

All About Heave (and a little about hell)

Week 1: Sheol and Beyond • Week 2: Rewards & Punishments • Week 3: Mansions in the Sky •
Week 4: Waiting Time • Week 5: *The Great Divorce*

1. Video

Somebody Really Forked Up

2. Opening Questions

- When you think of heaven what do you envision?
- What questions do you have you hope will be answered?

3. Course Overview & Disclaimer

Where it began: Fundamental Disconnect

What I hear at funerals

“My loved one is going to the great reunion in the sky. They’ll be together with their loved ones. They’ll be waiting for me. They look down on me and comfort me.”

What I understood the Bible to say

- Heaven is nothing like earth (Matthew 22:30/Mark 12:25/Luke 20:25-26)
- The resurrection happens at the end times (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
- That heaven will be on a restored earth, not “up there.” (Revelation 21)

The Big Disclaimer

The more I studied the more confusing it got. No single answer regarding heaven (or hell) exists. Scripture contradicts itself. Later church teachings contradict scripture and each other. Some of what we find comforting have little to do with either scripture or church teachings. The next five weeks will challenge at least one long held belief you’ve had.

Some core truths before we proceed

- Since we know Christ was raised from the dead, we too will be raised from the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:12)
- We are in the realm of mystery. We don’t know the details.
- If it gives you comfort, hold onto it, despite what you might read/hear in the next five weeks.
- Maintain perspective. We’re called to worry less about heaven than about building the kingdom of God here on earth. (Matthew 6:10)

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4. Going to the Pit – Sheol & Hades

Sheol: Where the Dead Go in the Old Testament

Psalm 88:3-7

For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to **Sheol**.
I am counted among those who go down to the **Pit**;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the **dead**
like the slain that lie in the **grave**,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the **Pit**
in the regions dark and deep
Your wrath lies heavy upon me
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

Bart Ehrman

“Sheol was the realm of death, to be avoided as long as possible. ... Not because there was any pain involved, but because there is nothing involved. It is a realm of forgetfulness (Ps. 88:12), silence (Ps. 115:17) and darkness (Job 17:13). God is not present there and, since the deceased are dead, none of them can worship him. [Sheol is bad because in Sheol] no one can experience the love and presence of God since they are cut off from the land of the living.

Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife (86-87)

Hades: Where the Dead Go in Greek Mythology

Odyssey, Book 11, lines 235-253

[Odysseus is in the underworld and meets his mother. He tries to embrace her.]

“Three times I rushed toward her, desperate to hold her
three times she fluttered through my fingers, sifting away
like a shadow, dissolving like a dream and each time
the grief cut to the heart, sharper”

[Odysseus cries out, frustrated and stricken with grief. At which point his mother replies;]

“My son, my son, the luckiest man alive!
I am no deception sent by Queen Persephone
this is just the way of mortals when we die.
Sinews no longer bind flesh and bones together
the fire in all its fury burns the body down to ashes
once life slips from the white bones, and the spirit
rustling, flitters away, flown like a dream”

Quoted in Ehrman: Heaven and Hell, 41

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Bart Ehrman

“One of the overarching points [Homer makes about Hades] is that the afterlife is not life. It is death. Those who have departed life are joyless, bodiless shades, with no possibility of pleasure or vibrancy of any kind. A ‘joyless kingdom of the dead’ (Odyssey, Book 11, line 105) “where the senseless, burnt-out wraiths of mortals make their home” (Odyssey, Book 11, line 540). [Hades] is the realm of the “breathless dead.” Shades have no bodies, no strength, no knowledge of anything happening in the world above. And they are not immortal – for the term “immortal” for Homer is synonymous with “divine,” Only gods are immortal. Deceased humans are dead.

Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife (39)

The Exceptions

Enoch

Genesis 5:1-24

“All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years, and he died

All the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years; and he died

All the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years, and he died

All the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died

All the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years; and he died

All the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; and he died.

All the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.”

Sirach 44:16

“Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up, an example of repentance to all generations.”

The Books of Enoch

In the books of Enoch, Enoch is taken up into heaven and was appointed guardian of all the celestial treasures, chief of the archangels, God’s primary attendant and the divine mouthpiece.

Wikipedia

Elijah

2 Kings 2:11

“As [Elijah and Elisha] continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.”

Mark 9:11-13

[As the disciples and Jesus come down the mountain after the transfiguration where they have seen Jesus meet with Moses and Elijah]

“[The disciples asked Jesus] “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated

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with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”

Not Dying in Homer

- Divine Relatives

Homer mentions two semi-mortals, Heracles and Menelaus who escape Hades because they have divine connections (Heracles' mom is mortal, dad is Zeus; Menelaus is a mortal who was married to Helen, step-sister to Heracles, mom is mortal, dad is Zeus.) They don't go to heaven but get to enjoy eternal life in an earthly utopia.

- Those Without Friends

Those who do not receive proper funeral rites at death are condemned to wander in a no-person's land between the living and the dead. They live in eternal agony, displaced forever.

- Those who really, really, really offend the gods

Three characters in the Odyssey: Tityus, Tantalus and Sisyphus receive eternal torment for their deeds.

- Tityus attempted to rape a goddess. His body is dispersed alive over nine acres while vultures eternally eat his liver.
- Tantalus cooked his son up and served him in a meal to the gods. He eternally sits at a table with food and drink he cannot reach.
- Sisyphus captured Death, preventing others from dying. He continuously pushes a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll down.

Ehrman: Heaven and Hell, 42-46

5. Divine Restoration

After the reign of Solomon, ancient Israel divided into two nations: Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south). The Assyrians would conquer Israel in 722, wiping it from the map. The Babylonians would conquer Judah, destroying Jerusalem and the temple, in 586, forcing Judah's elite into a soul searching time of exile.

For the Israelites, the exile became a national going down to the pit. Babylon became Sheol, a grave, the place without God. Return from exile would be a communal resurrection.

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Amos: Prophecy to the Israelites

Amos 9:9-15

I will command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations .. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword ...

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old.

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine; they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them.

Isaiah & Ezekiel: Resurrection of a Nation

Isaiah 26:14, 19

The dead do not live; shades do not rise, because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them.

Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.

Ezekiel 37:11-14

[After the vision in the Valley of the Dry Bones]

Then [God] said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, O my people and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,' says the Lord."