jesus' resurrected body was able to suddenly appear and disappear, alter what he looked like, and walk through locked doors (Matthew 28:8-9, Mark 16:12, 14, Luke 24:15-16, 30-31, 36-37, John 20:19, 26). The earth would be changed to somehow fit the biblical description of the New Earth that we'll explore below. Most importantly, "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain," as sin and evil will somehow be eliminated, enabling God to be fully present with us all the time (Revelation 21:1-4). These discontinuous exceptions aside, a continuous kind of Heaven is what the vast majority of you are likely to be familiar with. And although you may be starting to sense a disturbance in the force regarding the feasibility of such a place, this is probably the Heaven you've long understood or embraced, and I did too.

After all, aren't there all kinds of places in the Bible that describe people after their death who still are recognizable, still recall

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memories, and still can identify those who they knew on earth? Of course, but you may be shocked to learn that *none* of these people are in either the current heaven or the New Earth. Where are they then? They're all in Sheol/Hades, an imperfect place where continuity is acceptable (see Booklet 3 for details). Let's visit these dearly departed to verify this, because if we can, we will still be left with no evidence of continuity of memory in the current heaven or on the New Earth. First we have Samuel, who remembers his relationship with Saul and is recognized by and recognizes Saul. "Coming up out of the ground," Samuel's "spirit" verbally relates to Saul (1 Samuel 28:11-19). We've already learned that this prophet of God went to Sheol/Hades when he died. Those who argue that the saved go right to the current heaven either ignore this or claim that Samuel's spirit was actually a demon!<sup>50-51</sup> But Saul "knew it was Samuel," convinced both by the spirit's appearance and by its words. If we accept the Bible's teaching that humans don't go to the current heaven right after death, we're also free to accept its plain confirmation of Samuel's spirit rising from Sheol/Hades, the *subterranean* abode of the dead. That and we're not forced to believe that the current heaven is underground or that a servant of God is really a demon of Satan. So no human continuity of memory in the current heaven or in the eternal Heaven here.

Next is Elijah and Moses, who appear centuries after their deaths to chat with Jesus for a few minutes while Peter, James, and John look on (Luke 9:28-36). The text actually offers no definite evidence of continuity, but we do learn that Elijah and Moses spoke with Jesus about his departure and that after the conversation was over, Peter was able to name Elijah and Moses. As such, some claim that these two men must have remembered details from their former lives if they were able to have this conversation with Jesus.<sup>52</sup> But the Bible never indicates that they had any knowledge of Jesus at all during their physical lives, which were at least 800 years prior to this! It seems obvious that Jesus is *informing them* of his departure, not hearing about it *from* them, right? Others say that the appearance of Elijah and Moses was continuous from their former lives because Peter recognized them. But the arts of portraiture and photography had not exactly reached their heyday back in 30AD, had they? Unless

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there was an incredibly accurate and durable caricature of Elijah and Moses available to any ole fisherman—a picture that had survived for eight centuries through nationwide exiles to Assyria and Babylon—Peter had no clue what these two men looked like. This is why he only names them *after* Jesus apparently reveals who they are during their conversation. But even if continuity of memory or appearance could be conjured up here, it wouldn't matter. We've already discussed in Booklet 3 why neither of these men arrived at this chat session from the current heaven, but rather from Sheol/Hades.

On to Abraham, the rich man, and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The former two unquestionably demonstrate continuity after physical death. Both recall details of the rich man's life. The rich man identifies Abraham, although this is probably because Abraham had identified himself at some point before this narrative picks up or because postmortem individuals (unlike Peter) can have knowledge of people and events beyond what they knew from when they were alive, such as Samuel's knowledge of Saul's predicament in 1 Samuel 28:16-19. Once again however, the problem is location. The rich man is "in Hades," and the other two can see him and talk to him, which means they're also there, just in Paradise rather than Tartarus. Even those who argue for a continuous Heaven can't bring themselves to admit that humans with God in perfection can see and talk to the dead elsewhere, so this passage offers no evidence of a continuous Heaven.<sup>53</sup>

Then we have the sorrowful and frustrated martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11. They certainly remember their former lives, but for all kinds of reasons we discovered in Booklet 3, they aren't in the current heaven yet either. They're also in Sheol/Hades. And interestingly, in the four passages that *do* describe these folks in the current heaven after the first resurrection, not a hint of continuity can be found (Revelation 7:9-17, 14:1-5, 15:2-4, 20:4-6)! Hmm. So in the end, *none* of these passages demonstrates continuity of humans in the current heaven or on the New Earth. In fact, such continuity is not even possible right now, because no non-Jesus humans go to the current heaven before the first resurrection! God and the angelic beings never transitioned to the current heaven from somewhere else to be continuous with,

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and humans aren't there yet to demonstrate continuity from earth. Not even Jesus' spirit with all its memories of his earthly life—not to mention of eternity past—can be used as relevant evidence of human continuity from earth to the current heaven, because its origin was quite literally forever ago, and certainly not on this planet. The same is true of angels' memories of earth, because these non-human spirits merely visited earth, rather than originating on it.

Only twice are there exceptions to the lack of human continuity between the current earth and the current heaven, and neither of them definitively establish our continuity between this planet and the New Earth. The first is the resurrected body of Jesus, because it is the only human thing in the current heaven right now that had its origin on earth. It is at least minimally continuous with the body he had before his death, but we will learn in Chapter 12 how limited that fact is in determining what will and will not be consequently continuous about our resurrected bodies.

The second exception is the brief general presence of humanity in what is assumed—but not confirmed—to be the current heaven for one day only: judgment day. The dead appear to be publicly “judged according to what they had done,” apparently via records that God is making of human deeds for this unique purpose (1 Corinthians 4:5, Malachi 3:16-18, Revelation 20:12). “Their deeds will follow them” to this judgment—not to the New Earth as some claim—and all this takes place very transiently and only immediately *prior to anyone* entering the New Earth (Revelation 14:13, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Matthew 12:36-37, 2 Corinthians 5:10).<sup>54</sup> The Bible offers no evidence that these records of works are preserved beyond judgment day or brought to the New Earth, there would be no point in doing so as they've already accomplished their purpose, and God's oft-repeated assurance that he will not remember the sins of those who are saved strongly suggests against it as well (Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:34, Ezekiel 33:14-16, 18:21-22, Hebrews 8:12, 10:17). Therefore, we have no biblical or intuitive reason to believe that any account of the events of our lives here will be present or accessible in Heaven.\*

So other than Jesus and judgment day, there is only continuity of

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\* These accounts would include the Bible itself, as elucidated here.<sup>55</sup>



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human beings in Sheol/Hades. And even there, continuity is limited. We've learned that recognition and memories remain intact after death, indicating that our spirits are continuous from here to there. However, since Sheol/Hades seems to be a place for spirits only, our bodies are not continuous there, because we won't have them! "What happens to our body and spirit while we await resurrection? They are temporarily separated."<sup>57</sup> When Saul has the medium of Endor summon Samuel, he asks her to "consult *a spirit* . . . and bring up for me the one I name." The medium sees "*a spirit* coming up out of the ground" (1 Samuel 28:8-14). Samuel is clearly a disembodied spirit in Sheol, able to come out of the ground, even though his body had been buried at Ramah, approximately 50 miles from Endor as the Nazgul flies, and even farther as the Ewok waddles (1 Samuel 28:3). I have to wonder how many of you just checked this reference for evidence of biblical Ewoks. Dagobah Dragonsnake yes, Ewoks no (Job 40:15-24). Back to Samuel. This separation makes perfect sense, as our spirits clearly leave our physical bodies at death and clearly are not resurrected into imperishable bodies until judgment day (James 2:26, Psalm 146:3-4, Isaiah 26:14, Luke 8:49-55, John 19:30, 1 Corinthians 15:52).

Because people can recognize each other in Sheol/Hades, because Lazarus' finger and the rich man's tongue are identified, and because people appear to wear clothes there, some argue that we must have bodies there (1 Samuel 28:14, Luke 16:23-25, Revelation 6:9-11).<sup>58</sup> However, people who describe the clearly non-physical angels and demons throughout the Bible are able to discern many details about their appearance and attire as well (Hebrews 1:14, Luke 4:33, Isaiah 6:1-3, Revelation 9:1-10). Likewise, our spiritual forms in Sheol/Hades would be equally observable to other humans, with at least some features similar to those we have now, just like Samuel. It is clear that spirits without bodies can present themselves with recognizable features to other spirits and humans alike, so the Bible does not necessitate "intermediate forms" between death and judgment.<sup>59-60</sup> Paul speaks of bodies as garments and states that during this life "we do not wish to be unclothed" by our spirits departing our bodies in physical death. Instead, we long "to be clothed with our

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heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked” (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). These verses can only mean that we’re unclothed or naked spirits between physical death and resurrection. Paul disciplines a man “so that *his spirit* may be saved on the day of the Lord,” which is judgment day (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). If the man had a body in Sheol, why would it only be his spirit that is saved? It’s the spirit that is resurrected on this day into an imperishable body, just as Jesus “was put to death in the body but made alive *in the Spirit*” into his imperishable body. Moreover, Jesus then preaches to the “spirits” in what can only be Sheol/Hades (1 Peter 3:18-19). So clearly, no body for everybody in the abode of the dead! Therefore, in our significant transition from perishable physical body to no body, there is obviously limited continuity, and it would follow that such limited continuity would apply to our even more radical transition from no body to imperishable body as well. So continuity is present but limited in Sheol/Hades. You would think that if it were so important to maintain consistency of our memories, bodies, and surroundings between here and the New Earth, then God would have done so in the interval too. I mean he *could* have given us bodies in Sheol/Hades, and he *could* have made the abode of dead reminiscent of the earth above. But instead, after we die, we’re naked spirits in a place that until quite recently probably wasn’t familiar to you at all! This whole continuity concept seems like something God isn’t terribly concerned about, even if we are.

That being said, continuity still exists in Sheol/Hades, so why shouldn’t we assume that at least as much continuity would exist on the New Earth? Because there is a massively important difference between these two places. The New Earth has to be perfect and unmistakable; Sheol/Hades does not. The New Earth is unique among all present and future locations: it is the *only* place where humans stay that *has* to be perfect. Practically speaking, the current heaven contains no human presence, and every other location is imperfect in some way. The current earth, Lugg, Tartarus/the Abyss, and Gehenna are clearly not perfect abodes. True, Paradise is a place where *everyone* has both the Holy Spirit and the faith to genuinely and persistently produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy,

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peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Sounds quite wonderful—far better than our current existence—and it is! However, it's not a perfect, sinless place, and God is not fully present there, just as he is not here. Therefore, as great an improvement as Paradise will be, its inhabitants still have at least some measure of sorrow, frustration, and earthly memories inseparable from them (1 Samuel 28:11-19, Luke 16: 23-31, Revelation 6:9-11). This is fine, as the only alternative is to assign such imperfections to the current heaven, where they *certainly* don't belong! Moreover, in none of these postmortem locales does God promise to “wipe every tear from their eyes,” with “no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4). Only on the New Earth must perfection be maintained for humans. This is why we would expect to—and do—see at least some measure of continuity between our current lives and Sheol/Hades. They are much more similar to each other than they are to the New Earth. Although Paradise is generally a place of “rest” and “comfort,” and Tartarus is a place of “torment” and “agony,” continuous recollections of life on earth that cause various degrees of suffering are seen in both, all because these places don't have to be perfect (Daniel 12:13, Luke 16:19-31, Revelation 6:9-11). And since people in Gehenna will experience “everlasting shame that will not be forgotten,” this continuity is likely present there as well (Jeremiah 23:39-40, Daniel 12:2).

However, in the Bible's New Earth we would not expect to—and don't—see these memories from life on earth or in Sheol/Hades. Because the New Earth is the only human abode that must always be perfect, we would expect to find continuity in every human location *except* there. The Bible concurs. Compare the continuity found in the imperfect places above to the startling lack of continuity in the most definitive description of the New Earth that the Bible offers in Revelation 21:1-22:5. The only five beings or objects we find there that are identifiable in some previous location all have their origin in perfection. And *none of them* are imperfect humans. God, an angel, the New Jerusalem, and the book of life all have heavenly origins. The tree of life had its origin in the perfect garden of Eden before it was moved elsewhere when Adam and Eve sinned,

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likely to Paradise (Genesis 2:9, 3:21-24, Revelation 2:7). Revelation's New Earth yields *no* memory of earthly events, no reunion with or even mention of relatives or friends, and no reference to any earthly accomplishment. Apparently God doesn't particularly desire such continuity there, does he? But he does desire the lack of tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain. Perhaps that's because these two desires are incompatible, and God always picks the best option. After all, by making Paradise continuous and the New Earth discontinuous, his people literally get the best of both worlds. They still get to reunite and reminisce with family and friends after death, but they also inherit a truly unmistakable eternal life! Why would we want anything different?

## 7

**Y**ou've now been introduced to the idea of continuity and where it does and doesn't seem to be present in the biblical hereafter. However, because a continuous afterlife is such a common concept—and for some an expectation—we need to more thoroughly explore passages people offer as evidence of continuity. How much of our current lives do they teach us will be represented in Heaven? Well, we're told that our names will endure forever, so I hope you like yours (Isaiah 66:22)! I'm good with Jason. As on earth, a name will serve as a useful label, the simplest way to be identified by people after you meet them, and there's no reason not to use the one you have now. Some argue that we must remember everything from our life on earth to maintain an identity, including our name. "Memory is a basic element of personality. If we are truly ourselves in Heaven, there must be continuity of memory from earth to Heaven."<sup>61</sup> This, of course, is untrue. If a toink on the noggin gives me amnesia, do I cease to be myself? If I have dementia prohibiting me from remembering the past, do I lose my individuality? If I am born incapable of ever creating any memories at all, am I doomed to life without an identity? No, no, and no. Nor do we only achieve identity or become

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ourselves once we are old enough (2-4 years of age) to form lasting memories. Our eternal spirits give us our identity, not the memories they can recollect. Our spirits only need to exist—not to remember—to consider themselves themselves. Not even continuity of our names is necessary for self-identification; you can still know that you are you without a label or any other memory, right? Besides, on the New Earth, God gives us new names in addition to our old ones anyway, so again, he doesn't seem that into highlighting aspects there of our lives here (Isaiah 62:1-2, 65:15, Revelation 2:17).

Nonetheless, the names of the twelve sons of Jacob and twelve apostles of Jesus appear in the New Jerusalem. Likewise, in Heaven the book of life will continue to exist, simply a list originating in the current heaven of all the names of the saved (Revelation 3:5, 20:12-14, 21:27). Of course, the Bible never states that humans will have access to this record, and we would never need to anyway, since we'll be aware of everyone who's in it because they'll be with us! The names in this book are presumably our current ones, but maybe our new ones or both, who knows (Philippians 4:3)? We're also told by Jesus that "many will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 8:11). So what we are assured of is that one of the names we—including these three men—will have on the New Earth is the name we have now. However, we are not assured in any way that we will *remember* other people's names there or be able to *recognize* them by their name. *None* of the verses above imply that any of the people above will be recognizable to or remembered by any other humans in Heaven, except likely Jesus.\* At the very most, the Bible only states that these people will be in Heaven. To know now that they'll be there does not mean that we'll recognize them once we're there. Not like we would recognize Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob anyway, right?

Some look to the account of David and his dead son for evidence, but without success.<sup>64</sup> We have no confirmation that either of them went to the current heaven when they died, no reason to believe that they would recognize or remember each other there anyway, and no evidence that they're anywhere except Sheol/Hades (2 Samuel

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\* For a more in depth confirmation of this claim, visit here.<sup>62</sup>

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12:19-23, Acts 2:29, 34). Finally, Jesus seems to tell his disciples that they'll all be on the New Earth. But again, he says nothing to suggest that these men will recognize or remember each other there (Matthew 19:27-28, 26:26-29). Never in the Bible are we told that we will recognize or remember *anyone* on the New Earth that we knew here on the current one.

I understand why some have great difficulty accepting this, but their attempts to find biblical support for continuity of memory in Heaven become increasingly questionable. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).<sup>65</sup> I'm guessing that the argument for continuity is not apparent to you from reading this passage, so I'll explain. The first assumption is that "those who have fallen asleep" are the Corinthians' dead relatives, even though Paul clearly is referring to every Christian who has died up to that point. The second assumption is that if Christ truly wasn't raised, the Corinthians are "to be pitied" because they'll never be reunited with their relatives again. In reality, Paul is stating the obvious fact that if Christians are not going to be resurrected and only have this life to enjoy, then people like Paul, who was constantly persecuted, beaten, and jailed for his faith, are to be pitied. The third assumption is that the Corinthians would recognize and remember their relatives at the resurrection, even if Paul was talking about them! The first and third assumptions are repeated in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, where "those who sleep in death," "those who have fallen asleep," and "the dead in Christ" are somehow assumed to be relatives of the Thessalonians, when they are clearly generic references to all Christians who had already died.<sup>66-67</sup> And not a hint of anyone recognizing or remembering anyone else when they "meet the Lord in the air." There is *no* biblical evidence of a recognizing or remembering Heavenly family reunion anywhere.

