The Hard Problem of Hell



Series Introduction

I had expected the next series in *The Holy Spirit* teaching series to be different—a positive continuation of the concepts introduced at the ends of The Biblical Flood and Spiritual Realities series. But something was missing.

Over the course of the previous six series, a number of ideas have gradually begun to fit together:

- The relationship between the human spirit and God's Spirit, moral accountability, baptism and the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- The possibility that some people may receive the Spirit in ways they never recognized
- The idea that the structure of the Christian assembly may have on our relationship with the Spirit.

But something was missing…

And somewhat unexpectedly, I realized that the missing piece was **hell**.

In some ways, this reminds me of the fifth series in this teaching series, *The*

Biblical Flood. For years, the Flood had occupied a dark corner of my Christian understanding. I believed the biblical account, but I also knew that the explanations I had heard did not fit comfortably with what is scientifically accepted. Christian scholars offered dramatically different explanations, and I had never been satisfied that I understood how the Flood fit into the larger biblical story—particularly the story that ultimately leads to the Messiah.

Eventually, rather than continuing to leave the Flood in that dark corner, I decided to investigate it (really I was compelled by the Spirit).

Hell is a different type of dark corner. In fact, until now, I would not even have identified it as one of my theological dark corners. I believe in judgment. I believe that people can be lost. I believe Jesus' warnings about hell. And although I certainly did not like the idea of people spending eternity there, I don't remember frequently stopping to ask whether the traditional Christian understanding of hell actually made sense.

But looking backward, I now suspect the problem was there all along. As I have investigated the gospel, salvation, the Holy Spirit, moral accountability, and what I have called **Dual Moralism**, I have repeatedly found myself considering biblical possibilities that could point to the possibility that far fewer people are ultimately condemned than I and most church doctrines had previously assumed.

Why? Was Scripture actually leading me toward a different understanding of judgment and salvation? Or was I unconsciously looking *for a way around a problem* that I had never been willing to confront directly?

That question makes this investigation particularly important—and it also means I need to be especially careful about how I conduct it.

I already have ideas about where this investigation might lead. Some of the conclusions from earlier series may prove extremely important. But those ideas could also become liabilities if I begin with the assumption that they must provide the answer.

For that reason, I am intentionally not planning this series very far in advance—not simply because my plans might change—but because there is danger is that the plan itself might determine the investigation. If I decide beforehand where each episode must lead, it becomes very easy to stop following the evidence and begin assembling an argument for a conclusion I already expect to reach.

This series is part of *The Holy Spirit* teaching series. If we really believe that the

Spirit of truth guides us toward truth, then we need to leave room for this investigation to go somewhere we do not expect.

So, we will take this one episode at a time. And we will begin with defining the problem itself:

- How can a God who is perfectly loving, perfectly just, and who desires for all people to be saved create humanity knowing that a vast proportion of it may ultimately and perpetually be condemned?
- How should God judge people whose lives, knowledge, opportunities, cultures, abilities, and exposure to truth differ enormously?
- And even if judgment is completely deserved, why would sins committed during a finite human lifetime result in punishment that never ends?

These questions certainly do not mean hell does not exist nor do they prove that the traditional Christian understanding of who goes to hell and how long they stay there are wrong. God's love does not eliminate his justice, and the seriousness with which Jesus speaks about judgment cannot simply be explained away because we find it uncomfortable.

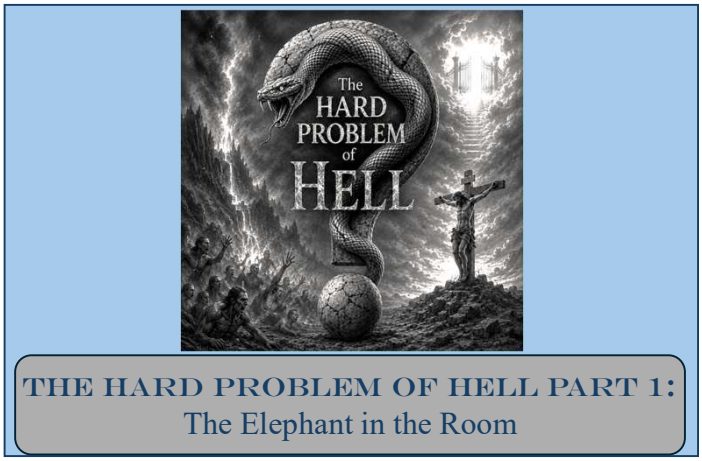
But neither should discomfort with these questions cause us to avoid them.

The hard problem of hell is not merely, **“How can a loving God punish people?”** The harder problem is whether everything Scripture teaches about God's love, justice, mercy, judgment, human accountability, salvation, and eternal destiny can be understood as parts of one coherent picture.

I don't yet know what that picture will look like.

I don't want to find a way *around* hell.

I want to understand what God has *actually* revealed about it.



I've titled part 1, **"The Elephant in the Room,"** because before we can begin investigating hell, I think we need to ask an unusual question:
Why is it so easy not to think about it?
Hell should be one of the most consequential subjects imaginable. If the traditional Christian understanding is correct, then the eternal destiny of every human being is at stake. Nothing could matter more.

And yet, strangely, hell often seems to occupy a place somewhere in the background of Christian thought. We believe it's there. We occasionally talk about it. We may even confidently teach about it.

But how often do we really stop and examine its implications?
- It's enormous.
- It's consequential.
- Everyone knows it's there.
- And yet, somehow, we manage not to look directly at it.

That's what we're going to begin doing today.

Why is the Topic of Hell so easy to avoid?

- **Spiritual deception**
  - Satan benefits when spiritual realities are ignored.
- **Personal discomfort**
  - Nobody wants to consider that *they* might be going there.
- **Intellectual embarrassment**
  - To unbelievers, Hell can sound primitive—even childish.
- **Biblical ambiguity**
  - Scripture warns repeatedly about judgment but gives no simple description of Hell.
- **The problem of eternity**
  - Justice makes intuitive sense. *Endless* punishment is much harder.
- **Christian discomfort**
  - Some confidently explain Hell away as logically necessary.
  - Others avoid even saying the word.

I don't think there's one single reason we avoid the subject—there are many—and they build on and reinforce one another.

- First, there may be a **spiritual reason**.
  - There is a famous saying that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn't exist. That particular quotation isn't from C. S. Lewis, as is sometimes claimed, but Lewis does make a similar observation in *The Screwtape Letters*: Satan benefits both when we become excessively fascinated with him and when we dismiss his existence altogether.
  - If Satan is real, then perhaps we should at least consider whether confusion about hell and our reluctance to think seriously about it—might serve Satan's purposes.
- Second, there is the obvious **personal discomfort**.
  - Nobody wants to go to hell.
  - For many people, simply becoming reasonably confident that they're going to heaven is difficult enough.
  - Why start pulling on theological threads that might disturb that confidence?
  - It is much more comfortable to think, "I'm basically a good person.

Surely hell is for people much worse than me."

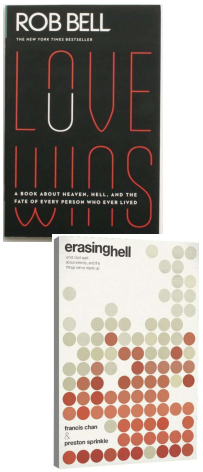
- Third, from outside Christianity, the entire subject can seem **embarrassingly primitive**.
    - To an atheist, heaven and hell may sound like the adult version of Santa Claus keeping a list of who's naughty and nice—good people get the reward and bad people get the coal.
    - For someone who doesn't believe in any spiritual reality, seriously debating the nature and duration of hell can seem absurd before the conversation even begins.
- Fourth, the **Bible itself doesn't give us a simple systematic description of hell**.
    - Instead, we encounter Gehenna, Hades, fire, darkness, destruction, punishment, exclusion, the second death, and other images and expressions scattered through different books and contexts.
    - So why venture into a subject that is already unpleasant when even Christians who take Scripture seriously disagree about exactly what those passages mean?
- Fifth, there is a profound **philosophical and theological discomfort with eternity**.
    - Most of us believe in justice.
    - Most of us believe that terrible evil deserves punishment.
    - Take perhaps the easiest extreme example: Adolf Hitler. Few people are going to object to the proposition that Hitler deserves punishment. But then add one word: **Forever.**
    - Suppose Hitler suffered terribly for a hundred years. Or three hundred years. Or a thousand.
    - At some point the question becomes unavoidable: What purpose is served by continuing for another thousand years?
    - And another million? And another trillion?
    - And after all of that, eternity has not even begun to be exhausted.
    - Even when we choose the worst human being we can imagine, **eternal conscious punishment creates a problem that ordinary ideas of justice don't automatically resolve.**
- And finally, Christians themselves seem strangely divided over how we're even supposed to **talk about hell**.
    - Some Christian teachers speak about it with remarkable confidence.
    - I have certainly fallen into that category myself. We develop explanations that make the traditional doctrine fit neatly into a theological system:
        - If heaven represents infinite goodness, perhaps there must be an infinitely terrible alternative.
        - If God makes eternal souls with cannot be destroyed, then

something must be done with the disobedient souls that lasts forever.
        - Or “People choose separation from God, and God simply honors that choice.”
    - At the other extreme, some Christians seem reluctant even to say the word *hell*.
        - We substitute euphemistic expressions such as “eternal separation from God”, “the bad place”, or speak vaguely about being “lost.”
    - One approach risks becoming callous while the other risks avoiding the reality altogether.
- Put all of these things together—the possibility of spiritual deception, personal fear, intellectual suicide, biblical ambiguity, philosophical difficulty, and theological discomfort—and perhaps it isn't surprising that hell has become **the elephant in the room**.

Love Wins vs. Erasing Hell

A Modern Battle over Hell

- **Rob Bell — *Love Wins* (2011)**
  - Challenged the traditional evangelical understanding of Hell.
  - Asked whether God's love and ultimate purposes are compatible with eternal conscious punishment.
  - Provoked enormous controversy within evangelical Christianity.
- **Francis Chan & Preston Sprinkle — *Erasing Hell* (2011)**
  - Written partly in response to the controversy.
  - Returned to the biblical texts to ask what Scripture actually teaches.
  - Chan acknowledged that he *wanted* to find a less troubling answer.
  - Concluded that discomfort cannot determine what Scripture means.



Why did this generate so much controversy?

- Before I talk about Rob Bell, I should acknowledge a bias: ***I strongly disagree with much of Progressive Christianity and the broader deconstruction movement***, with which Bell has become associated. So, my natural inclination is to be skeptical of him.
- But that's actually another potential trap in an investigation like this. **A person can be wrong about many things and still ask a very good question.**
- I haven't read *Love Wins*, so I'm certainly not endorsing Bell's conclusions.
- But I also don't want to dismiss his arguments simply because I expect to disagree with him. If he identifies a genuine problem with the traditional understanding of Hell, then that problem deserves to be examined on its own merits.

Rob Bell — *Love Wins* (2011)

- **Challenged the traditional evangelical understanding of Hell.**
  - Now, I should say that I haven't read either of these books, which is perhaps itself evidence for the point I'm making today.
  - But in 2011, Rob Bell published *Love Wins*, and it created an enormous controversy within evangelical Christianity. Bell wasn't simply denying that judgment or hell existed. He was questioning whether the

traditional evangelical picture was necessarily what the Bible teaches.

- **Asked whether God's love and ultimate purposes are compatible with eternal conscious punishment."**
    - The central tension was God's love. If God really loves humanity, desires reconciliation, and ultimately triumphs over evil, what does it mean if enormous numbers of human beings remain in conscious punishment forever? Bell explored whether Christians had become more certain about the nature and permanence of hell than Scripture itself warranted."
- **Provoked enormous controversy within evangelical Christianity.**
    - And the reaction was enormous. This wasn't some obscure academic disagreement. *Love Wins* became a major evangelical controversy, with books and articles appearing in response almost immediately. And I think the intensity of that reaction tells us something. Bell had touched a doctrine that Christians regarded as extremely important—but also one that was extraordinarily uncomfortable to examine.

Francis Chan & Preston Sprinkle — *Erasing Hell* (2011)

- **Written partly in response to the controversy**
    - One of those responses came from Francis Chan and biblical scholar Preston Sprinkle. Their book was called *Erasing Hell*. It came out just months later and addressed many of the questions Bell had raised. But what's especially interesting to me isn't simply that Chan disagreed with Bell. It's Chan's attitude toward the question.
- **Returned to the biblical texts to ask what Scripture actually teaches.**
    - Chan and Sprinkle's basic approach was: regardless of what we would like to believe about hell, we have to go back and examine what Jesus and the rest of Scripture actually say. In fact, the chapters themselves include subjects like 'What Jesus Actually Said about Hell' and 'What Jesus' Followers Said about Hell.' That's very close to the approach I want to take in this series.
- **Chan acknowledged that he wanted to find a less troubling answer.**

<This one deserves a little more emphasis, because Chan's own words are remarkably relevant to this episode>

    - What really caught my attention was that Chan admitted he didn't *like* the doctrine he was defending. He said that he would love to be able to erase hell from Scripture. He talked about thinking of loved ones who might be there and admitted that, although he intellectually believed in hell, when the thought became too disturbing he tended to push it aside and think about something more pleasant.
- **Concluded that his discomfort could not determine what Scripture means.**
    - But Chan ultimately concluded that what he wanted to be true couldn't

determine what Scripture says. And whether or not Chan's conclusions turn out to be correct, I think that principle is exactly right. I can't begin this series by deciding that eternal hell seems unjust and therefore the Bible can't teach it. But neither can I begin by assuming that the traditional doctrine must be correct and then explain away everything that seems inconsistent with it.

- **Why did this generate so much controversy?**
    - And that's what interests me about these two books. I'm not presenting Bell as the progressive who got it wrong and Chan as the conservative who got it right. I haven't even read the books. What interests me is that they expose the tension from opposite directions. Bell asks whether our traditional understanding of hell really fits the character and purposes of God. Chan asks whether our discomfort with hell is causing us to reject something God has actually revealed.
- **Those are both questions we have to take seriously.**
    - And the enormous controversy tells me that we're not dealing with a simple doctrine that only becomes difficult because unbelievers don't like it. Christians themselves feel the tension.
    - That's why I think we need to stop walking around the elephant and actually look at it.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- **Hell cannot simply be ignored.**
  - The consequences are too important.
- **Discomfort cannot determine truth.**
  - What we *want* Scripture to say is irrelevant to what it actually says.
- **Tradition cannot determine truth either.**
  - What we have always *assumed* Scripture says must also be examined.
- **The problem must not determine the solution.**
  - We can't choose an interpretation merely because it makes the Hard Problem disappear.
- **Therefore, we need to go back to the text.**
  - What does the Bible actually say about Hell, judgment, punishment, destruction, and eternity?

What did Jesus and the biblical writers actually say about Hell?

- **Hell cannot simply be ignored:**
  - If Hell is real, there may be no subject with greater consequences.
  - Whatever our discomfort with it, ignoring it isn't a reasonable option.
  - **This reminds me of something I encountered earlier in this teaching series:** when I investigated the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit—the one unforgivable sin. That's another frightening subject Christians often don't want to look at too closely. But when I finally investigated it, I found that the explanation was actually quite logical and not nearly as frightening as the vague doctrine I had carried around in my head.
  - And that taught me something important: **avoiding a frightening biblical subject doesn't make it less frightening. Sometimes the avoidance is what allows the frightening version of it to survive.**
  - I don't know that Hell will turn out the same way. Maybe after investigating it carefully, it will be every bit as terrible as I've always believed. But avoiding the investigation certainly won't tell us.

