

EQUIPPED: Tough Questions

Chapter 3

What About Judgment, Hell, and Heaven?

*“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,”
Hebrews 9:27*

.The mortality rate is 100%. Everyone dies. It's not about *if* it's really about *when*.

When I wrote my Bible study on Ecclesiastes, *Understanding What Matters Most*, I was constantly confronted with the fatality of life. This life isn't really just about this life. It's easy to focus on our own personal dash and forget that we should be living this life for the life to come - because this is *all* temporary.

My prayer is that this study will ignite a passion in each of us, to live our lives in light of the next life. So, let's get some grounding in what awaits us on the other side.

Read Genesis 2:17 and Romans 5:12 and explain how death became an inevitable part of life.

Please read Ecclesiastes 12:7 John 11:25. What is it that we can all expect to happen and what is our hope?

I remember not long after I became a Christian hearing a pastor stand at the pulpit, scanning across the wide auditorium as if he was looking every single person directly in the eye, and uttering these frightful words... “I've got news for you people! We are all going to die!” He went on to say, “That is why what you do *with* and *for* Jesus is really all that matters!”

So, to approach our study, I'm going to start with the Judgement - or should I say the *Judgements*.

JUDGMENT

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment," [Hebrews 9:27](#)

Judgment looms largely over us all. Like death, it's inescapable. Past biblical Judgments validate the Judgments that await us and are threaded throughout Scripture from beginning to the end. While scholars tend to categorize them differently, they all agree that there are three umbrella categories. Past, Present, and Future Judgments.

For this lesson, we will focus on two specific Judgments: The Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment. Time does not allow me to go into the depth needed to adequately cover each of the Judgments - not even the two we will focus on. For more information about the various Judgments in Scripture, I've provided a list of many of them to help you in DIG DEEPER at the end of this section.

Judgment is part of our earthly and eternal experience. Whether lost or saved, Judgment is coming. For those who have been born again, the Bible teaches us that we will be judged for our works at what is called the Judgment Seat of Christ... or the *Bema* (Greek word for Judgment) Seat of Christ a/k/a the Mercy Seat of Christ. For those who have never been saved, the Great White Throne is where they will be judged.

The Judgment Seat of Christ - The Mercy Seat

Let's take a biblical *look-see* at what the Mercy Seat is.

In [Leviticus 16:13-17](#) and [Exodus 25:17-22](#), we get a vivid picture portraying the Mercy Seat. It is the place of atonement. The cover on the Ark of the Covenant. The place where the sacrifice is offered, propitiation is made, and God meets with man.

It was an Old Testament typology of Christ. The One who would become our Propitiation - our Mercy Seat - the One who gives us access to God through the blood He shed on the cross.

Read **1 John 2:2** and **Romans 3:25**. Who has become our Propitiation (Mercy Seat) and by what means? _____

Now read **2 Corinthians 5:10**

- Where are we required to appear? _____
 - Who is the “we” that Paul is talking about? (You may need to look back at **2 Corinthians 1:1** to discover who Paul’s audience was.) _____
 - Look at the *Amplified Classic Edition* and explain what we will receive and what our *pay* is going to be based on. _____
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Read **1 Corinthians 3:9-15**

- Who is Paul talking to? _____
 - What will be judged? _____
 - What happens to the Christian whose work is burned up? _____
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What does **2 Timothy 4:8** tell us about what is awaiting all who know Christ? _____

When we are born into the family of God, we become fully His. Eternally His. And because we are *in Christ*, the Father sees us as pure and as holy as He sees the Son. That is why we are assured of His mercy at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

What does **Romans 8:1** tell us? _____

What does **1 Thessalonians 5:9-10** tell us about our judgment, God’s mercy, and God’s wrath?

In my Bible study, *Ecclesiastes: Understanding What Matters Most*, I shared about the Judgment that awaits those who are saved and those who are not. While the Judgment Seat of Christ will be a place of mercy and rewards, we won't be skipping our way to the Throne of God. Scripture teaches us that, although we won't be judged for our sins, we will be judged for our works. Good and bad. (Romans 14:10-12, 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, 2 Corinthians 5:9-11)

But Judgment isn't only for the saved. It is also a reality for the lost.

The Great White Throne Judgment

"I said in my heart, 'God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.'" Ecclesiastes 3:17

Probably the most palpable passage regarding the Great White Throne Judgment is found in Revelation, chapter 20.

Read Revelation 20:11-15 in the NKJV and the Amplified Classic Edition.

- Who will be at the Great White Throne Judgment? _____
- What will they be judged for? _____
- Where will those who experience the 2nd death ultimately end up? _____

Read Matthew 25:46 and John 5:28-29 and explain how these verses parallel the scene described in Revelation 20:11-15.

The Great White Throne is where lost people stand before God. A guilty verdict is given and sentence is passed. Eternal separation from God in a place called Hell. But Hell is just temporary. The Lake of Fire will be where the lost live lifelessly forever.