The last two passages used by folks to demonstrate continuity in Heaven are encouragements that Paul gives to the Thessalonians.<sup>68</sup> He tells them that they are "the crown" in which he "will glory in the

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presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes” (1 Thessalonians 2:19). Some say that the crown represents the intimate relationships between Paul and these folks that will reconvene in Heaven. This would not be the case for several reasons. First, in the New Testament, human crowns are overwhelmingly used to represent *rewards* for the *achievements* of Christians. Nine times this particular usage is seen—five by Paul—and even today you might hear good deeds referred to as jewels in people’s crowns. As Paul nears death, he confirms that his crown is related to persistent deeds, not relationships that he’ll reconvene. “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me *the* crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day (2 Timothy 4:7-8).” To Paul there is no other crown but *the* crown of reward—not relationships—and this reward clearly refers to his salvation (righteousness), not people. The second reason that Paul isn’t talking about a Heavenly reunion is that he’s not even talking about Heaven! Jesus, “the righteous Judge, will award” Paul “when he comes” on judgment day, *before* Paul goes to Heaven, as is clear in Revelation 20:11-13. Nobody seems to be glorying in reconvened relationships on that day, but they would glory in a big thumbs up from God for their earthly work! And this is exactly what Paul tells us that he wants in 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. “All for the sake of the gospel,” so that he “will not be disqualified for the prize,” Paul makes himself a slave to others and his body a slave to himself. He is not preoccupied with reunions in a continuous Heaven; rather, he glories in achieving spiritual growth in others now. “For now we really live, *since you are standing firm in the Lord*. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you” (1 Thessalonians 3:7-9)? Ironically, this passage is itself used to argue for continuity in the following way. Paul has joy in the presence of God because of the Thessalonians’ faith; therefore, there will allegedly be a Heavenly reunion attended by Paul, the Thessalonians, and God. However, Paul is having *present-tense* joy in God’s presence, rejoicing with the Holy Spirit within him at the Thessalonians’ faith *when* he wrote the letter. No future presence with God is apparent. Also, no reunion of Paul with the Thessalonians or any humans is

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evident anywhere or at anytime here, unless it is assumed that Jesus' "holy ones" are humans, when they are undeniably angels (1 Thessalonians 3:13, Matthew 25:31). Finally, Heaven is not mentioned at all, and even if they did reconvene there someday, we have no reason in any of the above words to the Thessalonians to believe that they would recognize or remember each other. There is *no* biblical evidence of a recognizing or remembering Heavenly friend reunion anywhere.

Alright, we don't see any examples of continuity in our relationships, but what about in our deeds? Surely the Bible's allusion to rewards in Heaven must mean that the earthly works that merited them will be remembered on the New Earth, right? Well, it's true that our deeds here—and records kept of them in the current heaven—will follow us to judgment day, when each of us must account for them to God (2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 14:13). The Bible is repeatedly clear—particularly in Matthew 12:35-37—that this single last day involves everyone, both unsaved and saved, and includes determination of both our reward and our eternal destination (Malachi 3:16-18, Romans 14:10-12, Revelation 11:16-18, 20:11-13). Numerous times throughout the Old and New Testaments we are told that God will reward his people. Many times these rewards take the form of blessings in this life (e.g. Psalm 18:17-20), but most often the reward itself is not specified, only promised. Jesus suggests that there are different types of awards, but what exactly are they (Matthew 10:40-42)? The ones the Bible does list fall into two categories.

The rewards specified in the first category are intimacy with God, redemption, an inheritance, a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, God himself, and the morning star—a name Jesus gives himself (Isaiah 40:10-11, 62:11-12, Colossians 3:23-24, 2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 2:10, Genesis 15:1, Revelation 2:26-28, 22:16). Taken collectively, God is awarding us with perfect community with him in Heaven, fulfilling our very purpose. Some might wonder how our salvation could possibly be a reward for our works, but remember that one is only saved after demonstrating a life of persistent good deeds that are only possible by saving faith and through the Holy Spirit within that person. These are not deeds we can fully take credit for; they're deeds God empowered us to do, just as we cannot take full credit



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for our faith, as God created us with the ability to believe. This is how Paul can claim, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:7-8). This is also why the Bible repeatedly ties peoples’ eternal destinations to being “judged according to what they had done” (Revelation 20:11-15, Matthew 12:35-37, 25:31-46). Recall that persistent fruit of the Spirit is part of the salvation process, which is why God awards it by giving us the inheritance of life with him. Jesus himself states, “Stand firm, and you will win life” (Luke 21:19). In fact, they are so intertwined that these works are represented *symbolically* as the dress that is worn by the bride (the saved in the New Jerusalem/New Earth) upon being married to the groom (God), achieving permanent, community with him (Revelation 19:7-8). But there is obviously no *literal* dress that is worn by a city inhabited by the saved with every admirable human act written on it for all to read and recall. There is also no biblical mention of any written record of human deeds existing after judgment day. Moreover, the Bible never says that we’ll remember these good works once we’re in Heaven either, and there’s no reason we need to remember them to fully enjoy the reward of being there.

The second category of rewards involves humans being given various levels of authority on the New Earth. Charge over cities, authority over the nations, reigning on the earth, and reigning with Jesus are the specific rewards listed (Luke 19:15-19, Revelation 2:26-28, 5:9-10, 2 Timothy 2:12). But once again, it’s neither biblical nor necessary to remember what deeds were done on this earth in order to merit and excel in such positions on the New Earth. After all, someone will need to do these jobs—as well as any other job—on the New Earth, and God is simply apportioning them according to what we have shown ourselves worthy of during this life. You might think this introduces a hierarchical inequality, but only if we remember all of the imperfections that make such differences in position so unequal here. On the discontinuous New Earth of the Bible, being a ruler of nations will not be considered more prestigious or desirable than being in charge of cities or anything else, because the selfish advantages of power, influence, and money we are familiar with now

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will not be remembered. Each position will be correctly understood as equally important and perfectly executed to reflect that. Ironically, the only place where Heavenly rewards do pose a problem is on a *continuous* New Earth! There, the positional hierarchy would also be present, but so would every memory and connotation of inequality that's associated with it here. We would recall that being a ruler of nations was more prestigious and desirable to being in charge of cities, not to mention a host of other jobs. Even if we were never able to use those memories to abuse our positions, the notion of inequality would still be remembered. Aside from Heaven itself and authority granted there, no other specific rewards are listed in the Bible. So in the end, the doctrine of rewards actually favors—not opposes—a discontinuous New Earth.

We have now addressed all the verses about the New Earth that people cite as support for continuity of memory and relationships there. I have neither found nor been made aware of any other passage offering evidence of a continuous Heaven where we will be knowingly reunited with our families and friends to recall memories of our lives here. All the Bible allows us to conclude is that we'll each keep our names. Never in the Bible are we told that we will recognize or remember *anyone* on the New Earth that we knew on the current earth, are we? Having assumed a continuous Heaven for the vast majority of my life, I understand how surprising this could seem to you, but now you've seen as well as I have that the Heaven of the Bible is a predominantly *discontinuous* one. And it must be so in order to remain the unmistakable Godmade Heaven. "See, I will create new Heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17).

## 8

**C**ontinuity is not only problematic regarding remembering and relationships; it also plunges us into irreconcilable contradictions between the New Earth that it espouses—the actual place itself—and

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the New Earth in God's words. These inconsistencies will inevitably lead us to a Heaven that cannot be biblical, perfect, or unmistakable, which is why I am spending so much time refuting continuity on the New Earth. First, I must emphasize that the eternal destiny for the saved is not "going off to heaven as a soul, naked and unadorned" in a rather boring place where they sit on clouds doing nothing or—in the best of circumstances—learn to play the harp.<sup>69</sup> This unexciting ethereal existence has been termed "Christoplatonism"<sup>70</sup> and is an extensive societal extrapolation of some examples of current heaven imagery found throughout the Bible, completely inconsistent with the biblical New Earth. When "the new heaven and a new earth" are unveiled, the current heaven will have "passed away," and every account of this New Earth portrays a decidedly physical place, especially the most thorough one we are given (Revelation 21:2-22:6). This is great news for people who are let down by the concept of a ho-hum Heaven, such as the depressingly comical heaven of the *Far Side* cartoons. But some insist on promoting a continuous Heaven along with a physical New Earth by applying continuity not only to humans there, but to the New Earth itself. Just as our old memories and relationships would supposedly continue to exist, so the dwelling of humanity on this very planet would supposedly continue to exist. "The New Earth will be the same as the old earth, just as a new Christian is still the same person he was before."<sup>71</sup>

This idea partially arises from several Old Testament prophecies regarding a future time of great bliss and harmony, with the prime examples being Isaiah 11:6-9, 60:1-22, 65:17-25, 66:22-24, and Ezekiel 37:15-28, 40:1-48:35. In Revelation we are told of two such times that could correlate. The first is theologically termed the Millennium. There are a few ways the Millennium has been interpreted, and our discussion below is only relevant to those that consider it a thousand year period on the current imperfect earth when Jesus and the martyrs to be raised in the first resurrection will have free reign, as Satan will be imprisoned (Revelation 20:1-6). Therefore, I'll use that definition for the Millennium in what follows. The second future time of bliss is the eternity on the perfect New Earth, following the second resurrection and judgment day. In order to understand

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which time of bliss the prophetic passages above refer to, we need to understand an important difference between historical narrative and prophetic literature. The former describes a series of consecutive events during a single time period, whereas prophecies often refer to two different time periods, being at least partially fulfilled in both. An example of this is in Isaiah 14:3-20, describing the fall of a great ruler. The prophecy primarily concerns the king of Babylon, who did fall more than a hundred years after this prophecy was made, when Cyrus conquered Babylonia. However, part of this prophecy—verses 12-15—also appears to refer to Satan, with the ruler falling from the current heaven in a description reminiscent of Satan’s expulsion from the current heaven described in Luke 10:18 and Revelation 12:7-17. Likewise, there are elements of both a temporary imperfect bliss and an everlasting perfect bliss in the list of passages above, indicating that these are fulfilled in part by the Millennium here and in part by eternity on the New Earth. Because the only events chronologically separating the Millennium and inhabitation of the New Earth are the final battle and judgment day, it’s not surprising for a prophet predicting these events thousands of years beforehand to lump them together into one big blissful blob, describing both at the same time. After all, these passages cannot be referring to only one or the other. The presence of a temple and death would exclude the New Earth (Isaiah 60:7, Ezekiel 40:1-48:35, Isaiah 65:20, Revelation 21:4, 22), and the eternal duration and lack of the sun and moon would exclude the Millennium (Isaiah 65:18, 60:19-20, Revelation 22:5, 21:23).

This concerns continuity because specific places on the current earth are referenced in some of the passages above. Because these passages cannot only be describing the New Earth, there is no reason to assume that the specific places mentioned will be continuous from the current earth to the new one. They may simply be references to the Millennium. In fact, none of the verses definitively describing the New Earth contain any of these references or any other evidence of the continuation of our current planet. Those who believe in continuity are forced to agree, even though they continue to offer examples from these passages in their arguments. “Isaiah 60 and 65 don’t refer to a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the old earth,” but

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then we are told, “It may be that these passages will have a partial and initial fulfillment in a literal millennium, explaining why the passages contain a few allusions to death, which is incompatible with the New Earth.”<sup>72</sup> “Christ’s millennial reign may prefigure the fulfillment of God’s promises about Jerusalem’s future.”<sup>73</sup> Quite obviously, it’s inescapable that these verses cannot only apply to the New Earth. To avoid such contradictions and because I want to be as accurate and reliable as I can to you, the only portions of the passages above from which I will draw direct Old Testament conclusions about the New Earth below are those that clearly cannot be referring to a pre-judgment day, pre-New Earth location. These groups of verses are Isaiah 11:6-9, 60:15-22, and 65:17-19, 23-25. The Bible offers a few other scattered verses that can only refer to the New Earth as well, so we’ll eventually take a look at those too. Hopefully these prophecies make a little more sense to you now if they were confusing before. They do have valuable information to offer regarding the New Earth, but they must be used responsibly.\* In doing so thus far, we have found little confirmed continuity concerning our planet in New Earth prophecies.

However, the confusion some experience about continuity does not arise from prophecy, but from certain words in the Bible. To no one’s surprise, the first word is “earth.” Because the word “earth” is contained in “New Earth,” some assume that the current one and the new one must be the same. This is problematic because it assumes that a single name cannot be applied to more than one thing. The new Count Chocula that I will buy at the store tomorrow is not the same as the current Count Chocula that I am eating. If it is when I get there, I will not be buying it, sale or no! The word “earth” can apply to the dirt in your garden rather than the whole planet, yet we don’t assume the New Earth is going to be a plot of dirt, right? The fact that this earth and the new one are both called an “earth” offers no evidence that they represent the same rock.

Words like “restore,” “redeem,” and “renew” also cause perplexity. We learned in Booklets 6 and 7 that these words do not refer to a

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\* To observe how such responsibility yields helpful insight about Heaven, check out this prophecy concerning Israel’s ark of the covenant.<sup>74</sup>

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corrective process in a temporary Hell. But some argue that they do indicate that God renews earth by reusing the old one, rather than making a new one. What do God's words have to say? Well, these three terms are used hundreds of times in the Bible, but interestingly, they almost exclusively refer to *people*, not things like planets. Just six times they are applied to the land or the cities of the Israelites being restored, likely after their exile to Babylon. That particular land was promised to the Jews forever, but that promise was made void because it came with a condition that was broken (1 Chronicles 28:8, Psalm 37:27). One other time these terms refer to "the redemption of Jerusalem," and several times we are told that Jerusalem—or God's presence or name there—will be established forever. This is true, first in the current Jerusalem and then in the new one! But as far as continuity is concerned, when we compare the earth-built current Jerusalem to the exotic heaven-built New Jerusalem—which resembles a 1400 mile cube—there are essentially no similarities, favoring *discontinuity* rather than continuity (Luke 2:38, Revelation 21:1-22:5). Not to mention that they both already exist, so one cannot continuously arise from the other (Hebrews 11:16). And zero times do "restore," "redeem," or "renew" refer specifically to the earth or world. Like Paul in the last chapter, God seems much more concerned with working to restore, redeem, and renew *people* for the sake of the gospel, than he is with maintaining continuity, whether of relationships or planets.

Does this mean that our existence on the New Earth won't involve renewal? No, three times we are informed of everything being restored or renewed, once when John the Baptist came to initiate Jesus' ministry and twice when judgment day arrives (Matthew 17:11-13, 19:28-30, Acts 3:21). There are two observations to make about such renewal. First, just as God has already demonstrated with renewal, it is primarily concerned with people. The first renewal of everything occurs when God's solution of Jesus is introduced to us by John, and the second renewal of everything occurs when those who accept that solution are admitted into Heaven on judgment day. There is no hint in these passages of earth being revamped, just people learning how to be—and then being—saved. The second observation is that this renewal does not equate to continuity. On judgment day

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all kinds of discontinuous things are happening. Disembodied spirits in Sheol/Hades get new, resurrected physical bodies, and humans finally assume an eternal residence. Sheol/Hades meets its end in Gehenna, which itself unfortunately holds its grand opening. The New Earth and the New Jerusalem—the descriptions of which are vastly different from their current counterparts—are revealed for the first time for human habitation. And let's not forget the rather significant change that "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:1-22:5). Again, no mention of the current earth becoming the new one. Instead, we see a whole lot of ending and a whole lot of beginning. At the renewal of all things, God is truly "making everything new," not making everything continuous (Revelation 21:5).

But even though the Bible never tells us that continuity between the current earth and the new one is part of this renewal, it still could be. The Bible doesn't say that it's not, right? Well, there are four passages that make an indefinite lifespan for the earth possible, and one that does so for the heavens. But as we discussed in Booklet 6, the terminology used here—the word *olam*—implies an uncertain duration and describes temporary spans as well (such as the length of a person's physical "life," as in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17). As such, the proponent and critic of earth's continuity alike reject these four passages as valid, supportive evidence, just as we refused in Booklet 6 to use *olam* to prove that Hell went on without end (Psalm 78:69, 104:5, 148:1-6, Ecclesiastes 1:4).<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the Bible tells us repeatedly in about as many ways as possible that our third rock from the sun will not survive beyond judgment day in *any* form, not even as a charred briquette! Those in the real-estate business for the long haul may want to reconsider.

By the end of the apocalyptic catastrophes in Revelation 6, 8, 9, and 16, everything living in water has died, there is no source of drinkable water, there is no natural light, all the cities have collapsed, and all islands and mountains are displaced. When describing these times, Jesus reveals that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Mark 13:24-27). Joel concurs, and Isaiah

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states this twice as well (Joel 3:15, Isaiah 13:9-11, 34:4). Even those with the most introductory understanding of physics and geology know that the chances of this planet meaningfully surviving such cosmological disasters aren't good, although these passages do nicely explain the discontinuous disappearance of the sun and moon from the New Earth (Isaiah 60:19-20, Revelation 21:23)! But it's not over. "The heavens will vanish like smoke; the earth will wear out like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6). "The whole earth will be consumed," with no survivors (Zephaniah 1:18). Peter confirms all of this as well, contrasting the *complete* demise of this physical universe with the new heaven and earth. "The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment...the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare...that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with (*God's*) promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12-13). Jesus, by whom this world was created (Colossians 1:13-16), rather authoritatively agrees that the current heaven and earth will pass away and disappear (Luke 21:33, Matthew 5:18). What the creator of the earth says should really seal the deal, but there is one more really big nail to sink into the coffin of continuity.

Isaiah—apparently with the aid of an excellent thesaurus—uses as many terms as he can to summarize the Bible's absolute, undeniable rejection of earth's continuance. "The Lord is going to lay waste the earth," "devastate it," and "ruin its face." "The earth will be completely laid waste" and "totally plundered." Its "inhabitants are burned up," and it "dries up and withers," "languishes and withers," is "broken up," is "split asunder," "is thoroughly shaken," "reels like a drunkard," "sways like a hut in the wind," and finally, *finally* "falls—never to rise again" (Isaiah 24:1-23). Disappointingly, proponents of a continuous earth intentionally exclude this final phrase when quoting this passage or simply ignore this chapter altogether.<sup>76-79</sup> "What Isaiah foresaw" turns out to be exactly the opposite of what they claim; he predicts a discontinuous New Earth where "God *will* wipe the slate clean and start again."<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, science is also quite adamant that our



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planet will eventually be obliterated, by the aging and/or explosion of our sun if not before. Likewise, God's words confirm beyond any shadow of doubt that when everything is restored, the redeemed earth must be a *brand new* one, not Current Earth: Version 2.0.

