

# 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

*Museum of Human Misery*

## 2. Opening Exercise

- Name some people you hope are in heaven.
- Name some people you hope are in hell.
- Why is it important to you for each to be in each place?

## 3. A Little Bit of Ancient History

### Timeline

722 BC – Israel (the northern state) falls to Assyria

612 BC – Babylon conquers Assyria

586 BC – Babylon conquers Judah. Exile begins.

530 BC – Persia conquers Babylon

530 BC – Some exiles return to Jerusalem. Under control of Persia.

332 BC – Alexander the Great conquers Persia. Judah under Greek control

323 BC – Alexander the Great Dies. Empire divided.

322 BC – Hellenistic period of forced cultural assimilation begins

165 BC – Jewish Hasmonean rule begins

63 BC – Hasmoneans conquered by Rome

### Life under Greek Rule

*1 Maccabees 1*

After Alexander [the Great] had reigned twelve years, he died. Then his officers began to rule.

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, “Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us.” So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to Gentile custom and removed the marks of circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

In the one hundred forty-third year, Antiochus went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took [everything.]

Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute. He fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people. He plundered the city, burned it with fire, tore down its houses and walls, took captive the women and

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children and seized the livestock. [They made the city their base] and became a great menace.

The king then wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. Many from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added: “whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.’

Many of the people joined them, and they did evil in the land. They drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

On the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar [in the temple.] ... On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering [in the temple]. According to the decree they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mother’s necks.

But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel.

### 3. Suffering leads to Resurrection

#### The Martyrs of Maccabees

*2 Maccabees 7*

It happened also that seven brothers, and their mother, were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine’s flesh.

One brother spoke up to the king, “What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.”

[While the mother and the other brothers looked on, the king had the first brother fried alive in a hot pan. As the smoke spread widely] the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying “The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us.”

After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second, [torturing him also.] When he was at his last breath he said, “**You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life because we have died for his laws.**”

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When the fourth was near death, he said: **“One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you [the Greeks] there will be no resurrection of life.”**

[Finally, tired of the killing, the king appealed to the mother to encourage her son to break the law so he might be spared. She leaned close to him and said:]

“My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. **Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.**”

Finally, the mother also is killed.

### Jesus the Suffering Messiah

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**Out of his anguish he shall see light;**

**Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great; and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death,** and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- Who is the suffering servant? Israel? (Isaiah 49:3-6); Jesus? (Acts 8:32-33) Moses? (Talmud) Jeremiah? King Josiah? King Jehoiachin? (Rabbinic traditions).

*Philippians 2:5-11*

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited

But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness

And being found in human form, **he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death** – even death on a cross.

**Therefore God also highly exalted him** and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth

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and under the earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### 4. Back to the Greeks: Plato & Eternal Punishment

#### Separating the soul from the body

*From Plato's Laws (Book 12, 959 a-b)*

What gives each of us his being is nothing else but his soul, whereas the body is no more than a shadow which keeps us company. So 'tis well said of the deceased that the corpse is but a ghost; the real man – the soul – **departs to give account to the gods of another world ... an account to which the good may look forward without misgiving, but the evil will grievous dismay.**

*Quoted in Ehrman, Heaven & Hell, 60*

#### Where one goes

*From Ehrman, Heaven & Hell – p. 61*

[Discussing Plato's conversation with Socrates about death as recorded in the Phaedo]

“When people die, Socrates says, their guardian spirits take them to the place of judgment, where they undergo the “necessary experiences” as long as required to rid them of their impurities. Impure souls are shunned by everyone in this over world and wander about ‘in utter desolation until certain times have passed.’ But those who are pure and sober enjoy ‘divine company.’

Socrates then goes into detail about various postmortem fates reserved for different kinds of persons. People who have lived a ‘neutral’ life go to a place of purification, the Acherusian Lake, where they are both punished for sin and rewarded for good deeds. Others who are great sinners, such as murderers, are sent off to Tartarus, never to be released. Moderate sinners spend some time in Tartarus before being sent to the Acherusian lake, where they have to seek forgiveness from their victims. Finally, those who have lived lives of surpassing holiness are released at death and pass up to the pure realm above.

- In Greco-Roman literature the visions of heaven and hell get more and more vivid, serving as a precursor to the visions presented in apocalyptic scripture, especially Daniel and Revelation, and in early Christian writing

### 5. Jesus & Hell

*Matthew 7:13-14*

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to **destruction.**

*Matthew 8:10-13*

[Upon being amazed at a Roman centurion's faith]

“Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of

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heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the **outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**”

*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** (hell).

\*Gehenna – the place of desecration. A valley outside of Jerusalem where an ancient temple used for child sacrifice had stood. (2 Kings 23:10). The geographic opposite of the temple, the place God will slaughter his enemies at the last judgment. (Isaiah 66:24) Worm food. Vulture food. Total annihilation from God. (Ehrman, 157-160)

*Luke 16:22-24*

The rich man also died and was buried. In **Hades, where he was being tormented**, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out: “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for **I am in agony in these flames.**”

*John 15:6*

Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, **thrown into the fire and burned.**

*Revelation 19:20-21*

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had deceived those who worshiped its image. These two were **thrown alive into the lake of fire** that burns with sulfur. And the rest were **killed by the sword** of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

*Revelation 20:13-15*

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.**

### 6. What goes to heaven? Body or soul?

*Paul: 1 Corinthians 15:3-38*

For I handed on to you as of first important what I in turn had received (from Jesus himself?): that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and **that he was raised on the third day** in accordance with the scriptures, and **that he appeared** to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, although some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

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**Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?** If there is resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.

But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! ... **God gives it a body as he has chosen.**

*Paul: Colossians 2:9-12, 3:1*

In [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

So if you have been raised with Christ...

- Paul's readers are obviously still alive, not dead. So if they are already with Christ spiritually then does this suggest the spiritual self is separate from the physical?
- Does Colossians disagree with Corinthians?

*Letter to Rheginus (The Treatise on the Resurrection)*

[This is a Christian document found in a buried jar outside of the village of Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945. Dated 100-200 AD. HERESY ALERT]

Although once you did not exist in flesh, you took on flesh when you entered this world.

Leaving this behind will profit you, for you will not give up the better part when you leave.

Some inquire further and want to know whether one will be saved immediately, if the body is left behind. Let there be no doubt about this. Surely the visible parts of the body are dead and will not be saved. Only the living parts that are within will rise.

*From Bart Ehrman*

One historical irony is that even though this view was roundly denounced by orthodox Christians as absolute heresy, it appears to be the view held widely by Christians today. You die and your spirit goes to heaven.

*Ehrman, Heaven & Hell 241-243*