

# All About Heaven (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

*How Your Life is Scored*

## 2. Opening Question

- What does it take to get into heaven?

## 3. Eternal Life

*John 3:16*

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but may have **eternal life**.

*ζωὴν αἰώνιον*<sup>ε</sup> – Zoen Aionion

Commonly translated “eternal life.” Can also be understood as “unending real life” or a “life without limits.” Refers both to the completeness of life here on earth and having that completeness continue after death. Zoen Aionion is deep, transformative, vibrant and real. Its life shaped by the divine, not bound by human limits.

## 4. How do we Get In?

### A Little Scripture

*John 3:16*

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but may have eternal life.

*Romans 8:14-17*

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You do not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. ... We are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – **if in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.**

*Luke 16:19-22*

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.

*Matthew 25:31-36*

When the son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Then the king will say to the [sheep], “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and

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you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

*Romans 8: 28-30*

We know all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

*John 11:25-27*

[Jesus, to Mary upon the occasion of her brother Lazarus' death]

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Mary said to him, “Yest, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

*Luke 23:39-43*

[As Jesus hangs on the cross with two criminals]

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding Jesus and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since we are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

### A Little Theology

Predestination: Some Get into Heaven by Grace Alone

Because our own actions cannot get us into heaven, we must rely totally upon God's grace. But everyone can't get into heaven, so God, before we have done anything, selects some people for heaven and some people for hell. (See Romans 8). Since predestined people are predisposed to rightly following Jesus, we can be pretty confident all our good Christian friends are among the predestined and our enemies are among those destined for hell. But we can't be sure. [OFFICIAL PRESBYTERIAN & LUTHERAN POSITION]

Universalism: Everyone Gets into Heaven by Grace Alone

Because our own actions cannot get us into heaven, and God, in his absolute pure love, wants everyone reconciled to him, everyone, eventually, gets into heaven. Rev. Rob Bell, who's bestselling book *Love Wins* shook up Evangelical circles in 2011, suggests everyone has an eternity to make a decision for Christ, and ultimately everyone will. Others suggest meeting Christ at the time of judgment is so

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overwhelmingly positive that everyone bows before Christ. Still others suggest everyone just gets in, no questions asked. [UNOFFICIAL PRESBYTERIAN POSITION]

### Pelagianism: Get into Heaven by Choosing God

God has given us laws and commandments to tell us how we must live, and the freedom to obey or disobey them. If we choose to obey, God will be gracious to us and will help and save us; if we refuse to obey, we will get the rejection and punishment we deserve. We save (or damn) ourselves by the “good works” we do (or refuse to do). God helps those who help themselves. [HERESY]

### Semi-Pelagianism: Get into heaven by acknowledging our need for God’s grace

We are all unworthy, undeserving sinners. We are totally dependent upon the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ for our salvation. We may not be free and able to save ourselves by our good works, but we are free and able to acknowledge our need for God’s grace, turn to God to ask for the deep, abiding faith, hope and love, we cannot achieve for ourselves. [OFFICIAL CATHOLIC, METHODIST & EVANGELICAL POSITION; UNOFFICIAL MOST AMERICAN CHRISTIANS POSITION]

Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*: 119-130

## 5. What’s it Like When We Get There?

*The Elysian Fields – Odyssey Book 4, Lines 631-41*

But about your own destiny, Menelaus dear to Zeus,  
its not for you to die and meet your fate in the stallion-land of Argos  
no the deathless ones will sweep you off to the world’s end  
the Elysian Fields, where gold-haired Rhadamanthus\* waits  
where life glides on in immortal ease for mortal man;  
no snow, no winter onslaught, never a downpour there  
but night and day the Ocean River sends up breezes,  
singing winds of the West refreshing all mankind.  
All this because you are Helen’s husband now –  
the gods count you the son-in-law of Zeus

\* Rhadamanthus is a Greek god who was one of the judges of the dead and the supervisor of the Elysian Fields.

*Garden of Eden – Genesis 2:8-10*

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground, the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden.

*The Heavenly Throne Room – Isaiah 6:1-5*

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each

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had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts  
the whole earth is full of his glory*

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.

*The Heavenly Throne Room – Daniel 7:9-10*

As I watched, thrones were set in place and the Ancient One took his throne. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands serve him, and then thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment and the books were opened.

*Mansions in the Sky – John 14:2-4*

In my father’s house there are many dwelling places (KJV: mansions). If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.

*The Heavenly Throne Room – Revelation 4:1-6*

There in heaven a door stood open! And at the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. At once I was in the spirit and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God. And in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

*The Holy City – Revelation 21*

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying:

*See, the home of God is among mortals.*

*He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples  
and God himself will be with them;*

*he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

*Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.*

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Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, and sorcerers, the idolaters and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Then one of the seven angels ... showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels ...

The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width, fifteen hundred miles... He also measured the wall, 75 yards (high). The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun nor moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. People will bring to it the glory and honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

### *Perpetua's Visions*

[Perpetua was a young, female convert who lived in North Africa around 200 AD. In prison and awaiting death, she has a series of visions of heaven.]

First, Perpetua sees a tall, narrow ladder leading up to heaven. It is enormously high and as attached to its sides all sorts of weapons: swords, spears, hooks, daggers and spikes so that if anyone tried to climb up carelessly or without paying attention, they would be mangled and their flesh would adhere to the weapons. At the foot of the ladder lies an enormous dragon set to terrify and attack anyone who might attempt the climb.

As she looks up the ladder, Perpetua sees a fellow martyr who urges her forward. Boldly stepping on the head of the dragon – who is unable to harm any who is in Christ – she ascends the ladder. When she reaches the top, Perpetua sees an immense garden. In it is a gray haired man, in shepherd's garb, milking sheep. Around the sheep are thousands of people clad in white: others of the saved who have already made the heavenly ascent. Christ greets Perpetua and tells her he is glad she has come. He gives her milk in her cupped hands, and she drinks it while all those around her say "Amen." Sacramental nourishment for her rebirth.

### **Where is Heaven?**

- Somewhere else (most of the above passages)
- On earth (Revelation 21)