This discontinuous renewal is exactly the type that the rest of the Bible teaches as well. "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Psalm 102:25-27, Hebrews 1:10-12). When you are wearing a worn-out garment and decide to discard it and change into something else, do you ever consider this to be accomplished by putting that same garment back on? Even if it were instantly repaired and cleaned, you still would not consider that a discarding of old clothes or a change of clothes at all, right? Likewise, when the current earth is discarded, we will inhabit an entirely different, distinctly New Earth. God has *already created* the old heavens and earth, but he "*will create* new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17).

## 9

**G**iven the scientific and biblical agreement that this earth will have a final end, why does the belief in a continuous New Earth persist? Is it really that big of a deal if God makes a new one? Of course not! I believe in a discontinuous Heaven and earth, so God can make the New Earth wherever and out of whatever he wants! However, other viewpoints are unable to allow him such flexibility. Specifically, there are three common and deeply ingrained beliefs about our planet that are inconsistent with the Bible's discontinuous

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New Earth, so we'll devote a chapter to each one.\*

First, many remain resistant to the final end of this earth because of their comfortable familiarity with their current lives. They consider their short experience on this planet to be at least suggestive of everything that Heaven could be, so they limit themselves to what Heaven *can* be: nothing more than the best earth has to offer. Because of this, whatever of this best that they do experience here defines Heaven for them. Engaging in earthly activities they enjoyed, reuniting with lost loved ones again, and being back in familiar places and times represents most or all of what they look forward to on the New Earth. Therefore, regardless of challenges to this emotional anticipation—even those from the Bible itself—many continue to determinedly believe and teach a continuous, best-of-earth Heaven.\*\* My encouragement to these folks to help them overcome this roadblock of anticipatory feelings is to trust that God's experience and imagination are far more expansive than ours. As I learned to do the same, I discovered how much greater his Heaven will be. God's concept of perfection is not suffocated by the quite limited experience that we get on earth, so he is not satisfied with the constraint of continuity. He "who is able to do immeasurably more than *all we ask or imagine*" is "making *everything* new" (Ephesians 3:20, Revelation 21:5). If we believe that God is capable of this, then an unmistakable, unlimited, Godmade Heaven—immeasurably better than anything we could ever imagine—is possible. If not, then a very mistakable, best-earth-has-to-offer, manmade Heaven—*no* better than anything we could imagine—is the most that is possible.

And what about those who would want a New Earth that is anything *but* the one they're familiar with? There are multitudes who don't long for the familiarity of the old, many who wish this world was not their home! Let's not be allured by the continuity of a comfortably familiar life just because it might be comfortable for us.

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\* If the biblical and logical evidence above has left you with no qualms or questions regarding the discontinuity between our planet and the New Earth of the Bible, these three beliefs are unlikely to significantly apply to you, so skip to Chapter 45 if you're ready to move on from this topic.

\*\* For a typical example of such teaching in popular Christian literature, read this.<sup>81</sup>

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For many it is not, and these folks long for the better-than-best-of-earth Heaven of the Bible. Similarly, the many in the Bible who were destitute, persecuted, mistreated, tortured, mocked, flogged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, sawed in two, and killed for their faith in God considered themselves “foreigners and strangers on earth,” longing for a *better* country, a *heavenly* one” (Hebrews 11:13-16, 35-40). There’s nothing comfortable about a familiar earth to *them*, is there?

Even for those who are well-off in this life and wouldn’t mind a comfortably familiar eternal home, wouldn’t a discontinuous Heaven become just as comfortably familiar to you a few years after your arrival as your current life has become to you now? After all, how important is it to you now that you forget about good friends you had as a child? We don’t remember a large number of comfortably familiar things from our past, yet how much suffering or remorse does that truthfully cause us? About none, right? Just as we chuckle now how a bacteria-infested rag could have been so soothingly familiar when we were toddlers, would we not lol in Heaven at how our concept of perfection similarly clings to the preservation of what is comfortably familiar now? In the end, you won’t want and won’t need a continuous Heaven, for “the world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:17). In the end, you don’t want and don’t need a continuous Heaven. God’s imagination is much better than ours!

## 10

**T**he second deeply ingrained belief necessitating a continuous earth is more a theological one than an emotional one, but it is very widespread and held with strong conviction. People cling to the idea that this particular planet must continue as the New Earth because they believe that the curse upon creation when humanity first sinned can only be lifted if that very same creation survives restored. So let’s find out exactly what this curse is and how it affects creation. Once Adam and Eve chose to sin and know evil, God placed specific

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judgments on the serpent, Eve, and Adam. Of these, only Adam's affected the earth. "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:14-19). Notice that while the serpent, Eve, Adam, and God all played a role in subjecting creation to this curse, it is God who directly curses the ground. But why would God curse creation for the temptation of the serpent and the sin of humans? No other snakes misbehaved, and the ground was completely innocent! It can't choose to sin, so why would God ever do this to his "very good" creation (Genesis 1:31)? The response I most commonly encounter is that human sin is some sort of evil ether that infects and infiltrates creation, causing its fall as well as humanity's. It is often claimed—but with little explanation why—that "the lot of the earth is thrown in with us. As we go, so goes the earth."<sup>90</sup> The argument is that "our destiny is inseparable from earth's destiny," so when Jesus comes to restore us to a New Earth, all of creation would be restored as a New Earth as well.<sup>91</sup> Ergo, this earth apparently can't end because humans don't end.\*

However, sin is a choice, not an object—let alone a pathogen or cancer. It cannot infect or invade any physical thing, nor has it "contaminated every last corner of creation," as if Mercury could catch a cold.<sup>96</sup> Regarding the headache of sin, perhaps the sage advice of Arnold Schwarzenegger says it the best: "It's not a toomah!"<sup>97</sup> Moreover, why would God not only allow, but command, sin to infect or metastasize throughout creation? Does he have so much anger left over after cursing the humans that poor creation gets hit with the remainder? If so, why doesn't he remove creation's infection by sin once he calms down? And why is there any link at all between the fate of humans and the fate of creation? Why does creation have to fall like humans do, and why does it have to be restored like they are? After all, the curse is not an inevitable necessary spread of

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\* To more specifically illustrate how attempting to biblically validate this argument quickly becomes problematic, head here.<sup>92</sup>

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disease from humans to the earth; it's a specific judgment *on Adam* chosen by God. He could have chosen any form of discipline; he might have grounded Adam, taken away his video game privileges (a penalty I was quite familiar with as a teen), or even given him a good paddling! So why does God pick a punishment that curses the innocent ground? Not because sin is infecting it, not because all of creation falls just because humans do, and not because there is *any* logical link between the ultimate fate of this planet and the fate of human beings. God curses the ground for one reason and one reason only: because it is a necessary part of humans knowing and experiencing evil.

Remember, the ultimate object of the punishment is not the ground; it's Adam. Every consequence of this punishment causes *him* suffering, not creation! His crops will be plagued by thorns and thistles, and he won't even be able to eat without "sweat" and "painful toil" (Genesis 3:17-19). The ground doesn't suffer from thorns and thistles; in fact, plants with such pricklers are actually benefiting from God's pronouncement, perhaps even being brought into existence by it! Creation doesn't suffer from this curse at all, does it? Adam wanted to know evil, and part of experiencing this is difficult, unfruitful work. Adam is learning about evil from interacting with the earth. This explains Eve's punishment as well. Something as joyous as childbirth is now very painful, and gender inequality first rears its ugly head (Genesis 3:16). Again, creation does not suffer here, only Eve does. Eve is learning about evil from interacting with other humans. Even the curse on the serpent predominantly causes human suffering. Does a snake care if it crawls on its belly? No, but I know a lot of women who fear and loathe snakes, and any man who gets bit in the heel by one certainly suffers (Genesis 3:14-15)! Fear and enmity of animals—as well as injury by them—is all part of experiencing evil. Humans are learning about evil from interacting with other creatures. God's curse on creation in Genesis is not an ubiquitous infection by sin, because sin is a choice, not an evil ether. It is not a fallen state of nature that must be restored like humanity's, because creation didn't choose to sin, humans did. And it is not the result of a misguided divine temper tantrum, because God had

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a very rational reason for his actions all along. It's a punishment for humans that fits their crime. We wanted to know evil, so God uses the earth, our fellow humans, and other creatures to teach it to us. This is why God can't yet relieve creation of the curse—we still want it. God's curse and judgments aren't baffling or arbitrary at all; they make perfect sense!

*Every time* this original curse is specifically mentioned, it's associated with human suffering, not the suffering of creation. Noah's father mentions "the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed" (Genesis 5:29). We see the fields and water cursed so that prophets who have sinned must "eat bitter food" and "drink poisoned water," as punishment for choosing to experience evil. "Because of the curse the land lies parched and the pastures in the wilderness are withered. The prophets follow an evil course and use their power unjustly. 'Both prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness,' declares the Lord. 'Therefore their path will become slippery; they will be banished to darkness and there they will fall. I will bring disaster on them in the year they are punished,' declares the Lord. . . . Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty says concerning the prophets: 'I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water, because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land'" (Jeremiah 23:10-12, 15). Isaiah confirms that the purpose of creation's curse was specifically to punish people. Humans "have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt" (Isaiah 24:5-6). Creation is not suffering because of the curse here; pastures do not care if they are parched or withered. But the affected humans do suffer, don't they? So here is how the curse seems to work: humans sin against God, wanting to know evil, so God curses creation to impact humans, resulting in them suffering and knowing evil. The perfect God justly and logically punishes, the guilty humans get what they ask for, and the innocent creation does not suffer, become infected by sin, or fall. It all makes sense.

Now let's look at a different way that creation is affected by sin. This time it's not God who curses creation without causing it

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to suffer; it's humanity who subjects creation to frustration while causing it suffer. "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, *not by its own choice*, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:19-23). Although many equate this frustration of creation with the curse on creation in Genesis, they are not the same thing. First, no curse is mentioned here at all! Second, creation is clearly suffering here, unlike the neutral, indifferent creation cursed by God in Genesis. Why is it suffering now, but not then? Because humanity is the one subjecting creation to frustration through its abuse, not God via the curse. Obviously, as humans have multiplied and spread, so has their irresponsible misuse of this planet, and the personified creation frustratingly groans at its resultant "bondage to decay" that it will endure as long as human sin persists. Humanity's potential to negatively affect the whole creation knows no limit. But this is not the curse. This is the frustration. Humans were not agents of the curse; they were the ultimate objects of the curse, the sinners deserving punishment. Creation is the agent of the curse; it is not the ultimate object of the curse, without sin and undeserving of punishment. The human frustration of creation is not the curse; the curse is the response of *God* to use creation to fulfill the choice and punishment of human sin to know evil. When sin is associated with the land, the source is clearly defilement of creation by the choice of humans, "not by its own choice," so God punishes the land via the curse for the ultimate and only purpose of humans experiencing evil, not to chastise creation. As a result, humans are "vomited out" by the land for their sin (Leviticus 18:24-28, Romans 8:20). Humans always suffer as a result of God's curse; creation doesn't have to. Creation always suffers as a result of humanity's frustration; humans don't have to. And even when humans sometimes suffer from their own

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frustration of creation, it is simply another way that God uses the agent of creation to teach humans about the evil they want to know.

A great example of how this frustration is used by God to achieve the curse's human education of evil is the Israelites' failure to rotate crops. Hey, these guys were rebels, what can we say? God commands them to periodically leave the land uncultivated—called a Sabbath year—just as farmers leave fields to lie fallow today (Leviticus 25:1-7). God's commands make sense; he knew that without a rest, the soil would become infertile as its nutrients were depleted. And if they disobey him and sin, look at his response. "I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit. . . . I cut off your supply of bread." "I will scatter you among the nations." "Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it" (Leviticus 26:18-35).

Guess what? Several centuries later, God did exactly what he said. The Israelites "despised his words" and were "carried into exile," and "the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 36:15-21). Humans sinned against God by ignoring his Sabbath years, abusing creation. God did not respond by causing creation to suffer further (quite the opposite actually), wrathfully infecting every atom with sinful, infertile fallenness. God makes sense. He responded to human sin just as he did in Genesis, by employing the curse to use creation—and its frustration in this case—to teach humans, via failed crops, about the evil that they want to know. This is all beautifully summarized for us in Isaiah 24:5-9. "The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore *a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.*" As a result, "The beer is bitter to its drinkers." "The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merry-makers groan." For some, this might be



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the greatest experience of evil imaginable! Humans sin and disobey. That frustrates creation. God uniformly responds to human sin with his curse, which itself does not punish but rather uses creation—and sometimes its frustration—to educate us about evil.

What on God's not-so-green, frustrated earth does this have to do with earth's continuity? Well, I'll tell you, and thanks for asking! Since the curse is not an ubiquitous infection of the universe with the evil ether of sin by a God with an uncontrollable temper, then it is not required that every atom of creation is restored by Jesus' removal of sin, continuously transforming this world into the New Earth to "be liberated from its bondage to decay." After all, Jesus was a *human* sacrifice to provide a solution to *human* sin. He was not a planetary or multigalaxial sacrifice to provide a solution for a fallen earth or universe. Jesus didn't come to save non-sinful things that don't need saving; he came to save sinful humans who do. "Christ redeemed *us* from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for *us*" (Galatians 3:13). Jesus didn't take a curse of creation involving imperfect, fallen star systems on himself when he became a curse; he took a curse bringing human suffering on himself. True, God is pleased "through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things," but that reconciliation ends up only applying to humans who "continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel" (Colossians 1:19-23). Only those who maintain the faith God requires for salvation are reconciled to God, not everyone, and certainly not non-human creation, which cannot continue in faith of any sort! Interestingly, in using this passage to argue that all created things do end up reconciled to God, any person who claims to oppose universalism actually forces himself to embrace it, since Satan, his demons, and every other eternal resident in Hell would also be included in "all things."<sup>98-99</sup> Investigating the full context of this passage allows us to avoid the extremes of both a continuous and universal salvation of creation that the Bible comprehensively teaches against. Jesus came to save *only* humans, and if that conclusion is hard for you to reach, the following questions should make it easier to grasp. Can you explain exactly how and why the choice of human sin causes "the whole creation" to fall? Can you describe in detail what exactly that fallenness constitutes, and

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can you clarify how the death and resurrection of a perfect human being somehow fixes all of that? If you cannot (hey, I can't either!), don't worry, because we don't have to. The discontinuous Heaven and earth of the Bible don't require that of us.

Instead, we *can* explain how God's curse and Jesus' solution are perfectly in tune, can't we? God's curse punishes *humans* with the fulfillment of their choice to experience evil and suffering. Jesus' solution removes that punishment from *humans*, allowing them to enter a brand New Earth with no experience of evil and suffering. When creation is "brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God," it is not because a curse was lifted off it, but because frustration was eliminated from it! On the New Earth, humans cannot sin to abuse creation, so it will never again groan in bondage to decay, because the frustration of *creation* is gone. Nor will it ever be used by God again to educate humans in the experience of evil, because the curse for punishing *humans* is gone. And given God's purpose for those who were made in his image to find perfect community with him, it is the lifting of this curse—not one on all of creation—that is the focus of this New Earth. First, we see God's specific judgments on the serpent, Eve, and Adam countered. Instead of inducing enmity and biting our heels, the serpent "will neither harm nor destroy." Instead of pain in childbirth, there will be no misfortunate child-bearing. Instead of "painful toil," humans "will not labor in vain" (Genesis 3:14-19, Isaiah 65:23-25). The curse for humans is lifted!

And then we are given a whole list of examples how creation will no longer be used by God to allow humans to know evil. The lambs, goats, calves, and cows that the original audience of the Bible so desperately depended on for food, farming, income, companionship, and survival were often by killed by wolves, leopards, lions, and bears (e.g. 1 Samuel 17:34-37). Occasionally humans were too, not just by these beasts, but by snakes as well. And these aren't just random misfortunes. The Bible is clear that such actions of wild animals are primarily due to the use of creation in God's direct response to human sin via the curse (Leviticus 26:22, Numbers 25:1-7, 1 Kings 20:36, 2 Kings 17:25, Jeremiah 5:5-6, 8:14-17)! You can imagine how elated the Jews were then, when God tells them that this curse will

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be lifted! “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:6-9). Humans will never experience evil from their environment again! The New Earth will be a place where food, achievement, resources, relationships, and life will never be threatened again. The curse for humans is lifted!

I am fully aware that many of you have read these verses numerous times and always thought that they referred to sin’s curse on or the fallenness of creation being removed. I used to as well. But they don’t, do they? Why would human sin suddenly and directly cause wolves to eat lambs, leopards to eat goats, lions to eat calves, bears to eat cows, or snakes to bite children (unless the kids really have it coming to them!)? These are all human experiences of evil, direct results of God’s curse for punishing *them*, threats to *their* well-being and survival, not the inevitable infection of *creation* by human sin, whatever that means. Along with the clear, biblical difference in how God interacts with humans versus non-human creation that we touched on in Booklet 2, the Bible’s teaching that human sin and an ubiquitously imperfect creation are not directly related is very significant. It flings open the door to all kinds of anthropological, biological, geological, and even cosmological agreement between what we learn in God’s written revelation of the Bible and what we learn in God’s general revelation of the world (Romans 1:20). It’s not the scope of this book to explore this agreement in detail (although the ability of non-human physical death to predate human sin and death should get you thinking),<sup>100</sup> but I can say that my own lengthy study of both Scripture and science has certainly yielded satisfying results! The New Earth in Isaiah 11:6-9 is not perfect or non-fallen because animals don’t suffer; it’s freed from sin’s curse because humans don’t suffer! When we actually see the curse being lifted in Revelation 22:1-5 and 21:1-4, all of the benefits are clearly being conferred upon humans; in fact, other creatures are nowhere to be found in these

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verses! The curse separated humans from perfect community with God, so when “no longer will there be any curse,” all we see is God and humans enjoying that restored community together.