- **Discomfort cannot determine truth:** We've just seen this. I may desperately want the answer to come out a certain way. That can't be how we determine what's true.

- **Tradition cannot determine truth either:** But there's an equal and opposite danger. Saying, “I can't reject eternal Hell just because I don't like it” does **not** mean eternal Hell is therefore biblical. An inherited doctrine has to survive the same examination as an alternative.
- **The problem must not determine the solution:** And this is particularly important for me because I already have ideas that could potentially resolve parts of this problem. Dual Moralism might dramatically change the number of people we think are condemned. The second death might change what we think happens to them. But the fact that an idea solves the problem is not evidence that it's true.

Conclusion

So, I'm not ending this first episode with an answer. In fact, I'm deliberately trying not to have one yet.

- Rob Bell reminds us of one danger: we can encounter something that seems incompatible with the love and character of God and decide that Scripture simply cannot mean what Christians have traditionally thought it means.
- Francis Chan reminds us of the opposite danger: we can be so concerned about changing an established doctrine that we fail to ask whether our established doctrine is actually what Scripture says.

I don't want to make either mistake.

I don't want my discomfort with Hell to determine the answer. But I also don't want two thousand years of Christian familiarity with Hell to determine the answer.

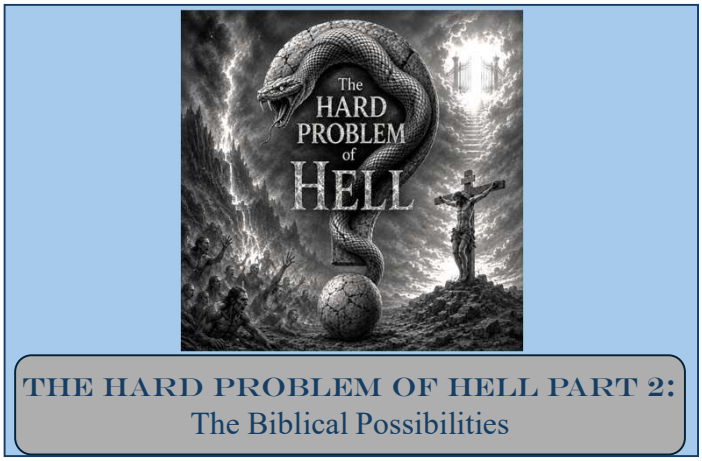
And perhaps most importantly, **I don't want the existence of the Hard Problem to determine the answer.** If we eventually discover an interpretation that beautifully resolves everything we've discussed today, that doesn't make it true. It still has to come from Scripture.

So, I think the next place we probably need to go is the most obvious one: back to the biblical texts themselves.

- What words are actually translated as *hell*? What did Jesus say? What did the apostles say? What does *eternal* mean in these passages? What is being punished? What is destroyed? What is the second death? And are all of these passages even describing the same thing?
- I don't know yet how much of that we'll get through next time—or even whether that will turn out to be precisely where the Spirit leads this investigation next.

But wherever we go, I want to maintain one principle throughout this series:

I'm not trying to find a way around Hell. I'm trying to understand what God has actually revealed about it.



Last week, in *The Elephant in the Room*, we established why the problem of Hell is indeed hard. There are difficult questions concerning:

- God's love and justice
- The number of people who may ultimately be lost
- The duration and nature of their punishment
- Even some uncertainty about exactly what the Bible means when it uses language that we commonly associate with Hell.

But establishing that a problem is hard doesn't get us very far toward solving it.

So, today we're going to begin putting some boundaries around the possible solutions.

- We'll look at the three current theories concerning who goes to Hell, how long they remain there, and what ultimately happens to them.
- But before we can do that very well, we also need to ask a more basic question: **Where can the human spirit go after death?**
    - The Bible describes several possible intermediate and final destinations or states.
    - We shouldn't simply assume that all of them mean either Heaven or

Hell.

- Then we'll begin establishing biblical constraints.
    - Rather than choosing a theory and looking for verses that support it, I want to ask what statements in Scripture **any successful theory** must be able to explain.
- At the end of this episode, I don't expect to have an answer to the Hard Problem of Hell. But hopefully we'll have something we didn't have last week: a map of the biblical possibilities, and some boundaries that any eventual answer will have to remain within.

Where Can the Human Spirit Go After Death?

Destination / State	Basis / Scripture	Duration
Sheol / Hades	Ps 16:10; Acts 2:27; Rev 20:13	Intermediate
Paradise	Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4	Intermediate?
Abraham's side	Luke 16:22–26	Intermediate?
Heaven / with Christ	Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8; Rev 6:9–11	Intermediate?
Resurrection / transformed existence	1 Cor 15:20–26, 35–54	Transition to final
Purgatory	2 Macc 12:39–46*; cf. 1 Cor 3:15	Intermediate
Tunnel / Light	NDE reports	Transitory
Trapped on Earth / "2nd Heaven"	Apparitions / after-death reports/evidence	Intermediate
Gehenna	Matt 10:28; Mark 9:43–48	Final judgment?
Lake of Fire / Second Death	Rev 20:10–15; 21:8	Final
New Creation / with God	1 Cor 15:24–28, 50–55; Rev 21–22	Final

- **Destination / State** — These are not necessarily distinct physical places. Some may overlap, some may describe conditions rather than locations, and some may simply be different terminology for the same thing. We're deliberately *not* resolving that yet.
- **Basis / Scripture** — This is especially important. The rows don't all have equal evidentiary weight:
    - canonical Scripture is your controlling evidence;
    - 2 Maccabees represents disputed/deuterocanonical evidence accepted as Scripture by Catholic and Orthodox traditions, but not by Protestants.
    - NDEs and apparition reports are observations previously considered in *Spiritual Realities*, not Scripture.

Intermediate / Final — This may be the most important column. Something experienced after death is **not necessarily someone's eternal fate**. Resurrection and judgment still have to be accounted for.

1. Hades — establishes a hard distinction

- Revelation 20:13–14 is excellent: Hades gives up the dead within it, and then Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire.

- Therefore, without knowing exactly what either one is:
- **Hades cannot be identical to the Lake of Fire.** That's real progress and an actual biblical constraint.

2. Resurrection — 1 Corinthians 15

- Whatever happens immediately after death, **Paul's story doesn't end there**. There is resurrection, transformation from perishable to imperishable, and ultimately the defeat of death.
- That means: **The state of a human spirit immediately after death should not automatically be equated with that person's final state.**
- I'm not going to try to interpret 1 Corinthians 15 today. We've already encountered it in *Spiritual Realities*, and I suspect we're going to encounter it again in this series.

3. Purgatory

- I've even included Purgatory. It isn't a third final destination in Catholic teaching; it's an intermediate state of purification for someone ultimately destined for Heaven. Its strongest scriptural support includes a passage in 2 Maccabees, which Catholics and Orthodox accept as Scripture but Protestants do not.

4. Experiential rows

- I've also included a couple of possibilities we encountered during *Spiritual Realities*—the transition or light reported in NDEs and reports suggesting that human spirits can sometimes remain associated with the earthly realm. Those aren't biblical claims, and I've deliberately identified their basis accordingly.

Summary

- Now that we've seen that even the possible destinations are more complicated than simply Heaven and Hell, let's narrow our attention to the final fate of those who face God's judgment. Christianity currently offers three major possibilities.

The Three Major Theories of Hell

Who? How long? What ultimately happens?

1. **Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT)**
   - The lost remain conscious after final judgment
   - Punishment continues forever
   - Their final condition is irreversible
2. **Conditional Immortality / Annihilationism**
   - Immortality is given to the saved, rather than inherent to every human soul
   - The lost are ultimately destroyed—the "second death"
   - Their punishment is eternal in consequence, not necessarily in conscious experience
3. **Universal Reconciliation (UR)**
   - The lost undergo real judgment and punishment
   - Punishment is ultimately corrective/restorative rather than endless
   - All are eventually reconciled to God through Christ

- These are the three major theories we're going to consider. They aren't merely products of the modern debate. All three have roots very early in Christian history, although they weren't neatly defined as three competing doctrines at the end of the first century.
- I'm treating these as possibilities, not conclusions. And I'm not assuming that because these are the three established theories that *one of them necessarily has to be correct*. They give us three models to test against the biblical constraints.
- Also, Universal Reconciliation doesn't necessarily mean everybody immediately goes to Heaven or that judgment doesn't matter. There are different versions of it, but the version we're considering says that God's judgment is real and may involve punishment, while nevertheless ending eventually in reconciliation.

Constraints from Scripture

Biblical Constraint	Key Passages	Most Naturally Supports
Eternal punishment	Matt 25:46; Mark 9:43–48	ECT
Death / destruction / perishing	Matt 10:28; John 3:16; Rom 6:23; Rev 20:14	Annihilation
Ongoing conscious torment	Rev 14:10–11; 20:10	ECT
Restoration / reconciliation of "all"	Rom 5:18; 1 Cor 15:22–28; Col 1:20	Universal Reconciliation
Judgment according to deeds / knowledge	Matt 10:15; Luke 12:47–48; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10	All must explain
Resurrection & defeat of death	1 Cor 15:20–28, 50–55; Rev 20:12–14	All must explain

- Notice what's happening here:
  - If I only showed you the first and third rows, Eternal Conscious Torment might seem obvious.
  - If I only showed you the second row, annihilation might seem obvious.
  - And if I only showed you Paul's sweeping statements about all being made alive and all things being reconciled through Christ, Universal Reconciliation might seem obvious.
  - But we don't get to choose which passages are in the Bible. Any theory we consider has to account for all of them.
- The last two don't obviously belong to any one theory.
  - Scripture repeatedly says that God's judgment takes account of what people have done and even what they knew.
  - And 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that resurrection and the ultimate defeat of death are part of the story.
  - Whatever theory we eventually accept has to accommodate those things too.

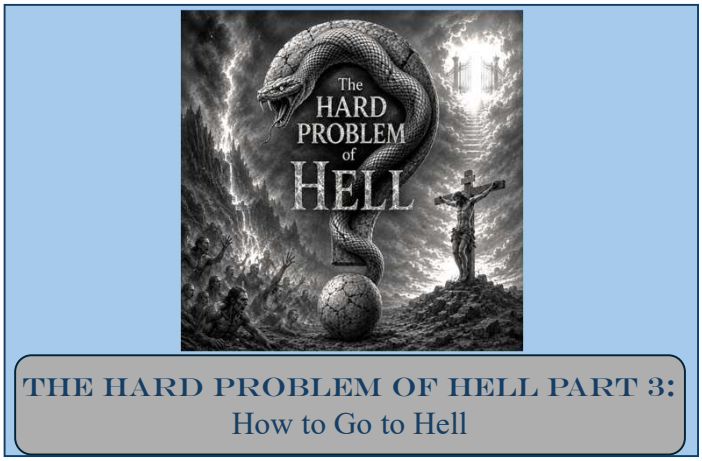
What Have We Established?

- "Hell" is not one simple biblical concept
  - Scripture describes multiple intermediate and final states
  - We must distinguish what happens **after death** from what happens **after judgment**
- All three major theories have biblical support
  - Each explains some passages naturally
  - Each must explain passages that appear to point elsewhere
- **The Bible sets the constraints**
  - We shouldn't begin by choosing the theory we prefer
  - The eventual explanation must account for **all the biblical evidence**

- We've made some progress today, but we haven't selected an answer. We've established the possibilities and begun defining the constraints.
- And that's intentional. I don't want to start with Eternal Conscious Torment, Annihilationism, or Universal Reconciliation and then explain away everything that doesn't fit.
- I want to see what happens when we allow all of these passages to remain on the table at the same time.
- Perhaps one of these three theories will eventually account for all of them.
- Or perhaps the biblical constraints will force us to think about the problem somewhat differently

Next Week:

- Next week, we're going to look at the sin that leads to death, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, and the rich man and Lazarus. I think they may have more in common than at first appearance.
- And that connection may tell us something important about who is actually in danger of Hell—and perhaps why.



The title of today's episode is an interesting one, "How to Go to Hell".

No one normally asks this question. Christian teaching contains endless discussions about how to get to Heaven—and understandably so. Who wants instructions for going to Hell, right?

But if Heaven and Hell represent the only two ultimate destinations for the human soul, shouldn't we be able to ask the question from either direction, and perhaps gain some important distinctions in doing so? For instance, asking the question backwards might help expose assumptions we make when we only ask, "How can I be saved?"

Therefore, instead of beginning by asking what someone must do to be saved, let's ask what actually causes someone to be condemned.

Before we begin, there are a couple of things I want to add or clarify from last week. First, there's a theological term I probably should have introduced: **eschatology**. Eschatology simply means the study of the "last things"—from the Greek word "ἔσχατος" (*eschatos*) meaning last—things like death, judgment,

resurrection, and the final destiny of humanity. Much of what we discussed last week—and much of this entire series—falls under the category of eschatology.

Second, last week I showed a table of the possible destinations for the human spirit, and I marked ‘Heaven / with Christ’ as possibly an intermediate destination. I want to clarify what I meant by that—but in preparing for today, I realized there's actually more to this question than I had appreciated.

My mental picture had basically been this: Our souls live in mortal human bodies, we die, and then our spirits go to be with God forever. And I suspect I'm not alone in thinking that that’s what “resurrection” means.

But that leaves out something the New Testament treats as extremely important: the **bodily resurrection**. I had tended to think of resurrection simply as spiritual life after physical death. But passages such as 1 Corinthians 15 appear to describe something more specific: after physical death comes a future resurrection in which the mortal becomes immortal.

And Jesus says something similar when the Sadducees challenge him about resurrection. So, let's take just a quick look at these two passages.

Resurrection Means Something More

1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 52–54

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead.
The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;
it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory;
it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;
it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

…the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable,
and the mortal with immortality.

Luke 20:34–36

"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.
But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come
and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage,
and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels."

Notice what Paul is describing. I had thought of resurrection primarily as my spirit continuing to live after my physical body dies. But Paul explicitly talks about something being *raised* and the mortal becoming immortal. And Jesus describes 'the resurrection from the dead' as a state in which we can no longer die.

That suggests a sequence I hadn't really considered: our present mortal embodied existence, then some intermediate existence after death, and ultimately resurrection into an immortal embodied existence.

I'm only giving this a taste today, because this the subject for next week's episode. But it explains why 'Heaven / with Christ' on last week's table may be an **intermediate** destination rather than the final state.

Old Covenant Precedent: Some Sins Led to Death

Passage	Offense	Result	Why useful
Numbers 15:27–31	Unintentional vs. defiant sin	Atonement vs. **"cut off"**	**Best passage by far**—explicitly contrasts forgivable/atonable sin with deliberate sin for which no remedy is given
Numbers 15:32–36	Sabbath violation	Death by stoning	Immediately follows Num 15:30–31; appears to illustrate the principle
Leviticus 20:1–5	Child sacrifice to Molek	Death / cut off	Remarkably uses both categories in the same context
Leviticus 20:9–16	Serious sexual/familial offenses	Put to death	Shows the breadth of capital offenses
Leviticus 23:27–30	Refusing to humble oneself on Day of Atonement / working	Cut off / destroyed	Especially relevant because it occurs in an atonement context
Exodus 31:14–15	Profaning Sabbath	Death / cut off	Another passage explicitly placing the two formulations together

Under the Old Covenant, not every sin was treated identically. There were sins for which God explicitly provided sacrifice, atonement and forgiveness. But there were also offenses for which the person was instead cut off or put to death. Numbers 15 is particularly striking because it places these categories right next to each other.

I should say that being put to death and being 'cut off' (Hebrew is kareth) are distinguishable, but they ultimately point in a similar direction. Execution ends the person's physical life immediately, while being cut off at minimum removes the person from the covenant community and its blessings. And in an ultimate sense, being cut off from God's people—and therefore from the covenant relationship that gives life—may actually represent the more serious consequence.

Remember as well that the Old Covenant is a shadow, model, and precedent for the New Covenant and not the other way around.

- **Numbers 15:27–29:** If someone sins **unintentionally**, an offering is made, the priest makes atonement, **"and they will be forgiven."**

- **Numbers 15:30–31:** But the person who sins **defiantly** (*"with a high hand"* in more literal translations) blasphemes/despises the LORD and: "must be cut off from the people of Israel.... Their guilt remains on them."

Therefore, under the Old Covenant, defiant sin, Sabbath and Yom Kippur violations, and serious sexual offenses resulted in death/being cut off.

So, with this Old Covenant precedent in mind—sins that can be atoned for and forgiven and sins that instead result in being cut off or death—let's see what happens when we get to the New Covenant.

New Covenant: Is There One Sin That Leads to Death?

Passage	Life / Forgiveness	Death / Condemnation
John 3:18, 36	Whoever **believes** is not condemned / has eternal life	Whoever **does not believe** is condemned already / God's wrath remains
John 16:8–9	Spirit convicts the world concerning sin	"About sin, because people do not believe in me"
Matt 12:31–32	Every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven	Blasphemy against the Spirit **will not be forgiven**
Heb 10:26–29	Christ's sacrifice provides forgiveness	Deliberate rejection leaves **no sacrifice for sins**
1 John 5:16–17	Sin **not leading to death** → pray → God gives life	Sin **leading to death** → John does **not** say to pray

- **EVERY SIN CAN BE FORGIVEN**. There is not a thing you could say or do that puts you into an unforgivable state for the rest of your life.

So, here's the question I want to explore: Are Jesus, John, and the writer of Hebrews describing four different exceptional circumstances—or are they looking at the **same spiritual reality from four different directions?**

- Let's begin with perhaps the simplest distinction. John says that the person who believes in Jesus is not condemned and has eternal life, while the person who does not believe stands condemned already and will not see life. Notice that these aren't really individual acts. They're descriptions of two different spiritual states.

- Then in John 16, Jesus explains what the Holy Spirit will do when he comes: he will convict the world concerning sin—and Jesus specifically says, 'concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.' So, unbelief in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit aren't independent concepts.

- I've discussed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in Matt 12 extensively in two previous series, *The Era of the Spirit* and *The Holy Spirit Through the Eras*. I don't believe Jesus is describing one action, belief, or particular combination of words that someone can accidentally do or say and thereby commit the

unforgivable sin. I think he's describing a **state of the human soul**—a state of rejection of the Holy Spirit and therefore of God's attempt to bring that person to salvation—purchased by the sacrifice of his Son on the cross.
- The **unforgivable state** is ultimately the state in which a morally accountable person remains irreconcilably opposed to the Spirit through whom God would bring that person to repentance and salvation.

Unaccountable child/young person → accountable adult but unsaved → saved and Spirit-indwelled
Note: An individual may never leave the unaccountable state if their mental capabilities are diminished and potentially if they are not of the "morally accountable heritage" of Adam and Eve (see Biblical Flood series Part 8).
Note: Whether someone can subsequently lose the Spirit is a separate question.
Note: **EVERY SIN CAN BE FORGIVEN.** Even if one walks away from God they can come back.

- Heb 10: Under the Old Covenant, sacrifice was God's remedy for sins that could be forgiven. Under the New Covenant, Christ is the sacrifice for all sins. So, what happens if someone rejects the sacrifice itself? There isn't another sacrifice waiting behind Jesus.

- 1John: And then we come to perhaps the strangest passage of all. John distinguishes between sin that does **not** lead to death and sin that **does** lead to death.
- For the first person, John says to pray, and God will give them life. But concerning the person whose sin leads to death, John says, remarkably, **'I am not saying that you should pray(ask) about that.'**

So, are these five unrelated teachings? Or are John, Jesus, and the writer of Hebrews describing the **same dividing line from different perspectives?**
- Unbelief and condemnation.
- Rejection of the Spirit.
- The one state that cannot be forgiven.
- Rejection for which no sacrifice remains.
- And finally, sin that leads to death.

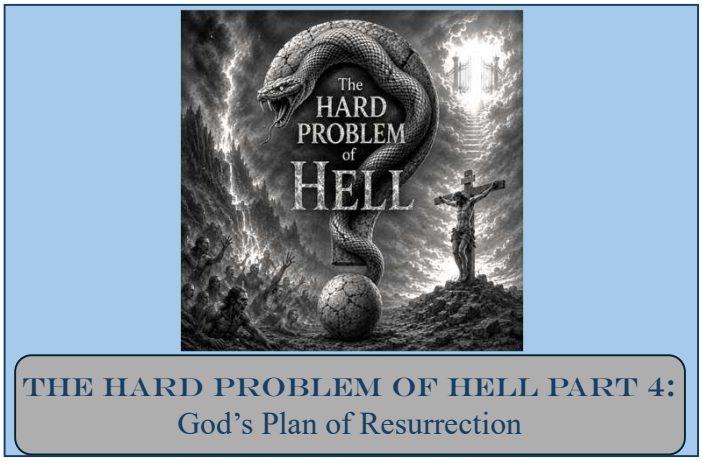
Summary:
Therefore, if you want to know how to go to Hell, the answer is surprisingly simple: continue in your unbelief, rejecting the Holy Spirit and His work to bring you to Christ.

- Perhaps that's why these passages sound so different and yet seem to arrive

at the same place. You remain condemned. You remain unforgiven. Eventually, no sacrifice for sin remains. Your sin leads to death.

- The unforgivable sin, then, may not be some mysterious terrible thing that you accidentally *do*. It may be the state in which you persistently reject the very means God has provided to forgive you and give you life.
- And, looked at from the other direction, the answer to 'How do I go to Heaven?' begins to look like the same question: **stop rejecting God. Believe in Christ, and allow the Holy Spirit to do what God sent Him to do.**

Next week we'll talk about happens between physical death and the final bodily resurrection.



The title of today's episode is, "God's Plan of Resurrection". If you've been a Christian for very long, you've probably heard someone talk about **God's plan of salvation**. Depending on your Christian background, you may have been taught a very specific sequence explaining how someone is saved.
But what about **God's plan of resurrection**?

What happens after salvation? What happens after death? And what is God's ultimate plan for human beings—not just for those who are saved, but for everyone?

Those questions bring us back to the reason I called this series *The Hard Problem of Hell*.

- Heaven is also a hard problem.
- We can't see it.
- We can't directly investigate it.
- And surprisingly, the Bible gives us relatively little detailed information about what existence in Heaven is actually like.

That was one of the reasons I spent an entire series investigating **Spiritual Realities** before beginning this one. It tried to glean information about the

afterlife from historical patterns of paranormal and supernatural experiences. It found that near-death-experiences could be our best extra-Biblical evidence about the afterlife—real conscious stories from real people who are known to have nearly died.

But Hell presents an additional problem.

It isn't merely difficult to understand because it belongs to a spiritual reality we cannot normally observe:

- The topic of Hell is frightening. The possibility of eternal punishment—whether for ourselves or for people we love—is so disturbing that it can be easier simply not to think about it.
- Our traditional understanding of Hell also raises difficult questions about the love, justice, and character of God. Who goes there? Why do they go there? What happens to them there? And how long does it last?

Last week, in Episode 3, **"How to Go to Hell,"** we approached one of those questions from the opposite direction.

Instead of asking, "How do I get saved?", we asked, "How does someone become condemned?"

And we found a recurring distinction the New Testament between life and death, belief and unbelief, forgiveness and unforgiveness: the accepting or rejecting what God offers through the Holy Spirit.

But even if we can determine **who goes to Hell and why**, another enormous question remains:
What actually happens when the saved and the lost die?

Jesus gives us one of the Bible's most remarkable pictures of the existence of the dead in Luke 16, in the account of the rich man and Lazarus.

But there is a question we don't often ask when we read that account:

- **Is what Jesus describes the end of the story?**

Today we're going to look carefully at Luke 16, consider where the rich man and Lazarus actually are, and then place that account into the Bible's larger teaching about resurrection.

By the end, I hope we'll have a clearer picture of something Christians talk about surprisingly little: **God's plan of resurrection**—what may happen between death

and resurrection, what resurrection itself means, and how all of this points toward God's ultimate plan for humanity and the New Creation.

Is Resurrection Merely Life After Death?

Passage	What it Suggests
1 Sam 28:11–19	The deceased **Samuel** appears and speaks to Saul; Samuel describes Saul as disturbing him and says Saul and his sons will soon "be with me."
Isa 14:9–10	**Sheol** is poetically depicted as stirring up the dead to meet the newly deceased king of Babylon; the dead speak to him.
Matt 17:1–3	**Moses and Elijah** appear and converse with Jesus centuries after their earthly lives.
Luke 16:19–31	**Lazarus and the rich man are dead but conscious**, experiencing different conditions and communicating—yet the rich man still has living brothers on earth.
Luke 20:37–38	Jesus says Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead from the human perspective, yet "to him all are alive."
Acts 24:15	…and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.
Rev 6:9–11	The **souls of the martyrs** consciously cry out to God and are told to wait for a future event.

- If conscious, spiritual existence after death is resurrection, haven't these people already been resurrected?

- Is the grave (lowercase 's' sheol) the resting place of souls until a certain time?
- These verses all point to individuals who died, were buried, and then appear outside their graves.
- Acts 24:15 says there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

What about the Grave (Sheol/Hades)?

Dan 12:2 – Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

Matt 27:52-53 – and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

John 5:28-29 –Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

- **Luke 8:54–55 – "**Child, arise." And her spirit returned, and she got up at once.
- **1 Kings 17:21–22 –** "O LORD my God, let this child's life [nephesh] come into him again."
  …and the life [nephesh] of the child came into him again, and he revived.

- Dan 12:2 – The "awaken" statement occurs in connection with the culmination of the conflict described in Daniel 11 and an extraordinary period of distress.
- Matt 27:52-53 – These holy people came out of the tombs. Is that because their souls were waiting there?
- John 5:25,28-29 – Jesus makes it very clear that whatever resurrection is, it will happen to both the good and the evil.
- So, I go back and forth. Does the human spirit go to a place called Sheol (capital 's') to wait or does it stay in the grave to wait unconsciously?
- I wish I could say, "When you die, depending on your spiritual status, you will go here or there and then later on at a given point, this will happen."
- **The Bible does not hand us a single chronological map of the afterlife:** We construct one by trying to reconcile passages that were written for different purposes—and some of them resist being fitted together neatly.
- The word **"grave"** makes this especially confusing because several different concepts can get collapsed into English language about death: the corpse being in a physical grave, the person being in Sheol/Hades, the "soul" existing somewhere, and resurrection from death or from the grave.
- These concepts aren't necessarily statements about the *same thing or the same time*.

- For example, these can coexist fairly easily:
    - **Body:** returns to dust / lies in a tomb.
    - **Person/spirit:** continues conscious existence elsewhere (Samuel; Luke 16; Rev 6).
    - **Resurrection:** the person is subsequently raised, apparently involving embodiment again.
- We get a glimpse of this with two people raised from the dead.

The Rich Man and Lazarus — Luke 16:19–31

- Jesus gives no introduction to the afterlife setting
  - He could be referring to 1Enoch 22 or 4 Ezra 7:36
- Both men die—but continue conscious existence
- Their destinations are immediately different
- A great chasm separates them
- The reason for their different outcomes is not explicitly explained
  - Luke sets up the concept of the rich already receiving good in life.
- The account assumes more than it explains

- Now let's turn to one of the strangest and most important passages in this investigation: the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.
- One thing that immediately strikes me about this account is how abruptly Jesus introduces this picture of the afterlife.
  - He doesn't stop and explain what Hades is. He doesn't explain Abraham's side, where Lazarus goes, or tell us when this arrangement began.
  - He doesn't explain how dead people can see or communicate with one another. He simply tells the story as though the basic concepts will be understood by his audience.
  - In that respect, it reminds me a little of the Nephilim passage in Genesis 6. We're given enough information for the author's purpose, but not necessarily all of the background information *we* would like to have.
  - Just as Genesis may refer to 1Enoch 6-16 (Watchers and Nephilim), Jesus may be relying on their knowledge of 1Enoch 22.
  - It almost certainly not 4 Ezra, even though it matches the parable pretty well, because that was written after Jesus.
  - 1 Enoch 22 though it’s a great match. It has four places:

        - **Righteous** — the bright place with the spring of water.
        - **Sinners who escaped judgment during life** — a dark place where they experience pain until the great judgment.
        - **Those slain by sinners / crying for justice** — Abel is the example.
        - **Another class of thoroughly sinful people** — whose description is especially odd: they apparently will not be punished/slain at the judgment and will not be raised from there.
        - It makes it look like the first three a separated from each other.
- The rich man dies and is buried. Lazarus dies and is carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man is in Hades and in torment, while Lazarus is being comforted. And between them is a great chasm that cannot be crossed.
- But notice something else: **neither man's spiritual condition is explicitly explained.**
- We're told a great deal about their earthly circumstances. One was rich and lived in luxury. The other was desperately poor and lay outside his gate longing for scraps of food.
- But Jesus never says, “Lazarus believed this, so he went here,” or “the rich man committed this particular sin, so he went there.”
- Abraham’s explanation seems too simple: the rich man received good things while Lazarus received bad things, and now their situations have been reversed.
    - This supports Deut 15:7-8 – If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.
    - But goes against Deut 28 (you get blessings for following the law and curses for violating it. So, if the rich man violated Deut 15, he should have received earthly curses.

The Rich Man and Lazarus — Is it Real?

- Jesus speaks propositionally about postmortem realities elsewhere
  - Luke 20:27–38 – The Sadducees question about marriage.
- Luke 16 is unusually concrete
  - Death, angels carrying Lazarus, Abraham, Hades, torment, comfort, consciousness, memory, communication, water, and an uncrossable chasm.
- The story doesn't signal that its cosmology is the mistaken part
  - The mistaken part is the Rich Man's thought that a person appearing after their death would certainly sway his relatives.
- Naming Lazarus is striking
  - This is the only traditional parable in which Jesus gives an individual character a personal name.
  - Lazarus means "God is my helper".
  - But Lazarus was also a real person—who actually was raised from the dead.
- Ethical intuition: Would Jesus tell such a specific story just for it to match the culture's preconceived notions but not reality's?

- We cannot necessarily conclude that every detail in the story is a literal description of the geography of Hades.
- But I think we have reason to take seriously the possibility that Jesus is describing a genuine spiritual reality.
- Jesus elsewhere speaks literally about realities after death and even corrects mistaken beliefs about them.
- Here he gives us an unusually specific picture, even naming Lazarus—the only named individual in any of his parables.
- If this picture substantially misrepresented reality, Jesus would seem to be reinforcing precisely the misconceptions his listeners were incapable of testing for themselves.

Is Hades the Final Destination?

- **Paul describes the resurrection as a future event** — 1 Cor 15:20–26, 35–55
  - Christ has already been raised; those who belong to Christ will be raised "at his coming."
  - "The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." (vv. 52–53)
- Paul repeatedly wants Christians to understand what is coming
  - **1 Thess 4:13–18** — "We do not want you to be uninformed…"; the dead in Christ rise.
  - **Phil 3:20–21** — Christ "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body."
  - **Rom 8:18–25** — we await "the redemption of our bodies."
  - **2 Cor 5:1–5** — Paul longs not for permanent disembodiment, but to be "clothed" with what is heavenly.
- **This matters to the Hard Problem of Hell**
  - The righteous are ultimately "raised imperishable."
  - But what ultimately happens to the unrighteous?
  - Eternal conscious existence—or resurrection followed by the "second death"?