Besides, if Isaiah 11:6-9 was describing how a fallen creation was cursed because sin “rippled out until it damaged relations between animals and even the earth itself,” the list would include interactions between things that *aren't* associated with human suffering.<sup>101</sup> The ameoba would coexist with its bacterial prey, the early bird would not catch the worm, the hyena would hang with the wildebeest, the giant squid would frolic with the sperm whale, the lava would politely bypass the uninhabited forest, the blizzards pounding the Himalayas would chill out, the meteors would all miss Mars, and the black holes would dance with the stars! Unless you cry every time hand sanitizer slaughters bacteria by the billions, are very fond of your pet giant squid, or agonize with the formation of each new Martian crater, you do not experience evil with these events. Why not if they represent the same curse and fallen state as a child's death by amoebic enteritis, a teen's infection with a bird-borne virus, a villager mauled by hyenas on the Serengeti, or the charred victims of Vesuvius in Pompeii? Let's admit it, when the injured party can be chalked up to “the circle of life” or the “laws of the cosmos,” we don't *really* consider it evidence of a cursed or fallen creation, do we? But when the same perpetrators claim human victims, it's a different story, isn't it? And that's precisely my point. Because God isn't telling us a story about a cursed continuous creation cured by Christ (sorry, I got a little carried away there), his account of the New Earth only includes restorations that lift a curse for humans to cure the human knowledge of evil. Because there is no more sin, not because there is no more curse, there can be no more creation frustration. The current earth is free to be destroyed and the New Earth is free to be truly new and discontinuous, just like the Bible says they will be, because they do not need to be and cannot be restored by Jesus' death and resurrection.\* Only the humans living on the New Earth need to be restored and will be forever. Amongst many other things, the Bible enables

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\* A specific and startling New Testament example of such discontinuity awaits interested readers here.<sup>102</sup>

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us to explain the curse and explain the solution; continuity does not.

A New Earth freed from recollected familiarities to be filled with restored folks is anything but “bad news,”<sup>106</sup> so perhaps we should believe God’s glad news that we won’t suffer from missing such things because we will have no memory of them—and therefore no want of them. “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:17). “I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be *glad* and rejoice forever in what I will create” (Isaiah 65:17). Without question, God will restore creation, but not *from* what it is, rather *to* a brand “new earth,” where “the old order of things has passed away...I am making everything new” (Revelation 21:1-5).

## 11

So two of three deeply ingrained beliefs that cause some to cling to this earth’s continuity have been addressed. We’ve shown why comfortable familiarity with this planet makes the New Earth suboptimal and why a continuous restoration of this planet makes the New Earth inexplicable. There is one final belief that keeps people from being free of a continuous earth. It is argued that completely destroying this earth and creating a completely New Earth would constitute a victory for Satan and a defeat for God. “Though we’d never say it this way, we see him (*God*) as a thwarted inventor whose creation failed. Having realized his mistake, he’ll end up trashing what he has made. His consolation for a failed earth is that he rescues a few of us from the fire.”<sup>107</sup> Yikes, it’s pretty bold to say it that way!

What I don’t understand is how Satan wins or God fails by God doing exactly what he says he’s planning to do. “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” (Isaiah 46:10). We now know from all over the Bible that God purposes

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to destroy this planet. Continuity proponents teach that God makes a mistake and fails by creating a discontinuous earth, that he is a “tyrant” to “want to blow the world to bits,” as they put it.<sup>108</sup> But in actuality, God only fails if he *doesn't* keep his word to make a discontinuous earth and eradicate this one with finality. For the myriad biblical, logical, and even scientific reasons above, God *wanted* us to enjoy perfect community with him, so he wanted us to have the ability to choose him and his goodness or sin and the curse. Given the suffering we chose, he wants us to fulfill his purpose for us in Jesus, so he *wants* to create a perfect, unmistakable New Earth where that can occur. Therefore, it would make sense that he would ultimately *want* to destroy this earth because it cannot fulfill his purpose for us. The only way that Satan can defeat God here is by convincing us that we know what God wants more than God does, but God's words don't permit us to do that. “It is difficult to think that God would entirely annihilate his original creation” only for those who won't let God tell them that he's going to.<sup>109</sup>

Some recognize that the Bible leaves no hint of doubt regarding the wholesale destruction of this planet. But then they ask, why can't God continuously recreate the New Earth out of the remains of this one? The most obvious answer is that there won't be any remains! Remember, “the heavens will *disappear* with a roar,” “the heavens will *vanish* like smoke, the earth will *wear out* like a garment,” “the whole earth will be *consumed*,” it “dries up and *withers*,” it “languishes and *withers*,” it's “broken up,” and it's “split asunder” (Isaiah 24:1-23, 51:6, Zephaniah 1:18). And in one final proclamation of doom, Jesus—by whom this world was created (Colossians 1:13-16)—states that the current heaven *and* earth will *pass away and disappear* (Luke 21:33, Matthew 5:18). There is nothing left to make a continuous New Earth out of! The current earth “falls—*never to rise again*” (Isaiah 24:20). God obviously won't “use the same canvas” to fashion the New Earth from the old, will he?<sup>110</sup>

But even if bits and pieces did remain—or better yet a roughly spherical charred briquette—what is the point of using this to create the New Earth? Would it not still be supposedly infected or invaded by the disease of sin, unlike a brand New Earth? And how would

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Satan's victory over God be any less if God was only powerful enough to save the earth's molten innards and chunks of its crust? Satan would still succeed in ruining every continuous earthly object or creature that appears in the Bible's description of the New Earth. So no, restoring debris does not exactly allow God to "forcefully strike back at Satan" to avoid "conceding victory," nor can it truly or practically be considered continuity.<sup>111</sup> God is not trash-talking Satan taunting, "Bring it Lucifer! Completely obliterating this planet is all you got? You can't touch me and all these tiny little bits o' rock I'm gonna restore the New Earth from. You can just take that sorry forked tail of yours and go to..." Which brings me to my next point. Satan isn't succeeding at *anything* when this earth disappears, let alone defeating God. He's just been chained for a thousand years, got totally owned in the final battle, and is about to go to Hell. Forever (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10). Besides, it's not Satan's decision to annihilate the earth anyway. It's *God's!* God does not reveal himself as one who "restores rather than obliterates creation"; he intends to renew creation *by* obliterating this planet.<sup>112</sup> He will be victorious over Satan *by* eliminating all memory and knowledge of evil—including the current earth—to make a perfect, unmistakable, brand New Earth out of absolutely nothing, so that we can live there with him. Forever. God wins when he does what he says, even when that challenges us to embrace unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and unmistakably brand new things.

We have now highlighted many reasons why a continuous New Earth is neither the biblical nor the best New Earth. To close our discussion of this topic on the lighter side, I've saved the most amusing two reasons for last. First, if the New Earth is continuous, then *when* would it be continuous from? The earth from Abraham's time, Jesus' time, our time, or another time? And how would any of these New Earths be continuously familiar to the vast majority of humans? Space travel, iPads, and bungee jumping are hardly comforting reminders of a Mesopotamian nomad's life! If "Jesus came to rescue the entire universe from ultimate destruction," is it today's universe, the universe when our planet is engulfed by our exploding sun in a few kajillion years, or the universe at judgment day?<sup>113</sup> And if "earth cannot be delivered from the curse by being destroyed; it can

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only be delivered by being resurrected,” then which earth is resurrected?<sup>114</sup> Answering “the universe and earth of judgment day” may seem obviously correct, but think again. There are an awful lot of stars, planets, mountains, seas, rivers, bacteria, protists, fungi, plants, animals, and people that physically existed in the universes and earths of the past that no will longer physically exist when judgment day comes. If the New Earth is going to be continuously restored from the matter of the old earth, then where’s our friend T-Rex going to be resurrected from? His matter’s all over the place by now, maybe even making up part of me! But if he’s resurrected, oh shoot, where am I going to be resurrected from? I’ll just borrow some matter from you, but not without a fight, right? If a Christian is eaten by a cannibal who converts, “who will have which bits at the resurrection?”<sup>115</sup> And where’s my great-uncle Willis going to be resurrected from if his matter now makes up the bodies of a whole family of maggots? Certainly *they* can’t be left out of the resurrection, but neither can he! And where are the celestial bodies that contributed the debris that eventually formed our earth going to be resurrected from? The New Earth? And if God just makes new matter so that *all* the stars, planets, mountains, seas, rivers, bacteria, protists, fungi, plants, animals, and people that ever existed could be resurrected, then how is that continuous? Creating *only* new materials to create a totally New Earth makes much more sense, doesn’t it?

Second, all this talk of universes and planets leads to my final reason the New Earth is not continuous. It would not be a comfortably familiar eternal home to any non-human free-willed residents, whether angels or aliens. How do we know that we are the only beings that can be saved? There are billions and billions of planets out there. True, the vast, vast majority of them cannot harbor life as we know it, but plenty of them might harbor life as we don’t know it! And chances are good that much more than a handful could sustain carbon-based life as well. We are extremely arrogant beings if we think that God created this entire physical universe just to house us on earth. And if we entertain the possibility of free-willed life elsewhere, we are in some ways even more prideful to think that only we as humans can be saved. Why couldn’t God offer a solution of salvation to them as



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he did for us in Jesus? But even if we humble ourselves to admit that other races might be sharing eternity with us, is it any less conceited to believe that they must come to *our* restored New Earth as their eternal home, the place where God has his throne (Revelation 21:3)? “Earth is unique. It’s the *one* planet—perhaps among billions—where God chose to act out the unfolding drama of redemption and reveal the wonders of his grace. It’s on the New Earth, the capital planet of the new universe, that he will establish an eternal kingdom.”<sup>116</sup> Wow. Sorry aliens, if the earth is continuous, you’re coming here forever! Do we really only care about the familiarity and memories of our own lives in a continuous place and not those of others who might be out there? This selfish and unhealthy attachment to our current earth directly opposes the attitude of those for whom God has prepared the New Earth and the New Jerusalem. “They admitted that *they* were *aliens and strangers* on earth. . . . Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13, 16). A discontinuous earth humbly allows God to put every planet wherever he wants, with a New Earth that is no more or less significant than any other New Planet of saved beings on which he is equally as present as ours. How cool that would be!

This unexpected problem with aliens actually takes us right back to where we started with continuity. Many of us believe it because of what we think we want, not because of what the Bible or logic tells us. We might think we want a continuous earth, but God doesn’t want one. We might think we want a place that’s comfortably familiar, but that can only be as good as what we can experience here. We might think we want a creation redeemed from the curse, but we can’t explain how it can be or why it needs to be in the first place. We might think we want a Heaven where God is victorious, when really it’s a Heaven where God can’t win. We might think we want today’s New Earth, but we forget about all the potential individuals from yesterday, tomorrow, and across the galaxy. In the end, we don’t want a continuous earth, do we? Having created us, God knows that what we really want is to rejoice with him in his perfect, unmistakable Heaven: the discontinuous New Earth of the Bible; it’s just that

some don't realize it yet. God has two promises and a suggestion for them: "I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create" (Isaiah 65:17-18).

## 12

**B**ecause the continuity of our current earth did not survive biblical or logical scrutiny, it no longer confines us to a Heaven of memories. But there is one very personal aspect of the New Earth that is also commonly held to be continuous: our bodies and the activities that they allow. Now there are a whole slew of things that we could talk about here, such as whether we'll all have 6-packs, be tan, wear nose rings, still have dimples, or finally be rid of that unsightly something-or-other. However, people who try to answer these questions follow irresponsible speculation into misleading waters. For example, it has been claimed—without confirmatory biblical evidence—that we will have perfectly recognizable but “beautiful bodies that will far surpass the beauty of our bodies on this earth.”<sup>117</sup> But beauty by whose standard? Not infrequently, you might find the mark or deformity that another person can't wait to get rid of the most uniquely attractive part of him or her, right? And this is not limited to physical traits, but includes many speech impediments, abnormal mannerisms, and other quirks as well. Beauty and charm are in the eye of the beholder; after all, not long before the days of Twiggy, 'twas plumpness that conferred beauty to people's minds! Still today some find themselves so incapable of denying that they like big butts that they even write a song about it!<sup>118</sup> So how can we all have beautiful bodies if we can't simultaneously possess all the characteristics that people find beautiful? If we can remember these traits, would we not consider several earthly imperfections to actually be superior and preferable to whatever perfect body is determined for us in Heaven? Or will we be forced to keep changing our appearance to constantly match others' perceptions of beauty? And for those of us who do not

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seem to fit into anyone's standard of beauty, how would we suddenly become drop alive gorgeous at our resurrection and still be continuously recognizable?

God's got a better Heaven in mind than a gaggle of supermodels. We're after the biblical hereafter, and the Bible doesn't comment on many specifics regarding our resurrected bodies. Also, to find a Heaven that is unmistakable, we're primarily exploring this issue to understand if continuity applies between our bodies now and our bodies then, and why or why not. We'll be looking at every account in the Bible of what a resurrected human body is like, and we'll draw our conclusions from there.

Although biblical references to the properties of resurrected bodies almost unanimously involve those "worthy of taking part in the age to come" in "the resurrection of the righteous," the Bible does teach a "resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked," so it seems that the unsaved will also end up with imperishable bodies as well (Luke 14:14, 20:35-36, Acts 24:15). This would be consistent with a forever Hell and could explain the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" there (Matthew 13:49-50). The only difference between someone's body in Gehenna and someone's body on the New Earth is that the former can be continuous, because the perfection that discontinuity allows is not present in Hell. The Bible does not tell us other significant details about the continuity of bodies in Hell, but because they are imperishable as those in Heaven are, we will consider whatever else we learn about the typical human resurrected body to apply to the saved and unsaved alike.

Before we begin, there are some caveats to consider. First, recall that any direct observations about the New Earth in the Old Testament passages that speak of both the Millennium and the New Earth cannot be accurately or reliably applied to the latter except Isaiah 11:6-9, 60:15-22, and 65:17-19, 23-25. Second, much of our information comes from descriptions of Jesus' body after he was resurrected but while he was still on the current earth. Obviously, whatever continuity of memory and recognition that Jesus demonstrated then is inapplicable to the New Earth, as he was not on the New Earth. He was on this earth and was exposed to the same circumstances that

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he had been exposed to just three days beforehand. Besides, he's God; he's not going to forget these people anyway. None of these conditions will apply to any other human on the New Earth, will they?

Likewise, we must be cautious about inferring definitive conclusions about our resurrected bodies from Jesus' resurrected *body* while he was still on earth. For example, because Jesus' resurrected body is able to suddenly appear and disappear, immediately alter its appearance, and walk through locked doors, it is often assumed that our resurrected bodies will be able to do the same (Matthew 28:8-9, Mark 16:12, 14, Luke 24:15-16, 30-31, 36-37, John 20:19, 26).<sup>119</sup> And they might. However, Jesus is God, and if he could calm storms, walk on water, and raise the dead in his first body, then it almost certainly wasn't his resurrected body that enabled him to accomplish the other feats above (Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 6:45-51, Luke 7:11-17). So ours may very well not enable us to do such things either.

So am I stating that Jesus' new body was no different than the one he died in? Was his resurrection no different than that of any individual brought back to life in the Bible? Of course it was different! Unlike their resurrections back into their perishable bodies, we are told that Jesus' resurrected body cannot die or decay; it is his *imperishable* body (Acts 13:34-37, Romans 6:9-10). True, his old body is gone from the tomb, his new body still has crucifixion wounds, and it can physiologically process earthly food, so there is *some* continuity (Luke 24:5-6, 37-43). But it can't die or decay. Jesus' resurrected "spiritual body" must have been changed to be raised imperishable, much like ours will be, even though that change must involve the creation of partially or entirely new bodies, as the old ones will still be perishable and subject to imperfection—and for the vast majority of us, quite decomposed (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)! And whatever anatomical and physiological continuity Jesus did possess in bodily form, he was able to have or needed to have for several reasons that don't apply to us. Jesus is God and we are not, so he was able to do a lot of things with both his old and new bodies that we have no reason to believe we'll be able to do with ours. Jesus needed to be able to recognize and reunite with people he knew for the resurrection to be meaningful and communicable; we don't need

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to be able to do these things on the New Earth. Jesus had to be able to keep his wounds and eat fish to persuade humans that his resurrection was real enough to tell others about it; we don't have to maintain such bodily continuity on the New Earth. Whatever form and abilities that Jesus' resurrected body possessed here, it possessed so that the gospel could and would be spread by humans throughout the world (Matthew 28:18-20). "Christ was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God" (Romans 7:4).

And because he is God, even his form and abilities after ascending to the current heaven are not applicable to ours. If you don't believe me, check out how Jesus looks now that he's there (Revelation 1:12-18, 5:6-10, 19:11-16)! Well, that's not very continuous, is it? Clearly those are his much more permanent and preferred resurrected bodily forms, rather than that of his 40-day post-resurrection stint on earth. As such, Jesus must have either used his divine power or possibly his new body's inherent ability to *assume*—not *maintain*—at least some anatomical and physiological similarity to his former body before his ascension. Unlike us, we know that he could and needed to adopt such similarity; therefore, the properties of Jesus' body in his post-resurrection existence here are unique and cannot be automatically extrapolated to our resurrection bodies on the New Earth.