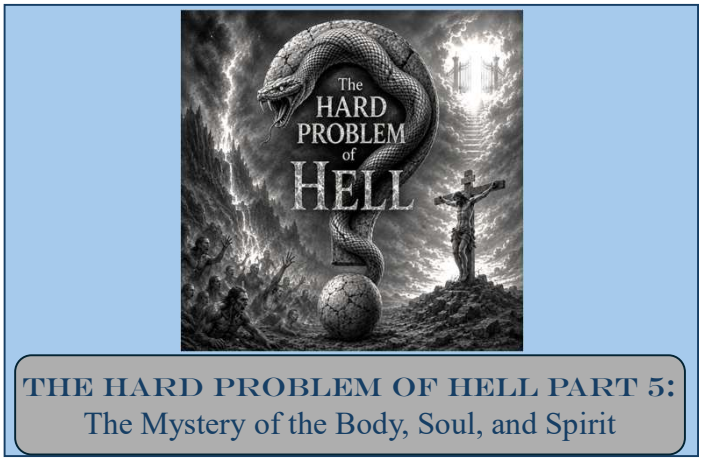
- Last week we saw that Paul spends a surprising amount of time explaining resurrection. And he definitely seems to be describing something that, from his perspective, is still to come.
- In 1 Corinthians 15, Christ has already been raised, but those who belong to Christ will be raised "at his coming." That's got to be his second coming, right?
- Paul says the dead will be raised imperishable and that our mortal bodies must put on immortality.
- And this isn't isolated to 1 Corinthians.
  - In 1 Thessalonians, Paul specifically says, "We do not want you to be uninformed" about those who have died, and then tells them that the dead in Christ will rise.
  - Romans speaks of waiting for the redemption of our bodies.
  - Philippians says Christ will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.
  - 2 Cor 5 potentially describes the intermediate condition, whereas 1 Cor 15 describes the eventual embodied resurrection.

Next Week: I will formally present my working theory:

- Saved: present bodily life → away from body / with Lord → clothed /

resurrection;

- Lost: present bodily life → away from body in torment → destroyed in the Lake of Fire/Second death.



The title of today's episode is, "The Mystery of the Body, Soul, and Spirit."

Last week I said that I would formally present my developing model of what happens to the saved and the lost after death. But after another week of thinking, researching, and meditating on the subject, I realized that I had skipped a necessary question: What exactly are the body, soul, and spirit? (I really need to stop saying what the next episode will be about ☺)

Before proceeding, I want to introduce a term that I expect to use throughout this series: "**fortuitous revelation**."
A fortuitous revelation occurs when a biblical figure is speaking about one subject but, in the process, reveals unusually valuable information about another subject that Scripture rarely discusses directly (so, it's fortuitous to our perspective). Last week I identified Luke 16, The Rich Man and Lazarus, as an example of this. I looked for an existing theological term to no avail.

Second, I want to highlight unfinished business from last week, and one area of uncertainty going forward: Is Sheol simply "the grave of a human" or an actual place where departed spirits are gathered?

It is important to understand that the Hebrew manuscripts do not distinguish these ideas by writing one with a lowercase “s” and the other with an uppercase “S.” The same Hebrew word, *sheol*, is used in both cases. The distinction is something I am imposing in English to describe the two possible meanings of the word.

But perhaps part of the confusion comes from asking where “the person” goes without first asking what happens to the body, the soul, and the spirit. The body plainly goes to the grave—but does the whole person go with it? Does the soul or spirit go somewhere else? And if soul and spirit are not interchangeable, could something different happen to each?
Before we can resolve the mystery of Sheol, we may first have to resolve—or at least better understand—the mystery of what a human being is.

There are verses that appear to say that we go down to the grave and unconsciously await what happens next. Dan 12:2 is important and John 5:28-29 are important. But other passages imply that spirits are gathered into an actual realm where something happens before the resurrection.

An Unresolved Issue: The Grave and Bones

Daniel 12:1-2 – "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

John 5:28-29 – "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."

Matthew 27:50-52 – And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

The close relationship between Daniel 12 and John 5 cannot be overlooked—and neither can the striking relationship between John 5 and Matthew 27.

There's also **Ezekiel 37** (graves opened and God's people brought up from them) and **Isaiah 26:19** (the dead arise as the earth gives birth to them) and Luke 23:43 (Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.").

When Jesus cried out and released his spirit, the earth shook and the tombs opened. Matthew may be presenting an anticipatory sign of Jesus' promise that the dead would hear his voice and come out of their tombs. It was not yet the universal resurrection of John 5, but it demonstrated that Jesus' victory had opened the graves and inaugurated the resurrection to come.

And there may be a covenantal dimension as well: the torn Temple curtain marks the end of the former means of approaching God, while the opened tombs mark the beginning of victory over death. Matthew places the end of the old order and the beginning of resurrection life in the same cluster of signs.

Perhaps Jesus death on the cross and resurrection, and the saints of Matt 27 are

inaugural or sign fulfillment, not the complete fulfillment of John 5 and the other verses, and the event was completed in AD 70.

AD 70 marked the definitive physical and historical end of the Temple-centered Old-Covenant order as a spiritually valid means of approaching God. It may function as a major eschatological boundary: the final judgment of the former covenantal world, even if the bodily resurrection described alongside it awaits the ultimate consummation.

God's plans do not always unfold succinctly and cleanly in a single event, as we might expect or prefer. A prophecy may be inaugurated in one event, visibly demonstrated in another, and finally completed much later.

What Is a Human Being?

- **Body:** Is it merely a temporary container, or an essential or at least reusable part of human identity that God intends to redeem?
- **Soul:** Is it best understood as life, the living person, or the conscious self—the experiencing agent normally embodied but capable of existing apart from the body?
- **Spirit:** Is it the animating breath of life, the person's Godward faculty, an ethereal counterpart of the embodied person, or some combination of these?
- **Death:** Which of these separates, departs, returns, sleeps, remains conscious, or awaits resurrection?
- **Resurrection:** If the conscious person already survives death, why must the body be raised?

Until recently, I assumed that the body had no enduring spiritual significance. It serves its purpose in the physical world, and when it can function no longer, it is finished. But now I'm not so sure.

Even as recently as the last two episodes, I assumed that "soul" and "spirit" were essentially interchangeable terms. I'm now convinced that they are not. They are closely related, and Scripture may sometimes speak of them in overlapping ways, but they do not appear to be identical.

Had I understood this earlier, I would have addressed it in *Spiritual Realities*. But *The Hard Problem of Hell* is increasingly becoming a focused continuation of that series. Before we can understand death, judgment, resurrection, Heaven or Hell, we first must understand what a human being is.

- The body is not merely disposable matter; it is the physical expression of the human person and therefore participates in both judgment and redemption.
- The soul is the conscious self—the person who thinks, desires, remembers, and experiences.
- The spirit is the extra-dimensional entity that gives or carries life and may

become the soul’s mode of existence apart from the body.

The Problem of the Body

- The body is mortal—but is it completely disposable?
- Enoch and Elijah were taken to Heaven without leaving their bodies behind
- Jesus returned to his own body placed in the tomb
- Matthew's resurrected saints came out of their own tombs
- Joseph's bones (Genesis 50:24-26, Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32, Hebrews 11:22) – that's a lot of important given to someone's bones.
- Ezekiel 37 shows that human remains matter
- Yet bodies can be cremated, disintegrated, or absorbed into future bodies
  - Bodily identity must involve more than possessing the same molecules

I previously assumed that the body had no enduring spiritual significance. It serves its purpose during physical life, and when it can function no longer, it is discarded. But the biblical evidence is not that simple.

Enoch and Elijah were taken by God without leaving their bodies behind. Scripture does not tell us whether their bodies were preserved or transformed, but God apparently did not consider them disposable.

Jesus' spirit returned to his *actual body* placed in the tomb. In the model I am presently considering, his body was first restored to a livable condition and then transformed into an imperishable body some short time later.

John 20:17 – Jesus said [to Mary Magdeline], "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

It really seems like Jesus' body was restored just enough to be reanimated and that, in the intervening time, he would return to the Father and the Father would transform that very body into a spiritual yet imbodied, imperishable form, and

then he would return to earth to the disciples. I really think his final Ascension in Luke 24 and Acts 1 was not unique and was just that, “his final ascension” before the Second Coming.

Whether or not that transformation occurred in two stages, the empty tomb establishes that God did not abandon Jesus’ former body and merely create another one.

Matthew 27 says that tombs were opened and the bodies of many holy people were raised. Raised imperishable? Probably not but nevertheless, presumably, whatever remained of them in them in their tombs was used to recreate and reanimate their bodies which then left the tomb and appeared to people. It couldn’t have been in a scary zombie form.

Joseph’s insistence that his bones be carried into the Promised Land also shows that bodily remains retained a meaningful connection to the person. Ezekiel 37 is a vision, but it reinforces this biblical picture of God rebuilding people beginning with their bones.

Yet this creates a problem. Many bodies have been cremated or completely disintegrated (think Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Their molecules may have entered plants, animals, and *even the bodies of later human beings*. The same matter can therefore become part of more than one person.

Obviously, God can resurrect anyone regardless of what remains. But Scripture seems to show that when bodily remains are available, God chooses to use them as the starting point. Paul’s comparison of burial and resurrection to sowing a **seed** may explain the relationship: the new body grows out of the old one and remains truly connected to it, without needing to contain all the same material.

The body is therefore mortal, but it is not disposable. Bodily continuity matters, even though bodily identity must consist of something more than the ownership of particular molecules.

The Problem of the Soul vs. the Spirit

- **Soul — *nephesh / psychē***
  - Life, living being, person, or conscious self
- **Spirit — *ruach / pneuma***
  - Breath, animating life, or nonphysical dimension
- Scripture sometimes uses them similarly—but also distinguishes them
  - "Soul and spirit" can be divided — Hebrews 4:12
  - Body, soul, and spirit are named together — 1 Thessalonians 5:23
  - Jairus's daughter's spirit returned to her body — Luke 8:55
  - The body can be killed without killing the soul and, presumably, the soul can be destroyed — Matthew 10:28
- Perhaps the soul is the conscious person and the spirit carries that person beyond death

The Hebrew word *nephesh* and the Greek word *psychē*, usually translated "soul," can mean life, a living being, a person, or the self. This has led me to wonder whether the soul is best understood as the conscious person—the part of us that thinks, desires, remembers, and experiences.

The Hebrew *ruach* and Greek *pneuma*, usually translated "spirit," can mean wind, breath, or spirit. Spirit is more clearly ethereal and appears to be the nonphysical, animating dimension of human life.

It's interesting that both the Hebrew and Greek languages have separate words for the two and that they both mean the same thing.

Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is sharp enough to divide soul and spirit, just as it can divide joints and marrow. Joints and marrow are closely associated within the body, but they are not the same thing. Perhaps soul and spirit are similarly interconnected yet distinct.

Paul also names spirit, soul, and body together in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

We also encounter *fortuitous revelations*. When Jesus raises Jairus's daughter, Luke says that her spirit returned to her. Her body was present, but something that had departed had to return before she lived again. Who knows, it may have been just outside of her body in the room.

I'm starting to think that the soul may be the conscious self, while the spirit is the nonphysical dimension capable of carrying or containing that conscious self apart from the body. Both are intangible in the physical realm and yet can be coloated with the body. During physical life, consciousness ordinarily operates through the body and brain. At death, perhaps the soul's consciousness becomes established in the spirit—what I described as the soul being "uploaded" into the spirit in Episode 4 of *Spiritual Realities*.

- Jesus also says in Matthew 10:28 that humans can kill the body without killing the soul. This suggests that the conscious person can somehow continue beyond the death of the body.
- Matthew 10:28: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."
- The Greek verb is *apollymi*, meaning to destroy, ruin, lose, or cause to perish. Its precise result must still be determined from context: it does not automatically prove either annihilation or endless conscious ruin.
- Nevertheless, other humans have no control or effect on the soul. God can do to the soul what human beings cannot.

That final idea is speculative, and I am not presenting it as established doctrine. But distinguishing soul from spirit may help explain how a person can remain conscious after bodily death while still awaiting bodily resurrection.

- It may also explain how an ethereal part of a person can remain on the earth after their death and continue to affect the physical realm. Naturally I'm speaking about ghosts.
- As I discussed in *Spiritual Realities*, an individual leaving behind some residual expression of themselves appears to be rare, yet common enough that people throughout history and across cultures have reported encounters with such phenomena.
- Significantly, these encounters do not usually seem to involve fully conscious beings. What remains often appears limited and repetitive, retaining certain memories of the person—most commonly something connected with where or how they died—and emotions such as sadness, fear, or distress.
- If there is any reality behind reports of ghosts, perhaps what remains may or may not be the person's soul.
    - It may instead be a residual imprint left within the spiritual realm: something carrying fragments of memory and emotion without possessing the person's complete consciousness or identity.

        - The soul may have departed while this limited expression remained behind.
        - I tend to think it may be their soul, though.
- Again, this is speculative. But distinguishing the soul from the spirit may help make sense of something that was difficult to explain when I treated them as interchangeable.

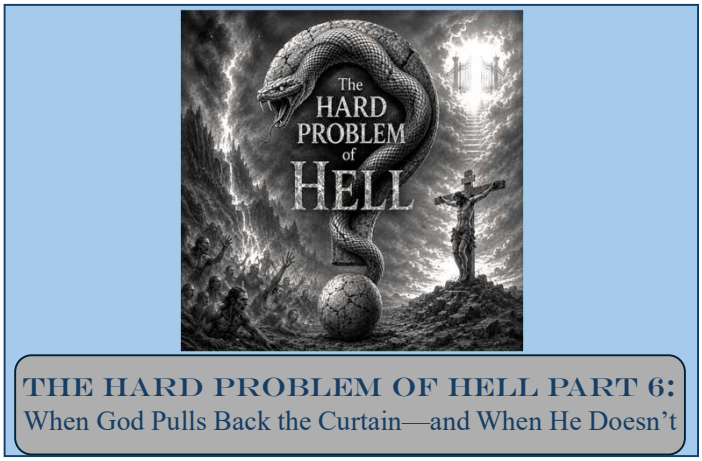
Summary

Ironically, of the body, soul, and spirit, it may be the spirit that now presents the fewest new uncertainties. Perhaps that is because most of its uncertainties were already present—and explored—throughout the *Spiritual Realities* series.

What changed this week were my assumptions about the other two. The body may be mortal, but it is not merely disposable matter. It retains some meaningful continuity with the person and has an essential place in God's plan of resurrection. Meanwhile, the soul and spirit may be closely connected, but Scripture gives us good reason not to treat them as interchangeable.

This episode has not yet given us a complete model of the afterlife. Instead, it has shown us why we should not formulate that model until we better understand what a human being actually is.

And after repeatedly discovering that this investigation has plans of its own, I am not going to promise exactly what next week's episode will cover. We will simply continue following the biblical evidence wherever it leads.



The title of today's episode is, "When God Pulls Back the Curtain—and When He Doesn't".

I'm going to use the word "cosmology" a lot in this episode, so I better start with its definition:

- Cosmology is simply a model or account of *the structure, origin, and nature of reality as a whole*.
- In science, cosmology deals with the physical universe—its origin, structure, development, and ultimate fate.
- Religious cosmology asks many of the same kinds of questions about realities beyond the physical universe: Where did everything come from? What spiritual beings or realms exist? What happens after death? How are heaven, the earth, the underworld, and the divine realm related?
- And throughout human history, cultures have developed very different answers to those questions.