So we can't just say that we'll be recognized by others because Jesus was. More importantly though, we can't even say that *Jesus* was all that recognizable after returning to life! We are given generic references to Jesus' resurrected appearances to humans in Acts 10:41, 13:30-31, and 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, but we are not told if they were able to initially recognize Jesus or how much information was required before they could. Stephen was able to identify Jesus in a vision of the current heaven, but this is also unhelpful (Acts 7:55-56). Stephen had almost certainly learned from the disciples that Jesus had ascended to the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19, Acts 2:33-35). So when he "saw the glory of God" during his vision, who *else* could have possibly been "at the right hand of God" but Jesus? I have no idea what Jesus looked like, but if I saw the current heaven open and someone at the right hand of

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God's glory, I would identify that person as Jesus too! Besides, we don't even know if *Stephen* knew what Jesus looked like on earth. Even if he did, his realization was only *possibly* one of recognition while *certainly* one of simple deduction. After all, Paul and John also supernaturally encounter Jesus after he's in the current heaven, but neither recognizes him at all until he clearly identifies himself (Acts 9:3-5, Revelation 1:9-18). So far, no one is able to definitively recognize the resurrected Jesus by his appearance alone.

What about people in the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28:1-20, Mark 16:1-20, Luke 24:1-53, John 20:1-21:25)? On Easter morning, women were the first to encounter him, and Mary Magdalene the first of those. All of them had already been told—by angels no less—that Jesus was alive before they saw him. Even with such authenticated knowledge, when Mary does come across him, she “did not realize that it was Jesus,” even after looking right at him, hearing his voice, and having a conversation with him *about* him! Everything that happened to Mary that morning should have put a resurrected Jesus at the forefront of her mind, yet she only recognizes him once he says her name. Later that day, the next people to meet Jesus were two of his followers who knew of the angels' words to the women that Jesus was alive. When Jesus joins them, “they were kept from recognizing him.” Even though they walked together for quite some time as Jesus explained *everything* the Old Testament prophesied *about* him, “their eyes were opened and they could recognize him” only after he was done and they had found a place to eat. That evening, even after being prompted by both the women and these two men that they had all *seen Jesus alive*, the disciples did not recognize him when he appeared either! Only after Jesus shows them the wounds from his crucifixion and eats fish in their presence do they realize that it's him. A week later, Thomas also requires confirmation of Jesus' wounds—in addition to the testimony of everyone above—before he can identify Jesus as “my Lord and my God.” And even after this the disciples continue having trouble recognizing Jesus. We are told later that “some doubted” that it was him, and when Jesus appeared to the disciples while they were fishing, they were close enough to

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hear his voice but “did not realize that it was Jesus.” Even when they came ‘round the campfire with Jesus, they still considered asking him who he was! Their acknowledgement that it was Jesus was legitimately but solely based on his provision of a miraculous catch of fish. I encourage you to check the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection referenced above to confirm all of this; it’s true!

This is absolutely astonishing! Not a *single* person in the Bible definitively recognizes Jesus after his resurrection based on his appearance alone, and the ones who see him the most still aren’t completely sure it’s him after multiple appearances and loads of evidence apart from his appearances! Sadly, this has led some who are constrained by continuity to fabricate details and be directly dishonest about the accounts above, and I urge you to compare both my and their conclusions with the Bible.<sup>120-121</sup> No unaided or unanticipated recognition of the resurrected Jesus is found in the Bible. This is even more amazing considering that Jesus could assume any form that he wanted and that he only had forty days to persuade these people that he was alive and worth devoting their lives to, so that his worldwide movement would be successfully launched (Acts 1:3-9)! He had every reason to make himself as recognizable as possible to anyone who saw him, didn’t he? Well, every reason except one. The only conceivable explanation for why Jesus’ visage was obviously not readily identifiable—despite his otherwise persuasive resurrection—is that his perfect, imperishable, spiritual, resurrected body was not all that continuous from his first body, and he wants everyone to know that. Think about it. Given the number of vastly different forms that he took and will take after his resurrection, what basis is there for the claim that his true or most accurate form is the one we see before his ascension? At the most, that form only lasted a few decades, after which John sees a vision of him in the current heaven of that time looking quite different (Revelation 1:12-18)! Because Jesus is God and because we aren’t given a bodily description of him on the New Earth, we don’t know what his resurrection body will be like there, where it would be optimally—although still not completely—comparable to ours. Based on multiple New Earth references to Jesus as the Lamb, our best bet is

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that it will be most similar to a wounded Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (Revelation 5:6, 21:14, 22, 22:3). Not exactly continuous from his first body, is it?

Therefore, Jesus' resurrected body offers virtually no reliable information regarding our resurrected body. Let's review the Bible's glimpses of imperishable human resurrected bodies *other* than his then. In the Old Testament passages definitively describing the New Earth, we are given a few useful tidbits. Infants and children are mentioned, and childbearing is at least a possibility. We will not weep or cry (Isaiah 65:17-19, 23-25). We will interact with animals—at least with snakes anyway—without any harm or destruction occurring (Isaiah 11:6-9). There will be no violence, ruin, or destruction to our bodies, and a lot of people will live there forever (Isaiah 60:18-21). Oh, and for all you *Twilight* fans, especially since *Breaking Dawn* broke out into theaters just yesterday (never do I need to be part of anyone else's honeymoon for that long again!), yes, our bodies will shine (Daniel 12:3). Please don't celebrate by biting anyone in the neck though, as some of you might actually be tempted to do that. I wish I could say I was kidding! Sorry, back to the Old Testament. Oh wait, there *is* nothing else that the Old Testament undoubtedly states about our bodies in the New Earth!

Well, what about the New Testament? We learn from the martyrs who arose in the first resurrection that many of "every nation, tribe, people, and language" will be there (Revelation 7:9). Very cool. People will wear clothes, sing, and yes, some will even play harps (Revelation 15:2-3). It's biblical! Hunger and thirst will be satiated (Revelation 7:16). People will have the names of God the Father, Jesus, and Jerusalem on their foreheads (Revelation 3:12, 14:1, 22:4). We will organize ourselves into nations, although there is no evidence to suggest that these will be reminiscent of any earthly nation (Revelation 2:26, 21:24-26). There will be no human marriage, only the ultimate, purpose-fulfilling marriage of perfect community between God and his people (Matthew 22:30, Isaiah 54:4-8, Ephesians 5:31-32, Revelation 21:2-3). We're told that we'll "bear the likeness of the man from heaven," who is Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:49); however, we don't know what his likeness is like on



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the New Earth, do we? “What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). This was written after Jesus’ resurrection, so Christ won’t appear again until judgment day. Maybe then he’ll resemble the lamb figure, maybe the guy with the sword coming out of his mouth, maybe something similar to his resurrected body on earth, or maybe a body completely unlike anything we’ve ever imagined! Who knows what Jesus’ likeness will be? Since Paul is clearly contrasting this heavenly likeness with the natural “likeness of the earthly man,” he may just mean that we’ll be resurrected in an imperishable, spiritual body like Jesus was, which is the whole point that Paul is driving at in these verses (1 Corinthians 15:35-57). Here we also learn that our bodies will be raised imperishable in glory and in power, and they will not be made of flesh and blood as we know them. Instead, they are heavenly dwellings that come from God, and our spirits will unite with them here immediately before ascending briefly to the place of judgment and admission into our final destinations (Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:1-2, 13, Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:28-29, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Revelation 20:11-15).

As most humans’ physical bodies will have long decomposed by that point, and as the same matter that makes me up now may have made someone else up in the past, it would be pointless and conflicting to argue that God simply resurrects our physical remains, but the proponent of continuity is left with no other choice. “God will not scrap his original creation and start over. Instead, he will take his fallen, corrupted children and restore, refresh, and renew us to our original design.”<sup>122</sup> “Just as Adam was made from the dust of the earth, we will be remade from the dust of the earth.”<sup>123</sup> How is regathering every atom (not Adam) of a person from all over creation not starting over? And what does God do with the atoms or dust that made up multiple people? How is this more restorative or victorious than completely creating part or all of our bodies completely anew? The bodily discontinuity these questions lead us to is welcomed by Paul, as confirmed by scholarly interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:1-7. “What he is affirming and denying is

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clear: resurrection means transformed body, not walking corpse or disembodied spirit.” “Heaven, by contrast, would bear little resemblance to this life because, according to Paul, our resurrected bodies would not be our earthly ones.”<sup>124</sup> God will create our brand new imperishable bodies here to be joined with our spirits as they exit Sheol/Hades (Isaiah 26:19, 1 Corinthians 15:37-44). However, just as we saw with the earth, there is essentially no role for continuity regarding our current bodies, is there? And remember how God changes the earths like clothes, discarding the worn out one in favor of the New Earth (Psalm 102:25-27, Hebrews 1:10-12)? The same word for change—*allasso*—is used to describe our bodies upon being resurrected! “The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be *changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:52). Just like this earth, our current bodies will be worn out and discarded—not to mention likely decayed—in favor of our imperishable, resurrected bodies. When you change clothes, you don’t put the same ones back on, especially if you’ve already graciously thrown them away to become a metropolis for maggots. Therefore, for the many reasons we’ve reviewed, it cannot be reliably claimed that a whole lot of continuity will exist between the bodies we have now and the ones we’ll have on the New Earth.

The final and most detailed account of what our eternal bodies will be like on the New Earth is in Revelation 21:1-22:5. Humans will dwell together with God, fulfilling his purpose for us, and “he will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” We will drink from the water of life and eat from the tree of life. We will have full access to a spectacular city, the New Jerusalem, and we will serve God. When we visited these verses before, we found only five recognizably continuous beings or objects from the current heaven and earth: God, an angel, the New Jerusalem, the book of life, and the tree of life. All of them had their origins in a perfect place, and none of them are imperfect humans. Therefore, aside from our names, the most detailed, representative account of the New Earth demonstrates zero human continuity between it and our current physical existence! Nobody’s recognizing each other, and no reunions are taking place.

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And yet there is no sadness, mourning, crying, or pain. Hmm.

So how on (new) earth can we put the last several chapters together to quickly recap everything we've learned about God's unmistakable Heaven, particularly when the Bible staunchly maintains a paucity of continuity? We know what the Bible teaches about our bodies there, and we have a list of both soothing and surprising details regarding everything that definitively goes on there. The details that don't concern an unmistakable Heaven I'll leave alone for you to ponder. The others can be summarized as follows. First and foremost, God will be on the New Earth, along with final fulfillment of the purpose for which he created us: perfect community with him. We'll keep our names—while getting new ones as well—and we'll keep our ethnicities and languages, which allows us to easily be identified *once we meet* folks, although this certainly is not necessary to possess identity itself. However, the Bible offers no definite evidence that we'll be recognizable to or remembered by those who knew us here, and given how hard to identify Jesus was after being resurrected—even though he needed to be recognizable and we will not—if anything, our predominantly discontinuous bodies would be at least as unfamiliar to others. And there is no biblical evidence or need for our predominantly discontinuous earth to be represented on the New Earth either, except for the presence of at least some types of animals and the names of a city, tribe leaders, and apostles, carried over from the current earth. There will be no violence, ruin, harm, or destruction between animals or humans.

No humans will be married to each other, and since God inseparably interweaves sex and marriage, there would be no sex as we know it (Genesis 2:20-24, 1 Corinthians 6:16-18, Matthew 5:32). How can people continue to espouse continuity (puns intended) even after admitting the absence of such fundamental components of earthly life as human marriage and sex?<sup>125</sup> How can they ignore sex when they argue that “if we would miss something from our old lives and the old earth, it would be available to us on the New Earth?”<sup>126</sup> I don't think I'm alone when I unashamedly proclaim that I would miss sex if I could remember it on the New Earth, and

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the sense of loss would be even greater for someone who hadn't experienced it yet! A high-school friend of mine used to joke that Jesus would probably return mere seconds before he had chance to consummate his marriage, and upon hearing the trumpets heralding his trip to Heaven, he would shout, "Nooooo God, why?" Sixteen years later, and I'm still laughing. In contrast, we have no need to question how God could possibly eliminate such significant entities. We *expect* him to replace these with brand new better things in a discontinuous Heaven, and we wouldn't remember what sex was like for us anyway. Also, despite my proclamation above, having no memory of sexual forays may actually be *good* news for more than a few folks, right? The God who "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" and who "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" will have no problem coming up with something far superior (Ephesians 3:20, 1 Timothy 6:17)!

Interestingly, despite the lack of human marriage and sex—at least sex as we know it—there will be infants and children. Bearing new children is not excluded or confirmed on the New Earth (Isaiah 65:23), but it would seem unjust to allow new incorruptible humans to be born when other humans are in Hell, just as it is to allow deceased children here to automatically go to Heaven. Plus, human marriage is absent because we're like the angels, and there is no biblical mention of angel procreation or angel babies—not even Cupid—so humans will likely not procreate there either. So where do the kids come from? I would say us! Let's face it, we've all wanted to relive the freedom and wonder of childhood, God calls us his children, and Jesus even says that we need to "change and become like little children" to get to the New Earth (Matthew 18:3)! We know that he is referring to their type of faith, but it certainly doesn't seem that God would be opposed to letting you live another childhood, or even many! After all, we *are* there forever, no one is going anywhere, our ages there are never revealed, and there's no requirement to remember much of anything from our past. Discontinuity embraces such a perpetually fresh and exciting way to experience the New Earth, other humans, and God! How could anyone "not find the prospect of eternal life attractive" if this is how God the Father happily ensured that "there will always be

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some new joy to discover,” that “this stretching and growing will go on forever,” and that “we will never bottom out and become bored?”<sup>127-128</sup> Hey, maybe some who died as kids or who still act like kids will be resurrected as kids, or maybe we’ll be able to have kids apart from earthly sex, but I for one don’t need to be an adult for the rest of eternity, that’s for sure!

Regardless of what age we are there, everyone is considered one family, eternal brothers and sisters with Jesus, and children to God the Father (Hebrews 2:10-11, Revelation 21:7). We will not think of ourselves as the parents, children, spouses, or relatives that we were here; instead, far more strongly than you associate with these labels now, you will forever consider yourself a child of God and a brother or sister to everyone else. Our earthly marriages and family relationships were clearly *never meant* to persist there; they were meant *to teach us here*, to make sense of God’s eternal marriage to his people and the committed community we will have on the New Earth, in ways that we can tangibly and intimately understand now. Jesus’ rather surprising attitude toward his earthly family demonstrated how well he understood such eternal associations and lived according to them (Luke 2:41-50, Matthew 12:48-50, John 19:26-27). Perhaps Christians should do the same, as many of these permanent relationships have already begun. In fact, it is only when we are willing to maintain a healthy (not irresponsible) detachment from our earthly families that we will even find eternal life (Matthew 10:37-39, Mark 10:29-30, Luke 9:57-62)! Now we know why. Only then can we freely attach to a much greater forever family that is now—and always will be—ours. Only then can we pursue unhindered the community for which we were created in a healed hereafter.

So that’s the whole enchilada! By avoiding the use of continuity to extrapolate almost any characteristic of Heaven that we might want from the Bible, we’ve been able to biblically list everything definitively told to us about what the New Earth is like in less than five pages: what we’ll remember, where it will be, what we’ll be like, and who we’ll be with. And the best way to make these findings comprehensively tangible to you—while summarizing our comparison of a continuously familiar Heaven with the biblical New Earth—is to share

a story respectively describing someone's first day in each one.

13

This is a story about Jera. On earth, Jera accepted God's solution of Jesus when she was in college and went on to get her PhD in Biology. She was married but then divorced when her husband left to live with his new girlfriend. She had a miscarriage while married, and was never able to become pregnant otherwise. Three years after the divorce, she adopted two Ethiopian sibling daughters, orphaned from infancy. Jera's brother was mentally normal but had severe skeletal deformities from birth and was quite dependent, so she loved and respected her parents tremendously for caring for him, but it had now been a year since all three of them had died and left her behind. As Jera was bringing her kids to junior high one day, a woman ran a red light and hit them. There were no survivors (since we're only concerned with the New Earth/Heaven in this story, we'll skip over these folks' existence in Sheol/Hades and judgment day).

Jera looks up in awe, as before her sits God the Father. Finally accessible to humanity as God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were previously, he welcomes her to a *continuous* Heaven! She sees her younger daughter, and they embrace with joy. Then God introduces her to an older child, who looks almost exactly like Jera—the daughter she miscarried. Elated, Jera runs up to hold her and just can't let her go. The Holy Spirit fills her with joy; could things be any better? Well, actually they could. Jera's adopted daughter watches the scene happily, but *she* doesn't look like Jera, and she's certainly not comfortably familiar with sharing mom with a look-alike who mom loves a little too much. Where is the mom *she* looks like to come and hold *her*? Moreover, the experience reminds her of the Bible's teaching that she will never be able to marry, have sex, or likely have a daughter of her own. This wasn't the Heaven that she had looked forward to! She turns to her *real* older sister for comfort, but no one is nearby. To the three of them, God explains that unlike her, her sister was five weeks

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past the age of accountability for automatic salvation, and since she hadn't accepted the gospel, she was in Hell. This news is unexpected.

Now less elated—but still perfectly happy of course—Jera and the girls decide that they need some fresh air. As Jera walks she notices the familiar sights and sounds of the continuous New Earth and anticipates the familiar comfort of her earthly life. She smiles as she passes the field where she loved to play as a kid, well, except for when those girls used to bully her to tears there. Pushing that memory aside, she rounds the corner to find something she knows that she'll enjoy, the refuge of her beloved childhood house! But it's not there. Instead, an older couple is sitting on the porch of a small new house, who Jera remembers as the people her dad sold the property to when she was in college. Her dad had told her that they would keep the house, but apparently he and Jera had been misinformed, as a new one had obviously been built in its place.

Surprised—but still perfectly happy of course—she realizes that the New Earth must be continuous from the time she died, rather than from her childhood, so they move on. But the return to familiarity doesn't get any better as they walk by the tree under which her mom had called to inform her of her brother's death, and then the park where she discovered her ex-husband's betrayal, and then the road on which the accident recently separating her from her older adopted daughter occurred. Here there is no wreck—no car wreck that is—but she turns her eyes elsewhere anyway. Unfortunately, they happen upon a couple very much in love, having a picnic with their three biological children. It is Jera's ex-husband and Patti, the girlfriend he went on to marry. Although glad that they apparently made things right with the Lord, Jera is not at all interested in approaching them for many reasons. However, wherever else she looks, she only sees delighted, smiling parents with all their children, as well as large groups of friends, laughing and hugging in a blissful reunion which goes on for what seems like an eternity. Finally, a few of them notice Jera and ask her and her daughters to come over. At this point, she's not even sure if she wants that. But they warmly greet her, and the distraction is welcome. However, because these folks know each other so well, unfamiliar family stories and inside jokes dominate the

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conversation, leaving Jera's relatively memory-scarce family out of the loop even as they stand within it. Her biological daughter feels it most keenly, as she has no earthly memories to enjoy with others here at all. But Jera recalls that pretty much the only thing that most people on earth looked forward to in Heaven was being reunited with loved ones, so she tolerates being the unintentional but inevitable lesser priority that she will be to them. None of these folks are married now, since that won't happen on the New Earth, but they might as well be, given the degree of time that they have been looking forward to and will be spending with each other. But Jera is not the only one who tolerates being a lesser priority. Because of differing memories regarding their relationships, those who married or remarried several times are not interacting with all of their spouses and children with equal eagerness or with equal amounts of time, and some wait a long time for only a short time of reuniting. Jera particularly identifies with the wives who had no children, as they watch their earthly spouse play ecstatically with another woman's kids.

Non-plussed—but still perfectly happy of course—she excuses herself and decides to find the people in Heaven who, like her, weren't surrounded by other Christians on earth. Thankfully, she spots someone she does know, and a dear friend at that, a woman named Anita who was Jera's counselor after her painful divorce. Although they hadn't seen each other in years, they smile as they meet, and when Jera shares that her experience so far has been different than expected, Anita leads her to a large crowd of folks on a nearby hill, all of whom seem to be just getting to know each other, with no families or couples evident. Here are the folks who couldn't bring their social circle with them to Heaven! Like those who have made earthly memories virtually only with other Christians, it makes sense for those who don't or couldn't make such memories to flock together, but this heavenly segregation is still disarming to Jera. Nonetheless, she and her daughters recognize that this—if any—is the group for them, so they waste no time in relationship building. This proves to be a challenge though, as many people Jera meets continuously arrived in the New Earth far less educated and socially mature as her, and conversation is limited to less stimulating and sophisticated



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subject matter than she is used to. This is unanticipated, but they'll catch up with her eventually, and she'll take what she can get at this point. Besides, she had learned that Jesus was somewhere in this crowd! She is pointed in the direction of a thick ring of trees, so she sprints toward them ahead of everyone to embrace the savior she is so familiar with, who can make everything here the way she thought it was going to be! But as she bursts into the grove, she is stopped dead in her tracks, and a shock is sent down her spine. She is face to face with a white woolly beast with seven horns, seven eyes, and a gaping, mortal wound in its side. And it's not alone. Four other creatures, each with six wings and covered in eyes, encircle her, as well as wolves, leopards, lions, bears, and several snakes (Isaiah 11:6-9, Revelation 4:6-5:6). She glances around to look for other humans, but instead notices a variety of beings of all shapes and sizes walking into the grove. Every memory of nature documentaries and alien movies that didn't end so well for humans floods her mind, and she doesn't know whether to scream, bolt, or just give up. Then she hears Jesus' voice and realizes that he is the beast who looked as if it had been slain! That's not comfortably familiar; where is the guy with the flowing locks and blue sash who she was ready to hug? She's not so sure about hugging this Lamb.

Confused—but still perfectly happy of course—she hesitantly listens as Jesus shows her the many other races throughout the universe for whom God has also made a salvation plan available. Jera notices that these beings seem as confused as she is, as there is little on the New Earth that is comfortably familiar to them either. They're only here because God rather arbitrarily chose the New Earth, rather than a different planet, on which to dwell. Sympathizing with them, Jera's thoughts turn to her own memories of her previous life, particularly of the people she hasn't seen on the New Earth yet. She knows what this might mean, but she resolutely asks Jesus if she can see them anyway. Jesus leads her out of the grove to a huge cave where many are gathered around a large hole in the ground. To offer her support for what she is about to witness, he calls over a man who Jera recognizes as her brother! Relieved, she thanks Jesus profusely, and turns to chat with him, but then she sees that his continuous body is still

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deformed. He doesn't seem to mind, but it strikes her rather unfitting for a perfect place. But then again, so has just about everything else, including being able to look into Hell. As they do, sure enough, they see Jera's older adopted daughter in torment, along with a teenage boy. Judging by their similarity in looks, he must be her brother from Ethiopia whom Jera never got to meet. Lugg (see Booklet 3) doesn't exist for almost everyone who believes in a continuous Heaven, and apparently no missionary or adoptive parent was able to make it to him with the gospel. Either that or God assigned him to Hell before the creation of the world. This surprises the onlookers, and it stuns Jera's younger adopted daughter as she also peers down, but they are even less prepared for what they see next: both of Jera's parents in Hell. They are at a loss as they watch two loved ones, who had done so many good things, in an existence apart from God. But Jera slowly remembers that neither of their folks ever expressed a desire to know God and be with him; they always considered Heaven the endless vacation you would get if you did enough good deeds. Shocked, she and her brother let the news sink in. But as it does, they are even more surprised to find that they don't care! They are able to watch both Jera's daughter and their parents suffer agony without a single ounce of concern. Jera marvels at this, but she recalls being told once on earth that she wouldn't love people in Hell. Rather, their predicament would only remind her of how great the New Earth is, and being with Jesus would be so great that not even watching loved ones in Hell could dampen the spirit! Well, that must explain it then. Although the New Earth is less better than Hell than expected and although being with Jesus is not quite as great as planned, Jera is quite indifferent toward her family's suffering. But rather than helping her emotionally cope, the astonishing discrepancy between this indifference and her fond family memories is something that she just cannot reconcile in her mind.

Conflicted—but still perfectly happy of course—she immediately rushes to ask Anita for advice, a person who had never steered Jera wrong. Finding her on the other side of the circle, Jera shows Anita her daughter in Hell, and asks her to help make sense of things. But Anita, with sudden loss of color from her face, can only muster a few

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feeble, hesitant words in response. “Jera, that girl was in the car I hit just before I came here.” Silence. A very long silence. After seriously contemplating hurling herself into the hole, Jera knows that only one person can fix this now, and she runs as fast as she can back to Jesus, while her daughters, her brother, and Anita follow. “Jesus, please take my memory away! So much of what I remember is either wrong or causes what I can only describe as great suffering, even though that’s supposed to be impossible here. So much of what I thought would be comfortably familiar is either uncomfortable or unfamiliar. So much of what continuously carried over from earth only serves to remind me of the knowledge of evil I chose there. If this is an unmistakable place, then why do I still experience evil and why are there certain mistakes that I’d really like to commit right now? The only relationships that I have here where I do value memory, comfortable familiarity, and continuity are with my daughters, brother, and friend, and even those seem far from perfect!” Jesus responds by reminding her that in a continuous Heaven, memory and continuity must be maintained, so that God can victoriously restore the old earth into this new one, rather than suffering defeat to Satan by making everything new with a brand New Earth. The outcome of this contest seems exactly the opposite to Jera, but Jesus continues, offering to remove everything in her memory associated with evil and suffering, rather than completely starting fresh. She accepts, eager to restore the valued relationships that remain to her. POOF! Her daughters, her brother, and Anita arrive, and as Jera approaches, she is delighted to find no trace of favoritism, disappointment, or resentment within her. But as she engages in conversation with them to begin this restoration, she can no longer recall why these people are so important to her or make sense of the memories she does have of them. She doesn’t remember her miscarriage, so she doesn’t even know why her biological daughter is present. She has several good memories of her other daughter, but she can’t seem to string them together into a meaningful relationship, as many of these recollections would have never occurred and are nonsensical without memories of associated periods of suffering. And because the memories of her brother and Anita were nearly always associated with sickness or suffering, she

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can barely remember anything about them at all! So now she has in many ways lost these relationships as well. With as much mourning and crying and pain that she can imagine without being able to experience mourning and crying and pain, she is forced to start over, realizing in the end how much better it would have been to have simply done so in the first place.

Is that the kind of Heaven we truly want? Is that the kind of Heaven God would ever create? Those who strongly embrace continuity might object to this tale, claiming—and hoping—that the New Earth won't be anything like this, because God will somehow make all these pitfalls go away! But how? By perfecting our permanently continuous memories of imperfection? Memory is suffering, and suffering is memory. If you remove suffering, you must remove memory, as well as the continuity that is inseparable from it. You *have* to start over. And if you find yourself searching for an impossible way to begin perfectly anew while maintaining continuous memory, ask yourself *why*. Why is it so important to remember everything about this life when there is no biblical or logical impetus to do so? What is it about this particular 80-year period—out of all the millennia that you will exist—that should force Heaven to be just like it? Why can't perfect community with God and others be present without continuity? After all, there was no continuity the only *other* time such community existed! If Adam and Eve didn't need memories of some prior existence to experience an immaculate relationship with God and each other, then neither will we. And why, if a continuous Heaven is the true biblical Heaven, don't God's words just directly tell us *even once* that we will remember our earthly lives, that we will recognize our loved ones there, and that all will be comfortably familiar? Surely, if God had wanted to, he could have easily added one clear and concise sentence to the Bible, proving his purpose of continuity and putting to rest everything we've discussed that speaks against it. But he doesn't want to, so he doesn't do that. He knows how Hellish a Heaven that's limited to merely our experience and memories on earth can truly be.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how an earth/Hell/Heaven fusion or continuous Heaven would avoid becoming like Hell. We are told

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that in such Heavens sin will be “prohibited and removed”<sup>129</sup> and that “our eternal inability to sin *has* been purchased by Christ’s blood,”<sup>130</sup> but we are not told how this is possible. The New Earth cannot be unmistakable if “there has to be the option, both now *and then*, to not love. To turn the other way. To reject the love extended. To say no.” “God *always* leaves room for the other to decide.”<sup>131-132</sup> And if the New Earth will be unmistakable because Christ’s sacrifice *has* made us unable to sin, then why do we still sin now? Every current Christian already “*has* been purchased by Christ’s blood,” so why do we continue to know evil? Because when Jesus “made perfect forever those who are being made holy,” he did so by removing their guilt in God’s sight, so that he considers their admission into the New Earth justified (Hebrews 10:14). Quite obviously, unless there are any perfect Christians out there I don’t know about, this justification does not remove our ability to repeatedly sin and produce substantial suffering, either here or on the New Earth. In contrast, God *will* remove it on his New Earth, a place that makes perfect sense. Because of the many teachings and bibles we’ve used *the* Bible to dismiss throughout this book, for many of you, Hell had been anything but understandable and Heaven anything but unmistakable. I earnestly hope this is no longer the case. Let’s be satisfied with God’s New Earth, and we will be relieved to find the superbly freeing, immaculately perfect, unmistakable place we were created for! Let’s let God’s words about the New Earth heal Jera’s hereafter, shall we?

## 14

Jera looks up in awe, as before her sits God the Father. Finally accessible to humanity as God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were previously, he welcomes her to the *discontinuous* New Earth! She looks around and sees many others looking just as amazed. Then as he did with Adam and Eve, God gives her the ability to understand his words, explains who he is, and unveils that he has created her for the purpose of eternal, perfect community with him and everyone

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else who desires the same. He reveals that during the first part of her existence, she believed in, was divinely confirmed in, and persistently acted upon her desire to seek and find this community, just like everyone else around her. He clarifies that not all of her actions or their actions were consistent with this faith, and that as a result, all of them had experienced a time that was far worse than the experience awaiting them, which made them want this community even more. Because they had previously proven that they would ruin whatever perfect community that they were in and because they had never completely stopped wanting to know what such ruination was like, the time had to come when that part of their existence had to end, and after that, they could only forever exist in a place completely without this community and the God that inhabits it. But God was not about to abandon his purpose for them, so he came to live among them as a person named Jesus to undeservedly experience that end in their place, to free them from the consequence of that end, and to prove his ability to do so. God tells Jera that he made this known to her to believe once he was convinced of her faith that his stated purpose, solution, and life for her was achievable and optimal. By the permission of this faith, God had removed her ability to ruin perfect community with him ever again. As Jera looks around to soak in the newness, wonder, and beauty of everything that she can see, she confirms that she would never want to ruin it, is exceedingly glad that she can't, and is exquisitely overjoyed that God created her at all, let alone that he was willing to go to such great lengths so that she could be here! She wanted to be here with him, and because of that, she is!

God goes on to explain that everyone there has only just arrived, all at the same time. He calls this perfect community between him and his people marriage, a glimpse of which was often seen between two humans previously. He describes the concepts of family and friends, groups of people who by birth or circumstance are perfectly committed to caring about each other and providing for each other, glimpses of which were also experienced by humans previously. Then he turns her attention to every single person present, and declares with great satisfaction that they are all forever married to him, and

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that they are all forever in the same single family and forever in the closest group of friends. Needless to say, the news is well-received by all, and they all literally shine as the Holy Spirit fills them with joy! From this point the story could go in one of two directions, and the Bible does not tell us which. God might ask Jera if she wants to know who her family and friends previously were. If she says yes, then God could introduce her to or give her recognition of those people—as long as they also wanted to know—and perhaps even some information about them. He probably wouldn't say how they were related to her, as that would lead to comparisons and inequality, and he certainly wouldn't mention any experiences that involve or could lead to suffering. Of course, merely being able to recognize more people than someone else there, despite having no memory of them, could be perceived as inequality and potentially cause suffering. Therefore, God might not give Jera that option at all, and she would certainly not be any worse off for it. If this is the case, then Jera would experience life on the New Earth from a totally clean slate, having no way to discriminate between people or places that she either knew before or didn't. Obviously, with no memory or details concerning her earthly life, we needn't follow that path any further, as the events in her eternity would unfold unpredictably without any constraint of continuity. Instead, we will follow her down the first path, both because it highlights important comparisons with the continuous Heaven of the first story and because it gives us a more intricate view of what information may and may not be available in the discontinuous Heaven. Let me make it clear that some of what follows is speculation, but these suggestions are never antagonistic to the Bible and do nothing more than reflect the impartiality, love for children, creativity, omnipotence, and transformation of human suffering that *does* characterize God in his words.

So God asks Jera if she wants to know who her family and friends previously were, and Jera says yes. He introduces her to two women, who she does not know were her biological and younger adopted daughters. God tells her how much she loved both of them and gave of herself for their well-being. The three of them feel equally satisfied by this news and embrace one another, with no jealousy or sense

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of lost opportunity at all. God tells them that they will meet others in a similar fashion as they explore the New Earth. But they have no reminiscing to do with each other or details to catch up on, and all three of them would rather simply spend some time with God to learn more about him together. That's why they're here after all! They have a delightful conversation with him and learn so much about how he went about preparing this place and what things they might do there with him and with each other. He explains the concept of being their father and them being his children. With a slightly mischievous smile, he asks the two daughters if they would like to experience that more directly. Jera's biological daughter says yes, and suddenly she is much smaller, assumes more petite features, and starts acting strangely silly! He tells Jera that she may try this whenever she likes, but for now she's fascinated enough observing it. God the Father then encourages them to find Jesus to learn more about this whole family thing. They have no great impetus to leave his presence, but there were many things he had told them of that would be interesting to explore, so they get up to take a walk. Before they leave the New Jerusalem, God invites them to eat from the tree of life and drink from the water of life. They do, and it tastes *most* refreshing!

Perfectly happy of course, they encounter landscapes and buildings that bear no specific resemblance to any place or time on earth. They are free to make whatever perfect memories they want in any one of these places, without them being tainted by any past evil or misinformation. As they pass fields, trees, houses, and roads, they enjoy conversation with each other, but without any memories to make their relationships seem more significant than with others, they indifferently branch off into conversations with random people going the same way. When they reach a large gathering, they stop to do some people watching. Jera recognizes a man, her ex-husband, as someone she knew and realizes that God has informed her that she was very close to him. He is with an unrecognizable woman and their kids, who have chosen to appear as children, just like Jera's biological daughter. The man recognizes Jera too and beckons her over, introducing everyone to her. Knowing nothing of the hatred and pain that plagued them before, they have a lovely conversation about how



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wonderful it is to be forgiven by God and welcomed to a place where they don't need to worry about ruining anything or anyone now. Jera and Patti hit it off in particular, as they discover how similar their personalities are. They decide to do more exploring together, so they bid adieu to the man, and Jera laughs—instead of cries—as she watches the three children roughhouse with him. Almost immediately they meet up with a third woman, but Jera does not remember her, since Anita preferred to not recognize those from the first part of her existence. This trio, an anomaly anywhere except the discontinuous Heaven, finds itself so enraptured in girl gab that they don't get their bearings until they are in the very center of the crowd. And what a gathering, with people of many different skin colors, body shapes, and clothing preferences! Every now and then moments of recognition are noticeable, as with Jera and her ex-husband, but as no one is particularly attached to anyone else, no conversation contains the same group of people for long. No one commands attention, as there is no recollected human standard of beauty to be drawn toward, only the one that God universally used to create every one of their resurrected bodies. Since everybody is starting from square one, there are too many ideas, learning opportunities, and interesting topics of conversation for any one discussion. Moreover, no one knows more or is able to better communicate a perspective, so everyone's opinion is equally welcome. There is no reason for anyone to feel jealous, alone, or of lesser priority. And when word has spread that Jesus himself is somewhere near, they all immediately end their conversations to find him. They would much rather see him than spend time with any other human. That's why they're here, after all!