Humans have always created religious cosmologies to explain what they fear and cannot see—especially death, the afterlife, and the spiritual realm. In addition, ancient leaders recognized religion could be used to control the

masses. Those ideas evolve, borrow from surrounding cultures, combine with one another, and eventually become accepted descriptions of reality.

But how do we know which ideas are actually true?

In this episode, we'll examine whether the spiritual reality can be known at all, and what kind of biblical evidence should be trusted when trying to reconstruct it—and why we must do our best to known what can be known.

That question is where the first five episodes have been leading. We began with the problem of Hell itself, surveyed the biblical possibilities for what happens after death, then worked backward through bodily resurrection, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and finally the body, soul, and spirit. Along the way, some possibilities have become more plausible, others less so, and a few things have become reasonably clear—but the deeper problem keeps returning: how do we know when Scripture is *actually revealing* the spiritual realm, rather than simply referring to it through language, imagery, or cosmology its original audience already understood?

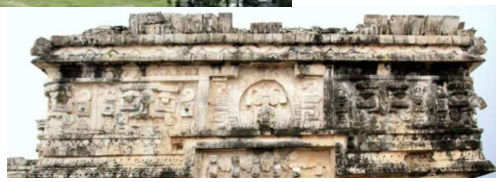
Before we can build a model of the afterlife, we have to decide what evidence belongs in the model.

The question is not whether humans have created descriptions of the unseen. The question is: ***when has God actually shown us what is there?***

Humans Make Cosmologies

- Humans fill the unknown with explanations
- Those explanations become religious cosmologies
- Cosmologies evolve, merge, and borrow from one another
- Death and the unseen realm are especially fertile ground for speculation



Humans do not like unexplained realities.

When we encounter something that we cannot directly observe or understand, we naturally try to construct an explanation. Death and whatever may exist beyond it are perhaps the greatest examples of this, because no ordinary human investigation can simply go there, observe it, and come back with a report.

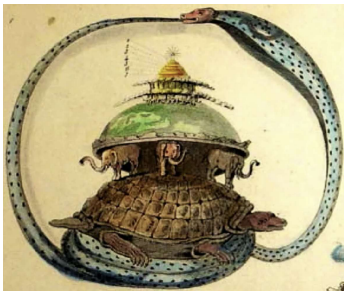
So, cultures develop religious cosmologies—models of the unseen world that attempt to explain where we came from, what spiritual beings or realms exist, what happens after death, and how those realities relate to the physical world. But these cosmologies do not remain static. They evolve. They borrow from neighboring cultures. Different ideas merge together. Stories become traditions, traditions become accepted explanations, and over generations those explanations can become so embedded in a culture that their origins are forgotten.

That means antiquity by itself proves nothing. Widespread belief proves nothing. Even a very old and sophisticated cosmology may still be nothing more than humanity trying to explain the unknown.

If we want to know what the spiritual reality actually is, we need something more than human speculation.

Israel's Cosmology Is Unique

- Ancient Israel had a unique role in God's revelation as God's chosen people
- Israel's cosmology is unusually restrained compared with many ancient systems
  - No gods physically carrying the sun or sky
  - No divine animals running the cosmos
  - No elaborate mythic geography of the underworld
  - No god assigned to every force of nature
  - The world being supported by elephants, serpents, mountains, or other physical structures



- But Israel still lived within the wider ancient world
- Jewish cosmology was not automatically divine revelation
- Ancient belief ≠ revealed truth

Ancient Israel occupies a unique place in this question because God chose the Jewish people as the vehicle through which He revealed Himself and ultimately brought the Messiah.

But ***antiquity does not authenticate a cosmology***. Popularity does not authenticate it. Only revelation can authenticate knowledge of an otherwise inaccessible spiritual reality.

Israel's cosmology is ancient**, but it was surprisingly restrained compared with many of the surrounding systems.**

I'm not trying to ridicule other religions—they themselves point out that their ancient cosmologies contain concrete physical claims that their modern adherents treat as obviously mythic, symbolic, or culturally ancient rather than literal descriptions of reality. This is why the restraint of the ancient Hebrews' claims deserve closer examination rather than casual dismissal.

But ancient Jewish culture was still part of the broader ancient world, and its religious cosmology was not immune from cultural influence. That means

ancient Jewish beliefs cannot automatically be treated as divine revelation simply because they were Jewish.

The key distinction is between passages where God genuinely "pulls back the curtain" and passages where familiar religious cosmology may simply function as a vehicle for another teaching.

That requires us to distinguish between direct divine revelation, fortuitous revelation, symbolic or apocalyptic imagery, and what I call a "cosmological vehicle"—the use of familiar cultural cosmology to communicate a different message.

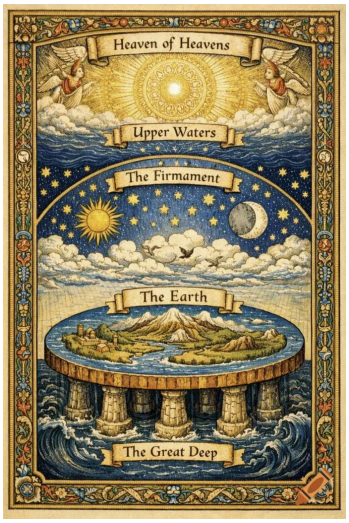
The Old Testament provides only sparse glimpses of the afterlife, making every credible disclosure especially important. Jesus is surprisingly restrained in describing what happens after death, while the apostles—after the coming of the Holy Spirit—provide several of the clearest statements about resurrection, being with Christ, and the state of the dead.
Revelation presents another challenge: it is unquestionably revelation, but it is also an apocalyptic vision filled with symbolism. How much of what John sees should be understood as literal spiritual geography?

We cannot simply fill the gaps with tradition or imagination. But neither can we dismiss the question by saying that God apparently does not want us to know.

The spiritual realm matters because it speaks to the character of God, the moral accountability of mankind, and the ultimate portion of both the lost and the saved—from the Garden, through the Old Covenant, and into the New Covenant.

An Epistemological Filter

- **Direct Revelation** — the spiritual reality itself is intentionally disclosed
- **Fortuitous Revelation** — spiritual truth is revealed while teaching something else
- **Cosmological Vehicle** — familiar cosmology is used to carry another teaching
- **Cultural Tradition** — evidence of what people believed, not necessarily what is true



Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that examines the nature, origin, and limits of **knowledge**.

If ancient Jewish belief alone isn't enough, we need some kind of epistemological filter—a way of deciding what kind of biblical evidence can actually tell us something about the spiritual reality.

The strongest category is **direct revelation**. This is when God, Jesus, an angel, a prophet, or an apostle is intentionally telling us something about the spiritual realm itself.

The second is what I've been calling **fortuitous revelation**. The speaker is primarily teaching about something else, but in doing so reveals information about another reality that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for us to know.

The third category needs a new term: **cosmological vehicle**. I looked for an existing theological term, and “divide accommodation” came close. *Divine accommodation* describes God communicating in forms, concepts, or language

that human beings can understand. But that is broader than what I mean here.

By *cosmological vehicle*, I mean the use of a familiar cultural picture of the spiritual world as the vehicle for teaching something else. The cosmology carries the message, but the use of that cosmology does not necessarily authenticate every detail of it.

And finally, there is **cultural tradition**. Knowing what ancient Jews believed is historically valuable, but belief by itself isn't revelation.

So, the question we have to keep asking is: Is the spiritual information itself being revealed—or is it merely the setting through which something else is being revealed?

Applying the Filter – OT verses that count

- **Genesis 5:24** — Enoch is taken by God
- **1 Samuel 28:11–19** — Samuel appears from somewhere, speaks after death, and says Saul and his sons will join him.
- **Ecclesiastes 12:7** — The spirit returns to God who gave it
- **Isaiah 26:19** — The dead will rise
- **Daniel 12:2–3** — Resurrection to life or shame after some event
- **Daniel 12:13** — Daniel will rest, then rise to his inheritance

- Sparse but not silent

Once we have this filter, we can start applying it to actual passages.

So, when we apply this filter conservatively, the Old Testament does give us a few places where the curtain genuinely seems to be pulled back.

Enoch is taken by God rather than simply dying. Samuel appears after his death and speaks to Saul. Ecclesiastes says that at death the dust returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Then Isaiah and Daniel become much more explicit about resurrection. Isaiah says that the dead will live and rise, while Daniel describes some awakening to everlasting life and others to shame, and is himself told that after resting he will rise to receive his allotted inheritance.

That isn't enough to construct an elaborate map of the afterlife. But it is enough to say the Old Testament is not silent.

And because these disclosures are so sparse, we should probably pay very close attention to every one of them.

Applying the Filter – Jesus Gives Little

- Resurrection is real — **Luke 20:34–38** (marriage after death?)
- Paradise — **Luke 23:43** (penitent thief will be with Jesus that day)
- Soul can survive bodily death — **Matthew 10:28** (fear the one who can destroy both)
- Resurrection to life or judgment — **John 5:28–29** (References Daniel 12, "a time is coming…good will rise to live…evil will rise to be condemned.
- Rich Man and Lazarus — **Luke 16:19–31** (very likely cosmological vehicle)
  - Starts with "Pharisees who love money"
  - The Tale Already Existed (The Egyptian-Jewish Connection)
  - Trap for the Pharisees
  - Sheol > Hades, but Ge' Hinnom > Gehenna (not Tartarus)
- Yet no systematic description of the afterlife…Why? **John 16:13-15**

When we get to Jesus, something surprising happens.

He clearly affirms that there is existence beyond death. He speaks of resurrection, Paradise, the destruction of both body and soul, Abraham and the patriarchs as living to God, and resurrection either to life or judgment.

And then, of course, there is the Rich Man and Lazarus.

But Jesus never really stops and gives us a systematic explanation of what happens from the moment a person dies until resurrection.

He reveals pieces of the reality, but not the whole system.

That is one reason Luke 16 has become so important in this series—and also why we must be careful about deciding whether every feature of that story is revelation, or whether some of it is a cosmological vehicle.

- *"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him"* (Luke 16:14).
- **The Egyptian Source:** Archaeologists and historians discovered an ancient

Egyptian folk tale known as the story of *Setme Khamuas and his son Si-Osire*. In it, a rich man buried with great honors is contrasted with a poor man buried with nothing. In the underworld, their fates are completely reversed: the poor man sits clothed in glory next to Osiris, while the rich man is tormented, standing with a door pivot fixed in his right eye.

- **The Jewish Adaptation:** Alexandrian Jews brought this story back to Judea, adapting it into a popular rabbinic parable known as the story of **the rich tax collector Bar Ma'jan and a poor Torah scholar**. In the Jewish version, the poor man rests in beautiful gardens next to flowing waters, while the rich man stands on a riverbank trying desperately to reach a drop of water but is blocked.
- **The Literal Context: A Trap for the Pharisees:** They assumed their wealth was proof of God's blessing. Jesus flips it: the rich man goes to torment.
    - They prided themselves on being "sons of Abraham." Jesus flips it: Abraham rejects the rich man's pleas, while the outcast beggar is the one cradled by Abraham.
    - The true climax of the story is the final line: **"If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead"** (Luke 16:31).
- When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek in the Septuagint, *Sheol* was most commonly rendered as *Hades*. That was a natural linguistic choice, but *Hades* already carried Greek cultural and mythological associations that *Sheol* did not necessarily share.
- Interestingly, the New Testament handles *Ge Hinnom* differently. Rather than translating it with a Greek underworld term such as *Tartarus*—which carried even heavier mythological baggage—it essentially transliterates the Hebrew or Aramaic name into Greek as *Gehenna*.
- That distinction is worth noticing. *Hades* imports an existing Greek word; *Gehenna* largely preserves the original Jewish place-name.

Why is Jesus Sparce?

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth… he will declare to you the things that are to come… He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

- So after the coming of the Holy Spirit, we should expect the apostles to disclose truths that Jesus had not fully explained during His ministry.
- And that is exactly what we find.

Applying the Filter – The Spirit Reveals

- **Paul** — depart and be with Christ; away from body, home with Lord; imperishable resurrection
  Phil 1:21–24; 2 Cor 5:1–10; 1 Cor 15
- **Hebrews** — spirits of the righteous made perfect
  Heb 12:22–24
- **Peter** — Christ proclaimed to imprisoned spirits; judgment of living and dead
  1 Pet 3:18–20; 4:5–6
- **John** — eternal life, resurrection, and seeing Christ as He is
  1 John 3:2; 5:11–13
- **Paul again** — the dead in Christ rise at His coming
  1 Thess 4:13–17

- After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament gives us some of its clearest statements about the unseen realm.
- Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 that the Spirit searches even the depths of God and reveals what God has given. That matters here, because the apostles are no longer merely repeating inherited Jewish cosmology—they are claiming revelation through the Spirit.
- And the information becomes noticeably more direct.
- Paul speaks of departing and being with Christ, of being away from the body and at home with the Lord, of the dead in Christ rising, and of the mortal body being transformed into an imperishable one.
- Hebrews speaks of the spirits of the righteous made perfect.
- Peter gives us difficult but important references to imprisoned spirits and to the dead being judged.
- And John speaks of eternal life, future transformation, and ultimately seeing Christ as He is.
- None of these writers gives us a complete map of the afterlife. But taken together, they provide some of the strongest windows we have into what lies beyond death.
- And because these disclosures are brief and rare, every word matters.

Conclusion

- So why does any of this matter?
- Because the spiritual reality is not just an interesting mystery.
- What happens after death speaks directly to the character of God—His justice, His mercy, and whether His judgments are proportionate to the lives people actually lived.
- It speaks to human accountability: who is judged, on what basis, and whether everyone is judged in the same way.
- And it speaks to the central question of this series: what portion of humanity is actually lost, what "lost" ultimately means, and how that compares with the portion that is saved.
- If we get the spiritual reality wrong, we may also get the character of God wrong.
- That is why we cannot simply inherit a cosmology, fill in the gaps ourselves, or assume that every biblical image is a literal description of the unseen realm.
- But we also cannot ignore the places where God does pull back the curtain.
- Those disclosures may be sparse, but they are enough to keep asking the question.
- And from this point forward, that is what I want to do: take the clearest revelations we have, give them the greatest weight, and see what kind of afterlife they actually describe.



The title of today's episode is, "More Than You Can Bear,"

And yes, this is Episode 6.5—not Episode 7.

Why 6.5? Why not just call it Episode 7 and let the series run to Episode 9?

Because this episode is different. It's both completely on topic and yet on all topics.

In fact, it has everything to do with where we've arrived in this series. We've spent several episodes trying to determine what can actually be known about things like death, the body, the soul, the spirit, Hades, resurrection, judgment, and Hell.

But the question we've now run into transcends the topic of Hell.

It is a question about knowledge itself—specifically, knowledge that comes from God.
And that brings us to the title: *More Than You Can Bear*.

Jesus told his disciples in John 16:12, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.”

That's an interesting statement. How can knowledge be more than someone can bear?

Actually, if you think about it, this happens all the time.

We know poorly delivered knowledge can hurt someone; but sometimes the problem isn't the delivery at all. Sometimes the truth itself has consequences for the person hearing it. It may overturn or contradict something they currently hold dear. It may force them to reconsider something about themselves or someone they love, their future, or even their entire understanding of reality.

Parents understand this. There are things we don't tell small children—not because the information is false or above their comprehension, but because they aren't ready for it yet. As they grow, gain experience, and develop the ability to understand more, we tell them more.

The obvious limitation is that human parents are themselves fallible. They can’t always separate their own fears and assumptions from the situation, and they can’t know precisely when their children are ready.

God knows all.