Jera discovers sooner than most that Jesus is in a grove of trees. Sprinting into the midst of them ahead of the others, she is suddenly overwhelmed by wonder! Before her is a woolly creature with seven eyes and horns, as well as a deep groove in only one side. Having no recollection of nature documentaries or horror movies, she considers this one of the coolest things she's seen yet, much like many of us do when we see a really unique creature for the first time. But when she looks around, she sees so many more wonderfully unique beasts. God had described animals to her, but her imagination had not done them

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justice! There were large, graceful creatures with big hairy necks or spots all over, fascinating legless squiggly things on the ground, and four beasts completely discontinuous from earth right next to her, with six wings and eyes everywhere. She was wondering how many more of God's amazing creations she could learn about when to her astonishment the woolly creature speaks, identifying itself as Jesus. Having no memory of flannelgraphs or medieval art, she flings her arms around his neck in gratitude for allowing her into this beautiful place! He smiles and tells her to look up. For the first time she beholds the new heavens, and marvels at the numerous round objects punctuating the deep blue backdrop, celestial bodies like but unlike the old discarded moon, stars, and planets of this current creation. Jesus informs her that on some of these planets are even more beings, ones made in the image of God like humans, who have also been saved. They are on their New Planets—as one would expect—and God is equally present with them, as they are also part of the family. Of course, Jera can go visit them anytime, and as fun as becoming a child was to watch, this opportunity excites her even more! But Jesus has something else to show her first. Jera follows, chuckling at the creature making a mooing sound contentedly next to the one with the hairy neck. What will God come up with next?

As they step out of the grove, she immediately recognizes a man walking toward them, free of any deformity or dysfunction. Jesus tells them both that they knew each other for a very long time and were dear to each other. He describes a joke that they would tell each other that made them laugh so hard that they couldn't breathe. It's still just as funny. Jera's brother tells her about the mountains that he looks forward to hiking and the lakes that he can't wait to swim in, and Jera recounts the skies and their undiscovered wonders. While they enthusiastically digress, they don't notice Jesus staring up at a large cave, where angels encircle a hole in the ground. With a look that encompasses nearly every conceivable emotion, he knows that the parents of these two are in Gehenna, despite dedication to their son. Without faith that God's purpose for them, God's solution for them, and God's Heaven for them were the best, they desired—and found—the place they consider to be better. God had done everything he

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could to help them, but they wanted an existence apart from him—one where they could be gods and determine what was best. So it had to be, or no one could freely choose an existence with him and his best either.

However, Jera's other family members fared differently. The older adopted daughter and her brother, along with Jera's biological daughter, had all gone to Lugg. The first hadn't had as equal an exposure to the gospel on earth as others, the second had been geographically isolated from the gospel, and the third hadn't lived long enough to have any access to the gospel at all. Jesus keenly remembered visiting Lugg three separate times to fairly share God's solution with them, and all three had demonstrated the faith to accept it! Rather than being judged according to the criteria of age or missionary exposure, they were judged justly, like every other human. Even Jera's youngest daughter was not saved automatically. Her faith was apparent to God just weeks before she died, and her own mother's perseverance in teaching her children about their savior made it possible for the girl to use that faith to accept the gospel. And here they all come! Jera's daughters had happened upon the adopted one's older siblings, and the four of them are now immensely enjoying their new resultant friendships. Never for a moment does Jera's biological daughter feel any different than the others. As Jesus introduces himself—since they couldn't remember the first time he had done so in Lugg—they jump on him and begin a raucous celebration! This gets the attention of Jera and her brother, and she is newly and gratefully taught by God about her third daughter. Many others from the crowd have finally located Jesus as well and rush toward him. The angels are now in front of the cave, brandishing instruments of all kinds, including a hip-hop harp ensemble! But it is God's voice that is first heard, singing a melody so powerful, so beautiful, and so moving that none can resist being swept into the song. There is great danger of a massive dance party threatening to bust out. Just before it does, Jera glances past the angels, but her eyes only behold the face of a cliff, off which bounce the angel's vibes, human harmonies, the Father's song, and Jesus' laugh. As Patti her betrayer and Anita her slayer pull her into the dance, Jera grins at her new perfect

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family-friends, and she never thinks to look up that way again.

That, my friends, is the biblical, Godmade Heaven, centered around his fulfilled purpose of perfect, eternal community between him and his own. God both anticipates and then annihilates whatever doubt remains that he has the best Heaven in mind! “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” God is “making everything new!” “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. *But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create*” (Revelation 21:4-5, Isaiah 65:17-18). Count me in! That, my friends, is a healed hereafter.

## 15

Well, we’ve trudged through Hell, soared through Heaven, and now it’s time to come down to earth. In Chapters 35-36, the first question raised by the concept of a perfect Heaven led us to answer why Hell is not temporary, but understandable. In Chapters 37-47, the second question raised by this Heaven finally led us to answer why Heaven is not continuous, but unmistakable. The third and final question raised by an unmistakable Heaven leads us to answer why we should even have to worry about Hell and Heaven here and now! If in Heaven God can make us with free will—except for the choice to sin and know evil—why didn’t he do that from the get-go and save us all? If that’s his way of keeping Heaven perfect, why wasn’t that his way of keeping the garden of Eden perfect? It’s a good question, but there’s a simple answer, and it offers us a great opportunity to summarize nearly our whole framework! God’s purpose for humans is for us to reach out for him and find eternal, perfect community with him. He had to give us free will so that we could truly engage in a meaningful relationship with him, genuine

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individuals choosing to know him and his goodness, not merely puppets doing his bidding. This free will had to include the option to not know God, to know what is not God, to sin and know evil. God could not possibly know if we freely desired to be in perfect community with him unless we were able to freely choose not to. This is why the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *had* to be in the garden of Eden, and it is why the choice to know God and his goodness or not God and evil must be given to all humans.

God can make Heaven unmistakable by removing its inhabitants' ability to sin and know evil because their faith and deeds have already proven a growing relationship with him that freely desires such perfect community. "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:10-12). Where is the only place that everyone knows God? Heaven. The people there want God to keep heaven perfect by making them unable to sin, and God knows it. But if he had removed our ability to sin and know evil way back in the garden of Eden, we would never have had the free choice to choose that relationship with him in the first place. God could never have known who truly wanted perfect community with him, and his purpose for us would have been thwarted. Sure, we would have been able to use our free will in many other ways, as we will be able to in Heaven. But concerning our ability to choose God or choose not God—which is the primary purpose for our free will in the first place—we'd still just be puppets, wouldn't we? Humans have to have the free will now to ultimately choose God and his goodness or sin and evil before God can know which of them desire to have their ability to sin removed in Heaven, right?

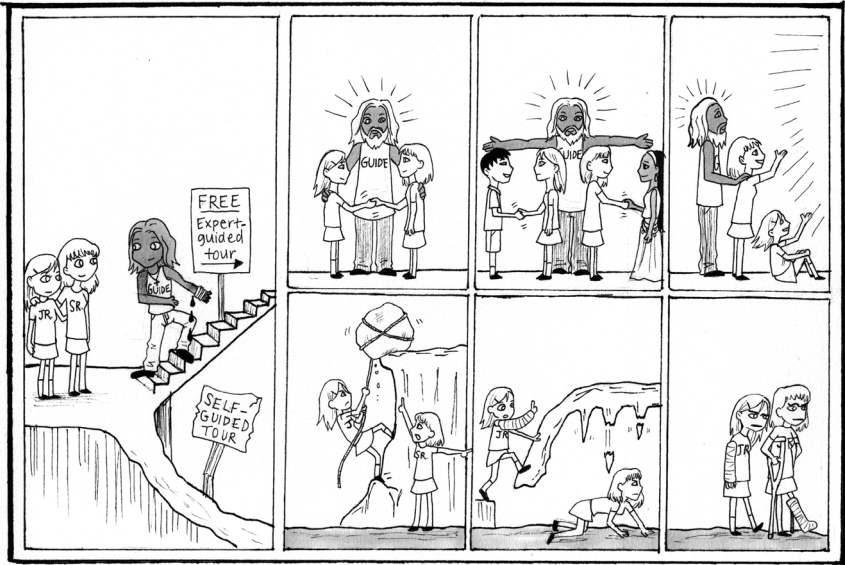
In fact, this is the whole point of our existence from the time that our physical life begins to the time that our eternal fate is decided: to use our free will to make this ultimate choice! If in the garden God had given us free will, except the ability to sin, there would be no reason for our earthly existence at all, unless this planet

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was humanity's eternal destination. Likewise, there is no reason for our earthly existence if everyone is saved, or if God chooses who is saved and who is not. We might as well have started our existence in Heaven or Hell in those cases, since our lives here wouldn't in any way affect which of the two we end up in. Throughout this book these two frameworks have consistently failed to answer many important questions, and here near the end they fall flat yet again. In contrast, if our free will to choose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to choose God or not God, factors into our eternal destination—and it does—then we have the best of all reasons to be here before we go there. God has to make us mistakable before we can demonstrate who of us desire to be made unmistakable in the healed hereafter of Heaven. And now is the time for us to decide.

God lets us all have our cake and eat it too. Each of us chooses a fate—one far more significant than leaving AMA—and experiences the resultant outcome. For him to accomplish his purpose for us and for us to be able to exist in perfect community with him, this outcome must be eternal. There must be a forever Hell for there to be a forever Heaven.

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Two potential paths lie before a close-knit mother and daughter, and they must now decide between them. By opting for an existence where they each can guide their own course—apart from a higher authority who knows best—they would experience the Hell of each being her own god and each resolutely doing everything her own way. They maintain the continuity of their earthly relationship, but it is marred by each only accepting her own authority, to the detriment of both. Because their minds are fixed on self-pursuit and because no one greater than them exists on their path to divine a way out, they willingly force themselves to perpetually continue on. In contrast, by opting to submit to Jesus' guidance and authority, they would experience the Heaven of community with God—finally including God the Father—and perfect assimilation of his best. They cannot maintain the continuity of their imperfect earthly relationship, but after being introduced to each other, they can easily achieve and surpass the quality of their former closeness anyway—and without the former baggage. Without distraction from either family/friend reunions or any memories of prejudice and inequality, they waste no time in building relationships with the broad diversity of individuals God greatly enjoys filling the New Earth with. All who choose this path are made unmistakably free to enjoy perfect, eternal community together with God in a Heaven greater than anything imaginable.

## Notes

1. Galli, M. (2011). *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 138-139.
2. Wiese, B. (2010). *23 Questions About Hell: Everything You Want—and Need—to Know!* Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, p. 59.
3. Chan, F., Sprinkle, P. (2011). *Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, p. 134.
4. Galli, M. (2011). *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 125.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
6. Chan, F., Sprinkle, P. (2011). *Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, p. 13.
7. Galli, M. (2011). *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 66.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-129.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
10. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 25.
11. Wiese, B. (2010). *23 Questions About Hell: Everything You Want-and Need-to Know!* Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, pp. 60-61.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
13. "Sterizo". *Strong's Greek Lexicon*. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.eliyah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&index=4741>
14. "Sterizo". *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 1940. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=STHRI%2FZW>
15. "Sterizo". *GreekBible.com*. 2010. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: [http://www.greekbible.com/l.php?sthri/zw\\_v-3xpi-s--\\_p](http://www.greekbible.com/l.php?sthri/zw_v-3xpi-s--_p)



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16. Lewis, C.S. (1946). *The Great Divorce*. New York, NY: Touchstone, p. 56.
17. Ibid., p. 16.
18. Ibid., p. 30.
19. Bell, R. (2011). *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 108.
20. Lewis, C.S. (1996). *The Problem of Pain*. New York, NY: Touchstone, p. 114.
21. Lewis, C.S. (1946). *The Great Divorce*. New York, NY: Touchstone, p. 118.
22. Bell, R. (2011). *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 173.
23. Ibid., p. 107.
24. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p.31.
25. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 160.
26. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 159.
27. Ibid., p. 71.
28. Ibid., p. 141.
29. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, p. 144.
30. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 346.
31. Perhaps by now it's becoming much clearer why God would want humans to experience a Heaven of relearning rather than remembering. But what about God's experience in Heaven? Won't he eternally remember our lives on earth and all the suffering associated with them? If he can remember this in a perfect Heaven, then why can't we? No doubt, whether presently in the current heaven or later on the New Earth, God's memory of history will remain (1 Chronicles 16:15, Psalm 105:8, 111:5, 112:6). Indeed,

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it's hard to imagine how it couldn't, unless he would voluntarily choose to forget things like our sin (Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:41, Hebrews 8:12, 10:17). But unlike the case of granting humans free will to make possible the fulfillment of his purpose for us, he has no need to limit his omniscience this time.

The current heaven is and the New Earth will be perfect for God because he knows how every episode of human evil and suffering will be transformed by him into something better than what would have happened otherwise. Remember that God's response to our suffering is to persistently work to bring healing from hurt, so that instead of being left with the status quo—as humans would if he just removed suffering—he constantly labors to leave humans better off after suffering than we were before. He doesn't force us to sin or want us to suffer, but every time we do, he knows that there will be an eventual net gain to humanity and he knows how it will be accomplished. You might think that anyone going to Hell would be an exception to this net gain, but it is not for two reasons. First, when a person dies having rejected the gospel, there is a great deal of good that God can do within other humans in reaction to that. Many have improved their lives and the lives of others dramatically after being confronted with the reality and consequences of losing someone who did not know God. But more importantly, the ability to choose Hell itself is one of the most prominent examples of God creating a net gain out of a loss. How? If no one could ever go to Hell, then no one could ever meaningfully go to Heaven, because the free will to choose eternal perfect community with God could not exist. Ironically, every time a person chooses an existence without God is proof that God's purpose can be fulfilled for those that choose it to be. Because God can completely know how every human choice to know evil will bring about both the possibility and realization of a net gain of good in the end, Heaven remains perfect for him even as he recalls these choices and their consequences.

Our sin and its suffering do not taint the perfection of the current heaven or the New Earth for angels either, both for similar and different reasons. Although they don't possess God's

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omniscience regarding every single way that he brings gain out of grief, they themselves are often the very agents of that transformation! After all, in announcing the resurrection, God used an angel to convert Jesus' followers' bitter hopelessness into the greatest joy the world would ever know, did he not? And angels continue to be ministers of this net gain today (Matthew 28:2-8, Hebrews 1:14). As such, they have always been intimately aware of the good that God has been working through human suffering and can consider it positively, similar to the way that he can. And in some ways, even more so. Because God manifested himself as a human in Jesus, he does not merely sympathize with our grief, he has actually experienced it himself. No biblical angel has ever been human or personally endured the experience of evil that we have, and their very nature is entirely different and superior to ours (Psalm 8:4-5, Hebrews 2:6-8). Whether because they know how God is working through human suffering or because their superior minds and capabilities allow them to diminish its effect on them, we find no biblical examples of angels sharing in our grief, likely because they don't experience or understand it the way we do. Even the sacrificial act of Jesus' own suffering for us is a bit of a mystery to them (1 Peter 1:10-12)! This does not mean that they don't care about our lot; in fact, they do much to improve it! It simply means that they can interact with our grief much more neutrally than we do, as is evident when they deliver proclamations in rather businesslike fashion, despite the circumstances (Matthew 28:5-7, Revelation 16:1-6). So neither the current heaven nor the New Earth will be flawed for them because of human sin and suffering. We do not have—and we can never have—complete knowledge of every way that God has transformed evil into good. Not even angels possess that, and God would have to make us God in order for that omniscience to be possible. We also do not have even close to the longevity and intensity of experience that angels do in bringing this transformation to earth. Sure, we can relieve suffering in many ways, but none of us has been doing so on direct missions from God for thousands of years, like angels have!

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Moreover, our very nature, especially as it has been altered by immersion in imperfection, causes us to encounter hardship in the intensely emotional human way that we do. If God let any of us into the current heaven, our ability to observe, remember, and relive the suffering that would continue on earth would keep this heaven from being perfect to us, would it not? We would be experiencing a state of incomplete flawlessness, just like the reminiscent martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11. That's why the saved don't go to the current heaven when they die; they got to Paradise in Sheol/Hades! It is a place of peace, rest, and comfort, but not perfect peace, rest, or comfort, because it does not need to be (Isaiah 57:2, Luke 16:25). God does not make his perfect residence in Paradise; he makes it in the current heaven, and then on the New Earth (Ecclesiastes 5:2, Matthew 6:9, Revelation 21:1-3). In Paradise, the martyrs can still be frustrated, and Abraham and Lazarus can still observe the rich man agonizing in Tartarus. Some balk at any kind of imperfection in Paradise, but the only alternative they have is to transfer it to the current heaven, and that's much worse! Besides, if Paradise were perfect, or if the perfect current heaven were open to humans and could stay perfect with them there, then what would *be* the point of the New Earth? God gets sick of the cloud/harp motif and decides to remodel? Of course not! Any decorating connoisseur will tell you that the cloud/harp motif is eternally stylish! That and the Bible only teaches one perfect postmortem destination for humans at the second resurrection: the New Earth.

But it's not only the current heaven where God and angels can observe human suffering in perfection, while humans cannot. If we can't experience perfection there while being exposed to such grief, then we won't be able to on the New Earth either, will we? And this is exactly what we find in the Bible. In a place that can only be the New Earth, since Gehenna is inhabited at this time, only God and his angels are able to observe the torment that is occurring there (Revelation 14:9-11). Humans, although certainly present on the New Earth, are conspicuously absent from this exposure to human suffering, aren't they? Now you know why.