He knows exactly what a person understands, what they don't understand, what experiences have prepared them, and what they may still need before they are able to receive something else.

Christians have probably all experienced something related to this when reading the Bible. You read a passage you've read a hundred times—and suddenly you see something in it that you never saw before.

The words didn't change.

The page didn't change.

So, what changed?

You did.

Maybe you learned something. Maybe you experienced something. Maybe

another passage finally supplied a missing piece. Maybe a question forced you to look more carefully. Or perhaps the Holy Spirit brought something into focus that you were finally prepared to understand.

There was nothing magical about the ink on the page.

But there is something extraordinary about the way God's Word is constructed.

The Bible is static in one sense: the same stories, the same words, and the same teachings remain on the page..

And yet it is remarkably capable of revealing varying depths of understanding to different people at different stages of their lives.

How can one fixed body of revelation speak to billions of individuals, each with different experiences, different levels of maturity, different questions, and different levels of spiritual readiness?

Part of the answer is that God's Word is layered, using things like narrative, figurative language, symbolism, parallels, and connections that are not always apparent on a first reading.

And for those indwelled by His Spirit, there is another dimension: the Holy Spirit can affect what comes into focus—what is emphasized, what becomes transparent, and what remains opaque.

But there is another side to this: If we encounter something difficult in Scripture, we cannot simply shrug and say, “I guess God doesn’t want me to know that yet.”

Understanding is a two-way street. We still have a responsibility to seek, study, compare, question, meditate, and make every reasonable effort to understand what has been placed in front of us.

But there is also a point where effort can turn into desperation—as though if we cannot solve a question right now, God has somehow failed to give us what we need.

Maturity includes knowing when to keep digging and when to leave a question open.

Not abandoned or forgotten…just unresolved for the time being.

We take what we can presently understand, continue forward, and trust that if more understanding is necessary, God will prepare us for it.

In essence, the truths of God come at ***the speed of our personal readiness***.

How God Reveals Truth

- **Proverbs 25:2** — "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."
- **John 16:12-13** — God has much more to say to us but more than we can *now* bear. But the Spirit will *guide* us into the truth.
- **Mark 4:33-34** —Jesus spoke the word using only parables But when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything.
- **Matthew 7:7** — "Seek and you will find" and God will not give you a snake.
- **1 Corinthians 2:6–14** — The Spirit reveals what comes from God
- **1 Corinthians 3:1–2** — Milk before solid food (but move on from milk)
- **Hebrews 5:11–14** — Maturity changes what can be received

Proverbs 25:2 — "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."
John 16:12-13 — "I have much more to say to you, more than you can *now* bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will *guide* you into all the truth."
Mark 4:33-34 — With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

- Wait, that seems unfair!
- There is a sense in which deeper revelation is available to those who demonstrate that they actually want it. The disciples did not merely hear Jesus and go home; they stayed, followed, asked, and kept seeking.
- Their access to the explanation was itself connected to their response to what they had already been given.

Matt 7:7-9 — "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

1 Corinthians 2:6–14:

> We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
>
> However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" — the things God has prepared for those who love him [Isaiah 64:4] — these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.
>
> The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:1–2 — Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. **2** I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, *you are still not ready.*

Hebrews 5:11–14 — We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer *try* to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

- God regulates revelation.
- The Spirit enables perception.
- The believer seeks.
- Practice produces maturity.
- Maturity increases capacity.
- Greater capacity permits greater understanding.

The Two-Way Street

- God reveals according to our readiness
  - As we read the Bible, in life's experiences, and through the Spirit
- We are responsible to seek and stretch
  - 1 Cor 3 and Heb 5 mention of "milk" is a direct challenge
- Effort itself develops capacity
- Refusal to stretch reveals immaturity
- Unresolved does not mean abandoned

Seek aggressively…Grow deliberately…Hold unresolved things peacefully.



God may not give everything at once. But the believer is also not permitted to remain indefinitely at the same level and then blame God for the lack of understanding.

- No one wants to be called a baby. It's a direct challenge to our pride. The one who is saying it is telling us we're not really be we *should* be.
- God may regulate what we are ready to receive, but our readiness is not entirely something that happens to us. We participate in developing it.
- Seek aggressively. Grow deliberately. Hold unresolved things peacefully.

Truth is given publicly.
Those who seek further receive more.
Those who prove unreceptive may receive less, not more.

Why Aren't We Ready?

- **Ineffable** — some spiritual realities resist human language and categories
- **Conceptually unprepared** — we lack the framework needed to understand
- **Emotionally unprepared** — the truth may overwhelm, frighten, or destabilize us
- **Spiritually immature** — we have not yet developed discernment
- **Morally unprepared** — we may resist truths that demand change
- **Experientially unprepared** — sometimes life has not yet supplied the context
- **Unprepared about Hell…and Heaven** — Matthew 20:1–16

So, what does it actually mean to say that we may not be ready for a truth?

There are several different possibilities.

First, some spiritual realities may simply be ineffable. They may not fit cleanly into human language or human categories. If the spiritual realm is fundamentally unlike the physical world we know, then even a completely truthful description may have to come through analogy, imagery, symbolism, or approximation.

Second, we may be conceptually unprepared. Sometimes the problem is not that a truth is too difficult, but that we do not yet have the framework needed to understand it. We may be missing background knowledge, other biblical connections, or even the right question.

Third, we may be emotionally unprepared. Some truths can frighten, destabilize, or overwhelm us simply because of what they imply. Hell is an obvious example. We may need to understand enough to take it seriously without being given so much that fear becomes paralyzing.

Fourth, we may be spiritually immature. Paul and the author of Hebrews both describe people who are still on milk when they should have moved on to solid food. Discernment grows. The ability to perceive and handle spiritual truth develops.

Fifth, we may be morally unprepared. Sometimes the problem is not that we cannot understand a truth. We simply do not want it to be true because it demands something from us. It may require repentance, humility, forgiveness, or the surrender of an idea we have become attached to.

Sixth, we may be experientially unprepared. There are things we can understand intellectually at one stage of life but only really grasp after we have lived through something that gives the words context.

And then there is one more possibility that applies not only to Hell, but to Heaven.

Maybe we are unprepared for what God's final judgment actually looks like.

Hell may be more terrible than we are ready to comprehend.

But Heaven may also be more ***generous*** than we are ready to accept.

- In Matthew 20, the workers who had labored all day were offended when the workers who came late received the same wage. The problem was not that they misunderstood what had happened. They understood it perfectly.
- They just did not like the generosity of the landowner.
- That does not tell us how many people will ultimately be saved. But it does raise an uncomfortable question.
- What if more people receive God's mercy than we think should?
    - Would we rejoice?
    - Or would some part of us say, "Wait. They get the same thing but didn't put in all the work I did to change myself *most of my life*?"
- So being unprepared for truth is not always about being unable to understand it.
- Sometimes we are not ready because the truth is too strange.
- Sometimes because it is too frightening.
- Sometimes because it requires maturity.
- Sometimes because it demands change.

Jesus tells a parable about workers hired at different times of the day. At the end, the landowner pays all of them the same amount. The workers who had been there all day complain…"

Matthew 20:12 — *"These who were hired last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us…"*
Matthew 20:15 — "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

- Is God more merciful ***than we are?*** Really let that settle in. It seems almost un-Christianly possible—but it is *very* Christianly possible!

How Truth Reaches Us?

1. **Revelation** — truth made available to everyone
2. **Seeking** — deeper understanding discovered through effort and maturity
3. **Illumination** — the Holy Spirit brings truth into focus for the individual

- Being taught by People:
- Personal – one-on-one or a couple-on-one.
- Communal – A person teaching a group (hint: it's very limited)
- A lesson – A video or audio lesson that can be chosen and rewound/rewatched.

So far we've mostly been talking about being taught by God.

There seems to be a progression.

First, there is revelation. God makes truth available. In the case of Scripture, the words are there for everyone to read.
Then there is seeking. We dig, compare passages, ask questions, acquire experience, and hopefully mature. Some things that were once opaque begin to make sense.

And then, for those who are indwelled by the Holy Spirit, there is illumination. The Spirit can bring something into focus for the individual—perhaps emphasizing something that has been sitting on the same page for years.

But most of us are also taught by other people, and that's where something interesting happens.

The most effective form of human teaching is probably personal: one person teaching another person, or perhaps two people working with one. The teacher

can see confusion as it happens. They can stop, rephrase something, answer a question, back up, or discover that the student is missing some prerequisite idea.

That's remarkably similar to what we've been talking about with God: teaching can proceed at the speed of the individual.

Then there is communal teaching—one person speaking to a group. And beware: this is very limited.

The moment I teach ten people, I am teaching ten people at ten different places. They have different backgrounds, different questions, different levels of biblical knowledge, different experiences, and different levels of readiness.

If I slow down enough for one person, I may lose another. If I assume too much background knowledge, someone gets left behind. If I explain every prerequisite, someone else becomes bored.

I've always thought that if I could understand something well enough, I could break it down into small enough pieces that a good number of people could understand it.

But it never quite works that way.

I've had people tell me something went over their heads when I thought I had simplified it about as much as I possibly could.

And maybe that's not entirely a failure of teaching.

A teacher can control what is presented. A teacher cannot control the readiness of the person receiving it.

There is one interesting middle ground: a lesson like this one.

A video or audio lesson is still one person teaching many people, but the hearer has some control. They chose to listen to it. They can pause it. They can rewind. They can listen again. They can stop and look something up. And perhaps they can return years later and hear something in exactly the same lesson that they weren't ready to hear the first time.
So human teaching can help make truth available.

But ultimately, I cannot determine when another person will understand it.

I can study. I can try to communicate clearly. You can seek and make every effort to understand.
But somewhere in that process there remains something neither the teacher nor the student completely controls.
God knows precisely where each individual is.

And perhaps that is why the most important teacher of spiritual truth is not another person at all.
It is God.

Conclusion:
So why did we stop here? Why have an Episode 6.5 at all?

Because before moving into Episodes 7 and 8, I think we needed to establish something about the limits of what we can know—and about the way God seems to reveal truth.

The next two episodes are going to bring us back to the hardest questions in this series:
1. What can we actually say about Hell?
2. How many people go there?
3. What happens to those who do?
4. And what do those answers—or even the uncertainty surrounding those answers—tell us about the character of God?

Those are questions I want answers to! But this episode has reminded me that wanting an answer and being ready for an answer are not necessarily the same thing.

It has also reminded me that uncertainty is not automatically evidence that God has failed to reveal enough.

Sometimes the limitation may be the ineffable nature of the spiritual reality itself.

Sometimes we may lack the concepts, experience, maturity, or emotional readiness to understand what has been revealed.

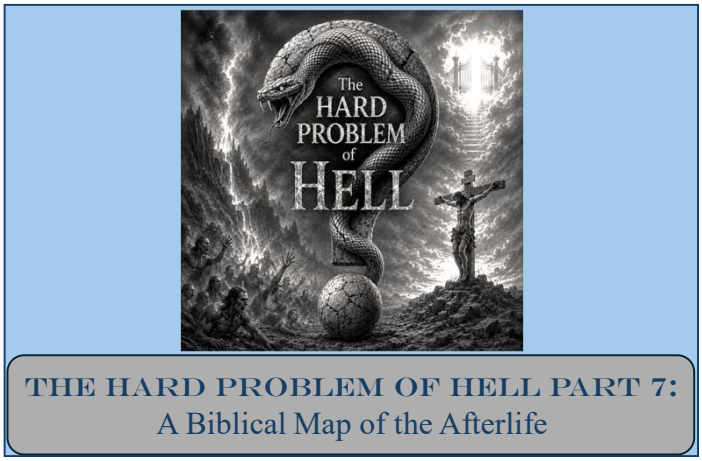
And sometimes the right response is to keep seeking—to dig, stretch, compare, question, and grow.
But eventually there may also come a point where the faithful response is simply to say:
- “I don't know yet.”

- Not with frustration.
- Not with fear that God has abandoned the question.

And not as an excuse to stop seeking.
But with the peace that if there is more I need to understand, God knows exactly where I am and what I am ready to bear.

That is how I want to approach Episodes 7 and 8:
- I want to push as far as the evidence allows.
- I want to challenge assumptions—including my own.
- I want to narrow the possibilities as much as I can.
- But I also want to be willing to stop where the evidence stops.

Because perhaps one of the lessons of this entire series is that spiritual truth is not something we conquer:
- We seek it.
- We grow into it.
- And, ultimately, God teaches us at the speed of our readiness.



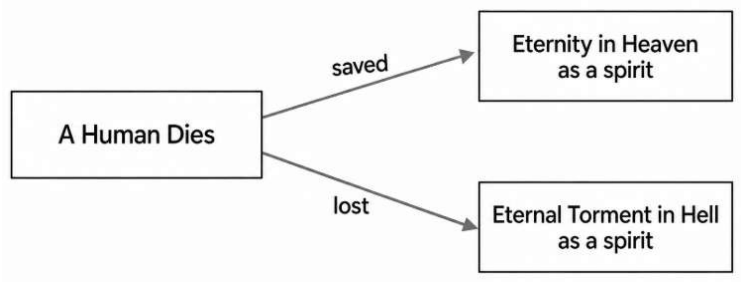
Last week, in Episode 6.5, "More Than You Can Bear," I argued that the truths of God often come at **the speed of our personal readiness**. I called it 6.5 because it was an epistemological intermission of sorts about the nature of what and *when* we can understand spiritual aspects of God. It's an amazing additional dimension of the Bible: it can simultaneously speak to multitudes each at their own level of readiness.

The same can be true of a Biblical teacher's spoken interpretation of the Bible—but with an important caveat. The Biblical truths espoused by human teachers are layered since the source is layered, but because they are human, disagreement and the inability to understand cannot simply be attributed to spiritual immaturity or deficiency. Instead, like a Good Berean, one must examine the teachings of others against the scriptures, always striving to reach the level of "meat" above "milk". It does mean that one's understanding can be limited by where they are, what they have already learned, and what they are presently able to integrate.

Continuing with this series, I don't think it would be right for me to expect some new revelation this past week to suddenly make everything clear about the Hard

Problem of Hell and the afterlife in general. Instead, I took what we have already examined and separated it into two categories: what seems reasonably well established, and what remains uncertain but constrained by the evidence. Today I want to present that honestly, as a biblical map of the afterlife. And as you watch, you may find some parts easy to accept and others difficult. That is okay. The point is not to force everyone to the same place at the same speed, but to examine the evidence faithfully and allow understanding to develop as we are personally ready for it.

The Starting Point



- This is very simple but it's likely what most Christians start with.
- The model stays simple because the practical emphasis is only: Position yourself in life to ensure you take the upper path.

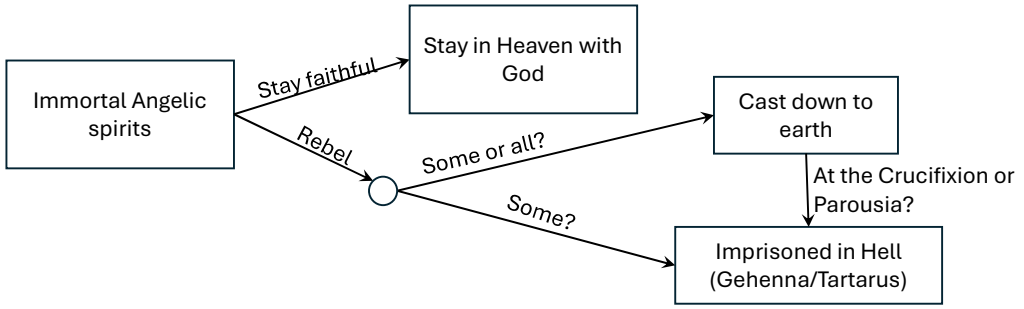
Expanding the Map

- A fuller biblical map must account for four things:

1. Covenant era: Pre-Old Covenant (?), Old Covenant, and New Covenant.
2. The separate destinations of body, soul, and spirit
3. Temporary and final destinations given in the Bible.
4. Multiple possible paths where Scripture leaves uncertainty.



An Even Earlier Starting Point



- Before Adam and Eve and the creation account, the Bible gives glimpses us of a spiritual rebellion.
  - Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:14-17, Luke 10:18, Matt 8:29, 2Pet 2:4, Rev 12:7-9
- So here we encounter our first uncertainties:
  - When did this happen? Were some or all cast to earth? When did they end up in Hell (Gehenna/Tartarus)?
  - Nevertheless, we see the Hell is created for Satan and his demons (Matt 25:41)

- **Isaiah 14:12–15**: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground… You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high… I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit."
  - While historically directed at the King of Babylon, this is widely understood to shadow the fall of Lucifer.
- **Ezekiel 28:14–17**: *"You were an anointed guardian cherub… You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you… Your heart was proud because of your beauty… I cast you to the ground…"* (Contextually addressing the King of Tyre, mirroring Satan's spiritual fall)
- **Luke 10:18**: Jesus states, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"
- **Matthew 8:29** – When Jesus encounters two demon-possessed men, the demons actually scream, *"Have you come here to torment us **before the time?"***
- **2 Peter 2:4**: "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Tartarus] and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment…"

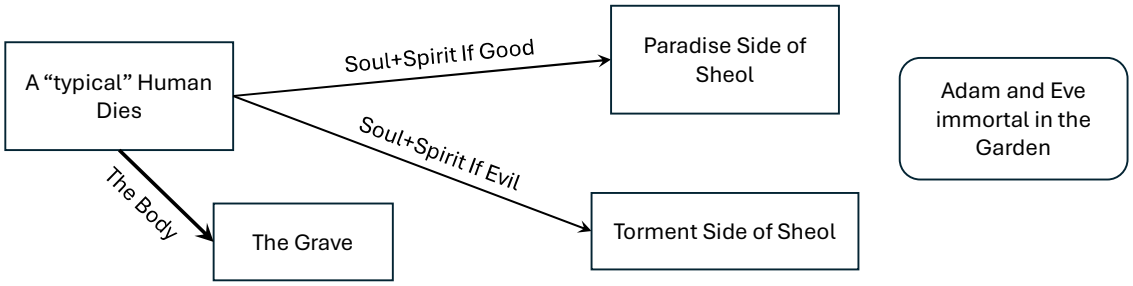
- **Revelation 12:7–9**: *"Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon…And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan… he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."*
- **Matt 25:41:** "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

- So here we encounter our first uncertainties: When did this happen? Were some or all cast to earth? When did they end up in Hell (Tartarus)?

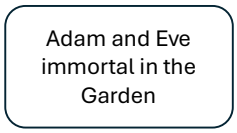
- **Parousia** (par-oo-see'ah)**:** The theological term for the Second Coming of Christ. It means "arrival" or "coming" in Greek. Commonly used in Christian eschatology to refer to the anticipated return of Jesus Christ.

Human Death: The Need for an Intermediate Place

Case 1 Before the Fall



Case 2 Before the Fall



- Case 1: There were mortal humans, perhaps many thousands and perhaps pre-dating the Garden by tens of thousands of years.
- Typical humans are mortal and die and there has to be a place for the spirit.
- Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were mean to be immortal

- **The need for a temporary place, Sheol**.
    - A separation of the soul+spirit from the body at death
    - Although there is much uncertainty about the soul and spirit, I'm going with: "The soul and spirit do seem to be two distinct entities yet bound together for the most part.
- Regarding humans, initially there are two Biblical possibilities:

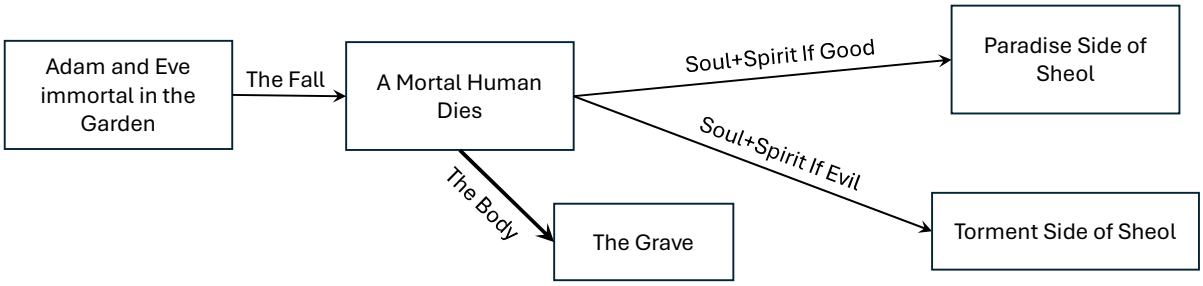
1) There were mortal humans, perhaps many thousands and perhaps pre-dating the Garden by tens of thousands of years.
2) Adam and Eve were the first and only humans created initially to be immortal

- Note the rounded shape is an End State.
- In case 1, this place of human spirits would predate the Garden.
- Although there wasn't a covenant to define who goes on one side and who goes on the other, the Bible still uses terms like good and evil, therefore the good went to the paradise side and the evil went to the torment side.

- Obviously, it's impossible to say this with absolute certainty, but I believe these are the best supported cases presented in the Bible.

Human Death: The Need for an Intermediate Place

Case 1 Before and after the Fall –or-
Case 2 After the Fall

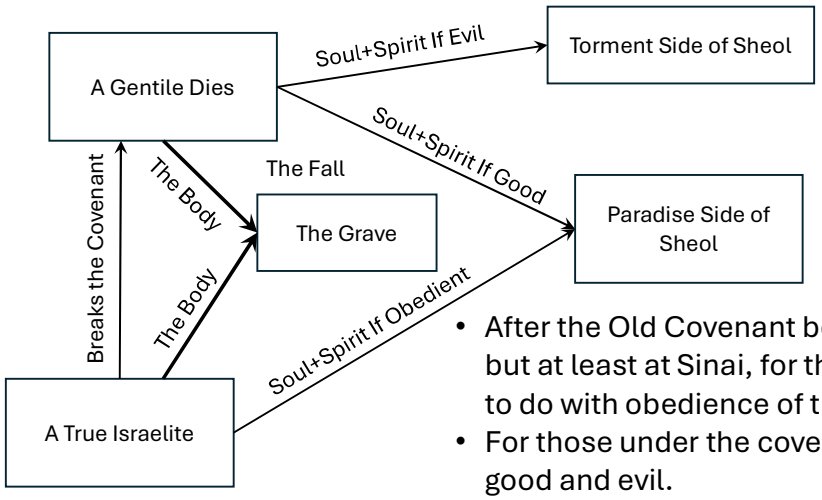


- Case 2 after the Fall: They become mortal (albeit long-lived initially) and a place becomes necessary for their spirits.
- In Case 1, this is the same picture as the previous slide.

- Before the Fall, there wasn't a need for a place of spirits, but after the Fall there was.
- Therefore, in Case 2, a place for human spirits *became necessary* after their expulsion from the Garden.
- In Case 1,

- In Case 2, it would seem as though Abel was its first occupant. Although there wasn't a covenant to define who goes on one side and who goes on the other, the Bible still uses terms like good and evil, therefore the good went to the paradise side and the evil went to the torment side.

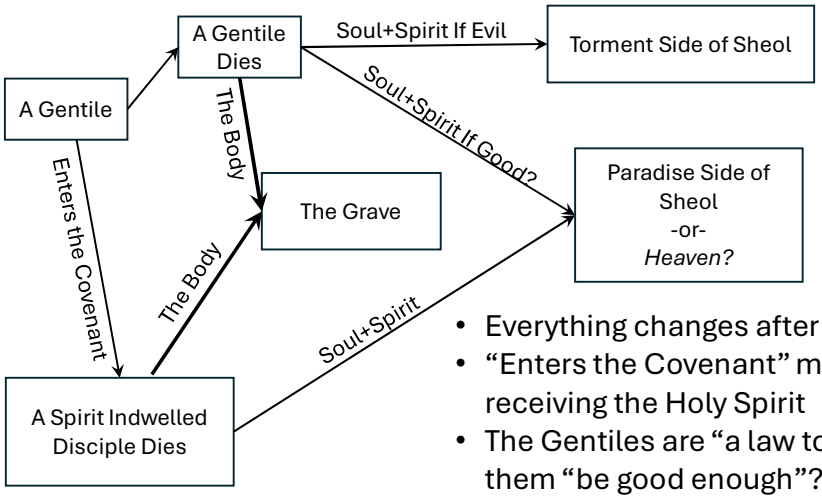
Human Death: The Need for a Covenant and a Messiah



- After the Old Covenant begins (arguably with Abraham but at least at Sinai, for those under the covenant it has to do with obedience of that covenant.
- For those under the covenant, it's still about universal good and evil.
- Neither of these say anything about how hard or easy it is to end up in Paradise.

- The Old Covenant is given to Moses who gives it to be people at Mount Sinai, but the Abrahamic promises are given to Abraham so you could argue the covenant started with him.
- For those under the covenant it has to do with obedience of that covenant.
- For those under the covenant, it's still about universal good and evil.
- Neither of these say anything about how hard or easy it is to end up in Paradise.
    - Perhaps it's impossible for a Gentile to "be good".
    - We know Abraham made it here. What about Enoch and Elijah? Maybe. It's possible they went to Heaven.

Human Death Under the New Covenant



- Everything changes after Jesus
- "Enters the Covenant" means becoming a Christian and receiving the Holy Spirit
- The Gentiles are "a law to themselves" but can any of them "be good enough"?
- Did Christ do any with the Paradise?

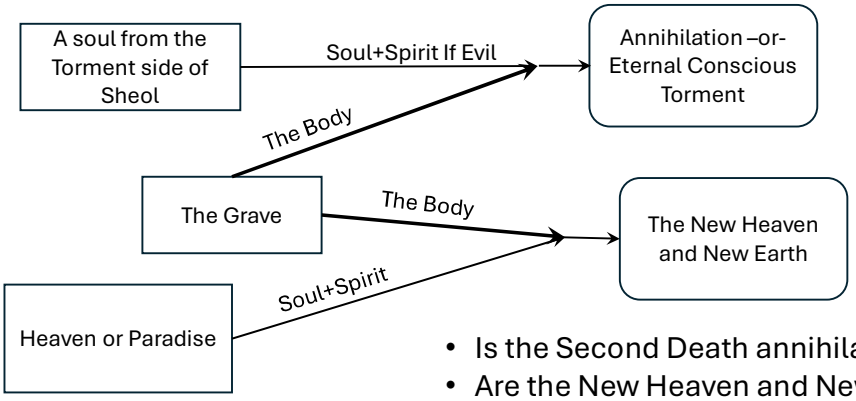
- Everything changes after Jesus. Jer 31:32 says the NC "will not be like" the OC.
- We know now there is neither "Jew nor Gentile" but only "saved and lost".

- But was Sheol closed down? Or perhaps the paradise side was closed down?
- **2 Corinthians 5:8** — Paul says he would rather be "away from the body and at home with the Lord" — and **Philippians 1:23** — he desires "to depart and be with Christ."
- But…what if Jesus went to Paradise? We know he went there at least at first.
- But He's clearly not confined there. Perhaps he goes to and from there. After all He has the first imperishable body.
- Then those verses could still mean Paradise exists.
- **2 Corinthians 5:8** and **Philippians 1:23** establish that the dead in Christ are "with the Lord," but they do **not** establish that Paradise ceased to exist. If Christ can be present in Paradise without being confined there, then "with Christ" is fully compatible with Paradise continuing as an intermediate destination.
- In fact, **2 Corinthians 12:2–4** makes the issue even less clear, because Paul speaks of being caught up to the **"third heaven"** and then calls the destination **"Paradise."** And **Revelation 2:7** still speaks of "the paradise of

God."

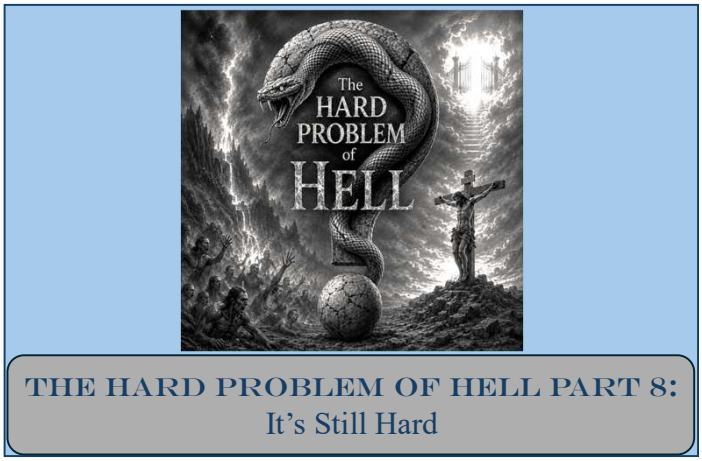
- So, the NT supports *being with Christ after death* much more strongly than it supports *Paradise being abolished*.
- The "Christ emptied Paradise and moved everyone to Heaven" view is possible, but it requires additional inference.

Human Death After Parousia



- Is the Second Death annihilation? It seems to be.
- Are the New Heaven and New Earth just earth or the universe?

- Christ is definitely coming back—not as soon as the apostles though it seems—but there will be a Parousia.
- It really does seem that all humans will be re-embodied. Not just the saved but also the lost:
- **John 5:28-29:** *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and* ***those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment [or condemnation]****."*
- **Revelation 20:11-14** – It is only at the final judgment that Sheol/Hades emptied its contents and "thrown into the lake of fire", ***and*** (end of v14) those who rejected God were merged into the Lake of Fire.
- To me this supports Annihilation. But since Revelation is centered around imagery, so, it's hard to tell.



Welcome to the eighth and final episode of "The Hard Problem of Hell", titled, "It's Still Hard."

Did this series make the problem of Hell easier to solve? No. In fact, it reinforced why the question was hard—and raised even more questions.

In this final episode, I'll recap the series and revisit the biblical map of the afterlife, including unusual cases that may not fit the ordinary path: Enoch and Elijah bodily taken up to Heaven, Samuel's appearance to Saul, the possible connection between Elijah and John the Baptist, bodies of many holy people who had died being raised to life at Jesus' resurrection, near-death experiences, ghosts, and the possibility of limited reincarnation.

These cases don't settle the map. They show how much remains uncertain about the human body, soul, and spirit—and why the hard problem of Hell is still hard.

Before I review the updated maps and the unusual cases, I want to clarify what this series set out to do. The goal was never to make the subject of Hell easy. If we had discovered that everyone goes to Heaven—or that only the exceptionally

evil go to Hell—that might make the problem seem to go away. That was part of the contrast we discussed in the first episode through *Love Wins* and *Erasing Hell*.

Instead, the goal was to distinguish as carefully as possible between what the Bible makes clear and what remains uncertain. Scripture speaks plainly about judgment, but many questions remain about its nature, duration, who experiences it, and what happens to the body, soul, and spirit. I wanted to see what we could responsibly say, where the Bible leaves room for more than one possibility, and where we simply don't know.

So, this series hasn't made Hell easy. It has reinforced why the subject is difficult—and shown that some of the uncertainty goes beyond what I expected. Before we add the rare and exceptional cases to the map, let's look at what each episode contributed.