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They cannot observe, remember, or relive human sin and suffering if Heaven is to be perfect for them. They go directly from a great but imperfect Paradise where they do remember their earthly life to an awesome and perfect New Earth where they don't. It is the *human* exposure to *human* suffering that must be absent from an unmistakable Heaven, and any *human* memory of such event is exposure to knowing evil.

32. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 175.
33. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 361.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 362.
36. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, pp. 182-183.
37. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 344.
38. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 168.
39. (21 May 2005). "The Elevation of the Cross." Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Peter\\_Paul\\_Rubens\\_068.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_068.jpg)
40. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 131.
41. Ibid., p. 147.
42. Ibid., p. 166.
43. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 282.
44. Ibid., p. 82.
45. Ibid., p. 344.
46. Ibid., p. 428.
47. Ibid., p. 282.
48. Ibid., pp. 340-366.
49. Ibid., pp. 151-167.
50. Ibid., pp. 57-59.

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51. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, pp. 63-67.
52. Ibid., p. 61.
53. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 63.
54. Ibid., p. 134.
55. Some argue that the Bible will be on the New Earth for us to read and remember, since God's words are "eternal" and "will never pass away" (Psalm 119:89, Matthew 24:35).<sup>56</sup> However, this may simply mean that what God says stands, not that we'll be toting Bibles around on the New Earth. After all, reading the Bible there would remind us of people in Hell and expose us to the suffering of other memories, particularly those of the myriad biblical characters who experienced great evil on earth, like the martyrs in Hebrews 11:35-38 and Revelation 6:9-11! Moreover, what's the point of reading a book about God in Heaven while he stands right in front of us where we can get to know him directly? Not to mention that he will almost certainly have a lot more to tell us about himself than what's in the Bible! Also, whatever he wants us to know about the Bible he can easily inform us of right when we arrive. We'll still have God's words in Heaven—more than ever before—just not necessarily the exact ones he put in the Bible, which we will no longer need for anything. Unlike now, we'll have God to directly teach us. This may explain why the martyrs in the current heaven after the first resurrection are singing "the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb," which is not found anywhere else in the Bible, suggesting a composite title and lyrics pieced together from various tidbits *learned* from God about the Bible (Revelation 15:2-4).
56. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 324.
57. Russell, J.B. (2006). *Paradise Misaid: How We Lost Heaven and How We Can Regain It*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc, p. 10.

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58. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 57-59.
59. Ibid.
60. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 74.
61. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 68.
62. As we'll continue to see, incorrectly inferring recognition and remembrance of loved ones in Heaven is a common mistake among those who are overly eager to find evidence for continuity there beyond our names. When Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses died, each was "gathered to his people" (Genesis 25:8, 17, 35:29, 49:29-50:7, Deuteronomy 32:50). This phrase is an obvious reference to death or to the body being gathered to the surviving family members for burial, since that is exactly what promptly occurred in the first four cases. However, God buries Moses in Deuteronomy 34:5-6, so "gathered to his people" could also possibly refer to the passing of his spirit to the place where the spirits of his dead relatives had gone. These verses are used to argue for a reunion of families in the current heaven.<sup>63</sup> But even if we assume that "his people" does refer to dead relatives, nothing in these verses suggests that these men would recognize their relations. More importantly, we're never told that these men or their "people" went to the current heaven when they died. In fact, even if they'll all be in Heaven someday, we have every biblical reason to believe—and no biblical reason to reject—that these folks are all in Sheol/Hades now. And they're allowed to have a reunion there, because continuity is acceptable. No matter how you slice it, these verses offer zero evidence of continuous memory on the New Earth.
63. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 43.
64. Ibid., p. 160.
65. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, p. 144.

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66. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 342.
67. Ibid., p. 346.
68. Ibid., p. 342.
69. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 104.
70. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 475-479.
71. Ibid., p. 155.
72. Ibid., pp. 147-148.
73. Ibid., pp. 95-99.
74. Let me give you an example. "In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "people will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the people of Judah will join the people of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your ancestors as an inheritance" (Jeremiah 3:16-18). The majority of this passage clearly does refer to the New Earth, paralleling the New Earth descriptions in Isaiah 65:17-19 and Revelation 21:2-3, 24. But the return of the Jews from the north to the land of their ancestors and the increasing number of people there almost certainly refer to the Jews' reoccupation of Palestine after they were scattered in exile throughout Assyria and Babylon. We have no reason to believe that the Jews will be exiled anywhere north of Palestine immediately prior to the Millennium, so that's not a great option here. But the point is that regardless of the dual fulfillment of this prophecy, we can still learn something about the New Earth. As any scholar of the Bible or *Indiana Jones* lore knows, the ark of the covenant was the most important object that the Jews possessed, because it literally represented God's presence



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among them (Exodus 25:22). God actually hung out above the ark and talked to Moses and the high priests there (Numbers 7:89). The Israelites didn't move their camp unless the ark went with them, because bad things happened when the presence of God was not nearby (Number 14:43-45). It miraculously allowed the entire nation to finally enter the promised land after decades of wandering (Joshua 3:17). It symbolized the glory of the Jews, and it was the namesake for God's eternal covenant with them that they would always be his people (1 Samuel 4:22, Genesis 17:7).

Obviously, if there was any object on the current earth that God would choose to be continuous on the New Earth, it would be the ark, representing his presence, his power, his glory, his promise, and his purpose for us. And yet he tells us not just in one, but in *four different ways* in a *single verse* how the ark will not be present, remembered, missed, or remade! He knows that some Jews and all continuity proponents will find this news crushing, so he says it four times in a row to get his point across, just as he repeats his condemnation of continuity in Isaiah 65:17. And how do we know that this discontinuity will only occur on the New Earth, that this doesn't just refer to the ark being captured by enemies and lost? Well, the Jews would never forget the ark anyway; not even Hollywood did! But more importantly, guess where we see the ark last? In the current heaven! It's there in Revelation 11:19, even *after* the first resurrection! So where is the *only* place that such a significant artifact could possibly go absent and unremembered? No one's going to forget about it here, and no one's going to forget about it in the current heaven, where it will be present at least well into the apocalypse. Jeremiah's prophecy about the ark can *only* be fulfilled on the New Earth, which proves a gaping lack of continuity there! If God felt that it was so crucial to convince us that this most significant earthly object—embodying his presence, power, glory, promise, and purpose for us—would not exist or ever be remembered or missed on the New Earth, we should probably acknowledge the rest of his words that more broadly negate continuity as well. “See, I will create new

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Heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

75. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 151.
76. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 103.
77. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 513.
78. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 262.
79. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 331.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
81. In *Heaven*, an extremely popular book by “a leading authority on Heaven” as its cover claims, we are taught, “The notion that relationships with family and friends will be lost in Heaven, though uncommon, is unbiblical. It denies the clear doctrine of continuity between this life and the next and suggests that our earthly lives and relationships have no eternal consequence. It completely contradicts Paul’s intense anticipation of being with the Thessalonians and his encouraging them to look forward to rejoining their loved ones in Heaven.”<sup>82</sup> As per our prior discussion, *Heaven* calls a consistently biblical notion “unbiblical,” champions a “clear doctrine of continuity” that has virtually no scriptural support, berates and then ignores the Bible’s exposure of its many dubious arguments, and as we will see, offers no serviceable answer to how Heaven can be unmistakable! Not to mention that our plunge into Hell made it quite clear how much of an eternal consequence our earthly lives have!

Maybe this criticism seems harsh, but my purpose has always been for you to know what the biblical hereafter is and why it makes sense. If anything obstructs us from that purpose, I will not hesitate to let you know, especially since such misdirection is not inconsequential. There is a reason that the notion of a discontinuous Heaven is unpopular, and it has nothing to do

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with a lack of biblical consistency. Many of us *want* a continuous Heaven reminiscent of our current lives, or at least we think we do. All of our experience is limited to this physical life, and even if it hasn't been particularly great for some, it is still comfortably familiar. We naturally become so enveloped in this 80-year span of time that when we ponder whatever hereafter we might encounter someday, we primarily do so in terms of our life on earth. Instead of acknowledging that something far more healing, far more refreshing, and far more excitingly unmistakable awaits us, we limit Heaven to no more than that best that life on earth can be. And those who reinforce this idea in us are often successful, because they are telling us what we think we want to hear. They even acknowledge this as they do it! "Sometimes when we look at this world's breathtaking beauty...we feel a twinge of disappointment. Why? Because we know we're going to leave this behind. In consolation or self-rebuke, we might say, 'This world is not my home.' If we were honest, however, we might add, 'But part of me *sure wishes* it was.' What we really *want* is to live forever in a world with all the beauty and none of the ugliness." "As human beings, we *long* for home, even as we step out to explore undiscovered new frontiers. We *long* for the *familiarity* of the old, even as we *crave* the innovation of the new." "We love newness—yet in each case, what is new is attached to something *familiar*. We *don't really like* things that are utterly foreign to us. Instead, we *appreciate* fresh and innovative variations on things that we already know and *love*. So when we hear that in Heaven we will have new bodies and live on a New Earth, that's *how we should understand* the word new—a restored and perfected version of our *familiar* bodies and our *familiar* earth and our *familiar* relationships."<sup>83</sup> Your feelings favoring familiarity are drawn out, they are affirmed and reinforced, you are encouraged to *interpret God's words according to them*, and then you're offered a continuous Heaven that you are emotionally primed to accept.

And so we are promised, "If we would miss something from our old lives and the old earth, it would be available to us on the New Earth," because "God fashions us to want precisely what he

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will give us, so what he gives us will be exactly what we want.”<sup>84</sup> I’m quite certain that we’ve all wanted several things that God would never give us in Heaven and will never give us on earth, things he detests and commands against. And apparently God screwed up when he fashioned those of us who, for all the really good reasons above and below, *don’t* want a continuous Heaven! Hey, I know that it *seems* like a sweet deal. Aside from only sin and scarce few other exceptions, you can apparently have almost whatever you desire in *Heaven* that you enjoyed on earth. Miss the comfortable familiarity of your childhood pet ferret Stu? No problem. We are assured by *Heaven* that “all flesh will see God’s salvation,” so Stu would be waiting for you at the pearly gates (Luke 3:6)!<sup>85</sup> The only catch is that you have to believe in continuity before the Bible can be interpreted to support such continuity. “*If we believe*” that God “intends to restore his creatures from the bondage they experienced because of our sin, *then we have biblical grounds* for not only wanting but also expecting that we may be with them again on the New Earth.”<sup>86</sup> Never mind that—as we will see in Chapter 10—no one can explain exactly why human sin puts Stu in bondage, why the non-ferret human sacrifice of Jesus fixed Stu’s bondage, or why this interpretation doesn’t champion universalism, not just for all humans, but all animals! Even mosquitoes! Only submission to beliefs that we think we want, like widespread continuity, can mysteriously transition us—in only a few pages—from “Humans continue to exist after death, but that may not be the case for animals” to “we have every reason to expect animals will find their ultimate home on the New Earth” to “*if it would please us* to have a pet restored to the New Earth, that may be sufficient reason” for God to do so!<sup>87-89</sup> Why stop where the Bible does when the magic word “Continuity!” can take you from admitting that what you want may not exist to claiming that it certainly does exist to proposing that you can have it on demand? Only by emotionally extrapolating the Bible’s words do we arrive at a continuous best-of-earth Heaven—one that offers so much less than what God’s does.

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82. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 351-352.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 398.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
90. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 73.
91. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 106.
92. As an example, some use the flood in Noah's time, which occurred to allow the human race a moral do-over after an essentially universal rejection of following God.<sup>93</sup> Obviously, not only humans were caught up in this deluge, but "with them the animals, birds, and creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 6:5-7). Likewise, after the flood, God includes "every living creature on the earth," not just humans, in his covenant promising that no future flood would be used to destroy the planet (Genesis 9:8-17). Therefore, it is argued that since God's flood judgment involving both humans and creation was at least partly accomplished without discontinuity or annihilation of the earth, it is also true that his final judgment will be accomplished without discontinuity or annihilation of the earth. However, the Bible repeatedly demonstrates—as we'll find in Chapter 10—that non-human creation was not the ultimate object of any curse or restoration during the flood; rather, it passively but inevitably would be affected by any disaster so severely depleting the human population. Even those who make the above argument admit that humans and their wickedness are clearly the objects of God's regret and watery judgment, the evildoers God purged the earth of before he could start over.<sup>94</sup> God only mentions the participation of non-human creation in passing—almost as an afterthought—because it is clearly not an evildoer that can be purged (Genesis 6:7). God is not punishing

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non-human creation for human sin; he simply does not hesitate to alter plant life, animal life, and even the entire planet in whatever way he wants in order to accomplish his purposes for humans. As creation's maker and master, he has the right to do so. And it is not unreasonable for him to do so if our assertion in Booklet 2 is correct that non-human physical beings are not spirited, free-willed, organisms made in God's image, since they have neither a self to make them truly aware of what is happening to them nor the ability to will it to stop, only to instinctively and reflexively react.

This explains why God deals with non-human creation as he does throughout the Bible. He considers it good, provides for it, and cares about it, but his intervention in human affairs always takes priority over it (Genesis 1:26-31, Psalm 147:8-9, Matthew 10:29-31, Leviticus 1:1-7:38, Mark 5:1-20). During the flood, creation was a passive and incidental participant, with many marine organisms benefiting, land animals not so much, and every creature just as allegedly "fallen" after the flood as they were before it. Not only is it perplexing to claim that a deluge wiping out almost all terrestrial creatures constituted any sort of past restoration for non-human creation, God never connects the flood to any future restoration of non-human creation either! Instead, he repeatedly connects the flood to future restoration of *humans* and future *destruction* of non-human creation! All six times the Bible mentions the flood in relation to God's final judgment or salvation, it is only *people* who are being restored, not creation (Isaiah 54:9-10, Luke 17:22-30, Hebrews 11:7, 1 Peter 3:18-22, 2 Peter 2:1-10, 3:6-9). In fact, both the first and last of these passages confirm that God's desire is to eventually save his people, not along with creation, but *in spite of* creation being destroyed. "To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the *mountains be shaken and the hills be removed*, yet my unfailling love for you will not be shaken" (Isaiah 54:9-10). Such geologic upheaval is reminiscent of the annihilation Isaiah already

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- predicted earlier in his book, one that will necessitate the creation of “new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 24:17-21, 2 Peter 3:10-13). Therefore, instead of “as we go, so goes the earth,”<sup>95</sup> the more biblical teaching is “as we go to our forever home, so goes this earth to its final end.”
93. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 73.
  94. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
  95. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
  96. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
  97. (22 Jul 2009). “It’s Not a Toomah!” Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaTO8\\_KNcuo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaTO8_KNcuo)
  98. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 188.
  99. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
  100. Lewis, C.S. (1996). *The Problem of Pain*. New York, NY: Touchstone, pp. 113-128.
  101. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 178.
  102. A New Testament corollary to this discontinuity is the absence of the sea on the New Earth (Revelation 21:1). Now we can at least partially explain *why* this seemingly random and unexpected restriction exists. Throughout history the sea has represented a significant source of human suffering, so much so that it is specifically listed as an abode of the dead in the Bible and in our literature as Davy Jones’ locker (Revelation 20:13). This experience of evil obviously persists as hurricanes continually ravage the Atlantic coastline and tsunamis flood Pacific shores, not to mention all of the smaller storms and marine accidents that occur. It has been argued that this connection between the sea and human suffering or death should lead us to interpret “sea” figuratively in Revelation 21:1, that on the New Earth there is no longer any death instead of there being “no longer any sea.” However, the sea is not a figurative metaphor for death like the Grim Reaper; it is a literal, actual cause of death! And the context of this verse supports a literal interpretation of “sea” as well. Throughout the

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entire chapter John is staring straight at the New Earth, giving us a very detailed physical description of it, noting the lack of a sea along with the number of gates in the New Jerusalem, the exact stones and inscriptions associated with its foundations, and its precise dimensions! The sea is physically absent, and God at least partially seems to eliminate it from the New Earth because humans would continue to suffer from it.

The continuity proponent has no explanation for the ocean's omission. The sea's harm to mankind would be considered a result of the curse, causing marine infestation by sin's evil ether. On the New Earth that curse would be lifted, so the sea would no longer be infected by sin. Why then would it need to be removed? And because it will be removed, how is a sea-lacking New Earth continuous with our current planet anyway, 70% of which is covered by oceans (Revelation 21:1)? How could God possibly make the New Earth any less continuous than by removing the most prominent thing on it? Moreover, if there are no seas, then how can sea creatures be continuous on the New Earth? The Bible never tells us that they are or that they need to be. It is only the continuity devotee who has to worry about the suffering that results from the memory in Heaven of beloved creatures that no longer exist. "We won't regret leaving all the wonders of the world...because we will yet be able to see them."<sup>103</sup> Except the sea, as well as other wonders like apparently the sun and moon (Revelation 21:23, 22:5). The insistence that "all we love about the old earth will be ours on the New Earth"—except our unsaved loved ones, for example—forces folks to argue that God will make all saltwater creatures freshwater!<sup>104-105</sup> A discontinuous earth is free of such complications.

103. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 248.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

108. Wright, N.T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, p. 60.



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109. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 96.
110. Ibid., p. 102.
111. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 187.
112. Ibid., p. 207.
113. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 108.
114. Ibid.
115. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 157.
116. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 230.
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120. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 345-346.
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125. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 350-354.
126. Ibid., p. 277.
127. Bell, R. (2011). *The Love Wins Companion: A Study Guide for Those Who Want to Go Deeper*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 89.
128. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 207.
129. Bell, R. (2011). *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 50.

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130. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 312.
131. Bell, R. (2011). *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 103.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 119.