Recap of Episodes 1-7

Video box

- **Part 1 — The Elephant in the Room:** Why Hell is easy to avoid discussing.
- **Part 2 — The Biblical Possibilities:** ECT, annihilation, and universal reconciliation—and the Bible's role in setting the boundaries.
- **Part 3 — How to Go to Hell:** The series' account of what leads someone to Hell, and how that frames the question of avoiding it.
- **Part 4 — God's Plan of Resurrection:** The embodied afterlife as an important part of God's plan.
- **Part 5 — The Mystery of the Body, Soul, and Spirit:** What can—and cannot—be distinguished about the body, soul, and spirit.
- **Part 6 — When God Pulls Back the Curtain—and When He Doesn't:** How direct revelation, fortuitous revelation, cosmological vehicles, and cultural tradition shape what we can infer.
- **Part 6.5 — More Than You Can Bear:** Spiritual understanding develops with readiness and prior knowledge.
- **Part 7 — A Biblical Map of the Afterlife:** Bringing the findings together across covenant eras, body, soul, and spirit, temporary and final states, and scriptural uncertainty.

In Part 1, The Elephant in the Room, I discussed six reasons why the topic of Hell (and the afterlife in general), is easy to avoid:
1) Spiritual deception - Satan benefits when spiritual realities are ignored.
2) Personal discomfort - Nobody wants to consider that they might be going there.
3) Intellectual embarrassment - To unbelievers, Hell can sound primitive—even childish.
4) Biblical ambiguity - Scripture warns repeatedly about judgment but gives no simple description of Hell.
5) The problem of eternity - Justice makes intuitive sense. Endless punishment is much harder.
6) Christian discomfort - Some confidently explain Hell away as logically necessary while others avoid even saying the word.

Part 2, The Biblical Possibilities, constrained the possibilities for those destined for Hell to ECT, Annihilation, and Universal Reconciliation; but in the end concluded the simple, "the Bible must set the constraints"

Part 3, How to Go to Hell, in a way simplified things by explaining that what

destines someone to Hell is their not being indwelled with the Holy Spirit. At least that allows one to focus on how to avoid going to Hell.

In Part 4, God's Plan of Resurrection, the series took a turn to discuss something I hadn't previously considered: The embodied afterlife is an important part of God's plan. Before this I only knew of the idea of conscious spiritual existence.

Part 5, The Mystery of the Body, Soul, and Spirit, investigated much about the purpose of the body in the afterlife and tried to see of the soul could be distinguished from the spirit, but did have much luck. For the most part the conclusion is the soul is different from the body and the spirit, but is intangible and more likely to resid with the spirit.

Part 6, When God Pulls Back the Curtain—and When He Doesn't, the concept of cultural religious cosmology was brought in. The idea that the Jewish/Hebrew cosmology is unique and distinct. (I didn't mention it, but this does help with Problem #3.) I defined the terms Direct Revelation, Fortuitous Revelation (new), Cosmological Vehicle (new), and Cultural Tradition. With the filters of direct and fortuitous revelation, many Scriptures were identified as containing important information about the afterlife (on the next slide for reference).

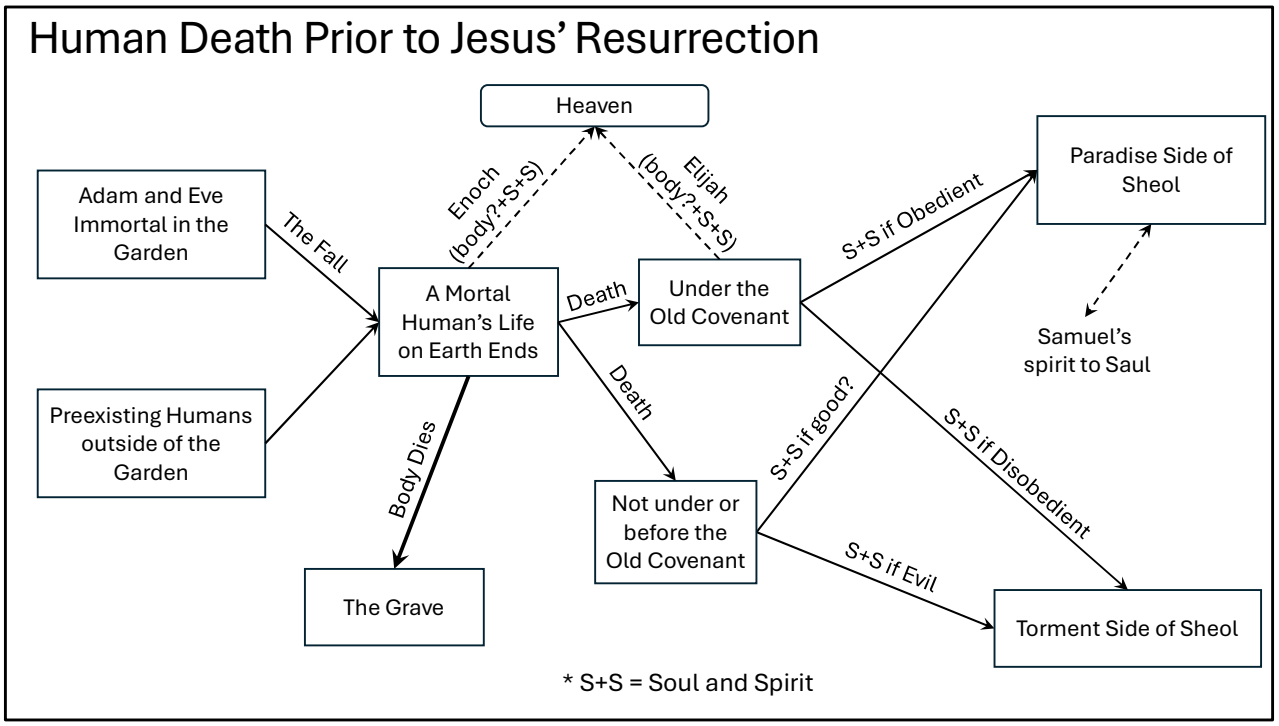
Part 6.5, More Than You Can Bear, was a general episode about the nature of spiritual knowledge. The Bible speaks to people individually at the speed of their readiness. One can only understand and appreciate spiritual knowledge when they are spiritually ready from a prerequesite knowledge and experience standpoint.

Part 7, A Biblical Map of the Afterlife, put together all the knowledge from the prior episodes of the series to create maps of afterlife possibility. One must consider covenant eras; the separate destinations of body, soul, and spirit; temporary and final destinations given in the Bible, and Scriptural uncertainty in order to develop good maps. Today I want to add a fifth consideration: Rare and exceptional cases.

Reference Table of Direct and Fortuitous Revelations of the Afterlife

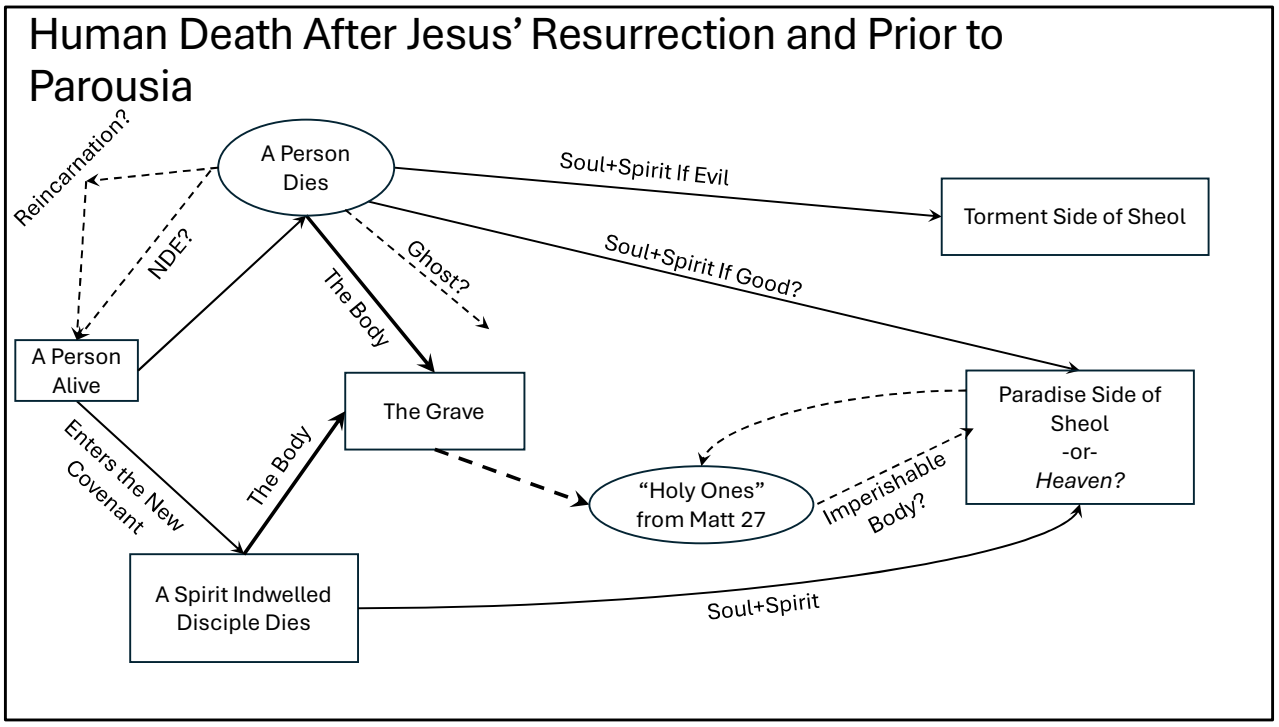
Old Testament	Gospels	New Testament
Genesis 5:24	Mattew 8:29	Acts 24:15
1 Sam 28:11–19	Matthew 10:28	Philippians 1:21–24
2 Kings 2:11	Matthew 17:1-8, 12-13	**1 Cor 15**
Ecclesiaties 12:7	Matthew 22:29-32	2 Cor 5:1–10
Isaiah 26:19	**Matthew 25:31–46**	1 Thess 4:13–17
Daniel 12:1-3	Matthew 27:52–53	2 Thessalonians 1:5–10
Psalm 16:10 (Acts 2:27–31)	Luke 16:19–31	Heb 9:27 and 12:22–24
	Luke 20:34–38	**1 Pet 3:18–20** and 4:5–6
	Luke 23:43	1 John 3:2 and 1 John 5:11–13
	John 5:28–29	**Revelation 20-22**
	John 16:13-15	

Gen 5:24, 1 Sam 28:11–19, Ecc 12:7, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:1–3, Luke 20:34–38, Luke 23:43, Matthew 10:28, Matthew 22:29-32, John 5:28–29, Luke 16:19–31 (although one has to be careful about this), John 16:13-15, Phil 1:21–24; 2 Cor 5:1–10; 1 Cor 15, 1 Thess 4:13–17, Heb 9:27, Heb 12:22–24, 1 Pet 3:18–20, 1 Pet 4:5–6, 1 John 3:2, and 1 John 5:11–13.



- Before the Fall, there wasn't a need for a place of spirits, but after the Fall there was.
- Therefore, in Case 2, a place for human spirits *became necessary* after their expulsion from the Garden.
- In Case 1,

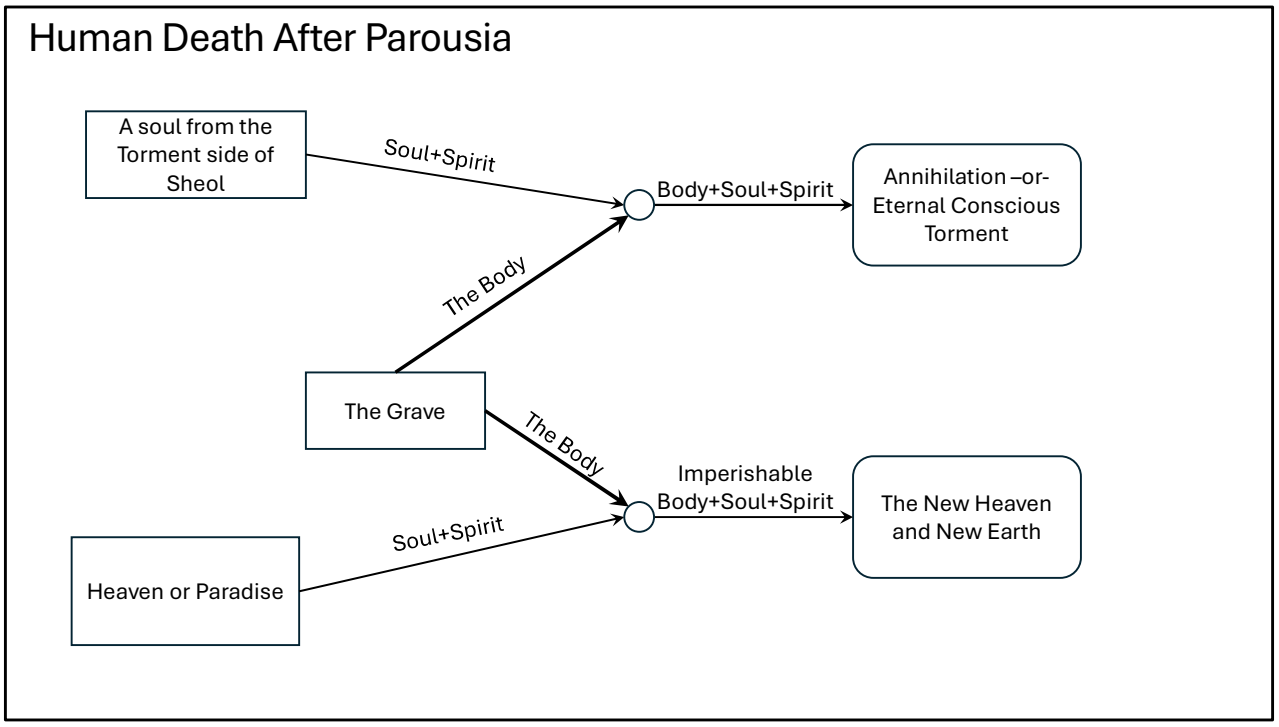
- In Case 2, it would seem as though Abel was its first occupant. Although there wasn't a covenant to define who goes on one side and who goes on the other, the Bible still uses terms like good and evil, therefore the good went to the paradise side and the evil went to the torment side.



- Mat 27:52-53 – "The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many."
- This really complicates things and brings in an additional uncertainty: Did they receive their imperishable body? I would think so, even though Paul makes it sound like no one gets this besides Christ before Parousia; but if they didn't, then could their mortal Body, Soul, and Spirit go Sheol or Heaven, or would their body return to the grave and the soul and spirit return to Sheol or Heaven. Neither of those last two make sense. I should also add that the verse doesn't indicate at all that these were recently deceased. In fact, I would suggest they were long-dead people like Jacob, Joseph, and Moses--a lot of uncertainty though. It's clear that at least for Jesus, his imperishable body can go wherever it pleases.

- Talk about NDE and Reincarnation (limited—only because there's evidence and the Bible probably wouldn't discuss this).

- Programming notes about vacation and the next, final series in the Holy Spirit teaching series.



- Christ is definitely coming back—not as soon as the apostles though it seems—but there will be a Parousia.
- It really does seem that all humans will be re-embodied. Not just the saved but also the lost:
- **John 5:28-29:** *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and* ***those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment [or condemnation]****."*
- **Revelation 20:11-14** – It is only at the final judgment that Sheol/Hades emptied its contents and "thrown into the lake of fire", ***and*** (end of v14) those who rejected God were merged into the Lake of Fire.
- To me this supports Annihilation. But since Revelation is centered around imagery, so, it's hard to tell.