Which leads us to our next topic. Hell.

HELL

Hell is a terrifying topic that people often avoid and frequently misunderstand. Maybe you've heard some of the multiple misconceptions like...

- *"The lost will spend eternity in hell." - That's not actually biblically accurate.*
- *"I'm going to go to hell and party with my friends." - There are no parties in hell.*
- *"Hell is not real. It's just figurative." - That's not true. The Bible clearly teaches that it exists.*
- *"A loving God would not send people to hell." - A misunderstanding of the nature of God.*
- *"Only the bad people go to hell." - Not biblically accurate either.*

None of those beliefs line up with Scripture yet so many people believe them to be true.

While the goal of this study is not to challenge what others believe, I'd like to cover these various misconceptions by simply presenting what the Bible actually teaches about it.

Throughout Scripture, you will find several words that are translated into English as *hell*. I want you to see them for yourselves, so I have provided the words as well as the Strong Concordance numbers, times used, and the basic definitions.

TITLE	CONCORDANCE	DEFINITION / TRANSLATION
Sheol	H7585 (65 times)	Grave, Death, the Depths, Lowest Part, Pit - Often translated as grave. A place of the departed wicked. A place of no return.
Hades	G86 (11 times)	From name for Pluto, god of lower regions; temporary place of the departed spirits of the lost; never used for grave; (Not a reference to anything resembling Purgatory. It is an intermediate state between death and the Lake of Fire for those who do not know Christ.)
Tartarus	G5020 (1 time)	Derived from the subterranean abyss of Greek mythology where demigods were punished. Used in verb form, Peter adapted a familiar word to express the place of punishment for the wicked.
Gehenna	G1067 (12 times)	Derived from Valley of Hinnom where human sacrifices were made, filth and dead animals were burned there. The place of punishment for the wicked, unquenchable fire, outer darkness, the worm does not die.

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¹ All definitions taken from The Complete Word Study Dictionary (Old and New Testament) Spiros Zodhiates Th.D.

After reviewing the various titles of words that our English translation calls *hell*, answer the following questions:

- Which title for hell is used most? _____
- Were you surprised by any of the details given about hell? _____
- After reading through the definitions, how would you describe hell in your own words? _____

So, let's take each of the misconceptions mentioned above on page 5 and examine what the Bible actually teaches. The journey through these biblical truths will help us gain a clearer picture of what hell is and what it isn't.

“The lost will spend eternity in hell.”

As you read in the various definitions of hell, they all invoke the idea of darkness, a place of punishment, eternal torment, where the wicked pay for their deeds. But you may be surprised to learn that hell is not the ultimate destination for those who don't know Christ.

Read through Revelation 20:11-15 again and answer the following:

What books were open? _____

List the places that gave up the dead. _____

What were the dead judged for? _____

If someone's name was not written in the Book of Life, where were they cast? _____

Ultimately, the eternal destination for those who don't know Christ is the Lake of Fire - not hell. At the end of time as we know it, all who have never received Christ will stand before the Great White Throne and be judged for every evil deed. They will then be cast into the Lake of Fire where the beast, the devil, and the demons will be throughout eternity.

The Lake of Fire is described as a place of torment, eternally burning with brimstone. (Revelation 19:20, Revelation 20:10-15) It is where the wicked will exist in utter isolation, darkness, and torment forever.

So, the next time you hear someone say that the lost will spend eternity in hell, you will know that, biblically speaking, they will actually wind up in the Lake of Fire.

“I’m going to go to hell and party with my friends.”

The verses we just covered about the Lake of Fire presents a precariously different picture than a party-hardy kind of place.

Read the following verses and describe what awaits those who are in hell and ultimately, the Lake of Fire.

Matthew 13:42, 50

Matthew 25:41, 46

2 Thessalonians 1:9

2 Peter 2:4

Jude 1:7

Doesn't sound much like a party, does it? Both Hell and the Lake of Fire are depicted as a place of eternal punishment, darkness, and separation from God. Not exactly a place where wicked people finally get to party for eternity.

There are no parties in hell.

“Hell is not real. It’s just figurative.”

We need not examine any more verses than the ones we’ve previously read to conclude that hell is real. It’s really real. And it’s not a place you want even your worst enemy to go.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 and describe who it is who will suffer eternal punishment.

If hell was figurative, God’s Word would not be so candid and specific about the ultimate fate of those who do not believe in Christ - those who don’t obey the Gospel.

If hell was figurative, God’s Word would not relentlessly warn unbelievers about the torment that awaits those who will be in hell.

C.S. Lewis once said, "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason." ²

Hell does not cease to be real because it’s frightening to think about or because a finite mind cannot comprehend what the infinite God has ordained to be real.

“A loving God would not send people to hell.”

Have you ever heard that? Maybe you’ve said it or possibly thought it yourself.

The thing is, God is good. He is the very essence of love. But while God’s Word expresses the nature and character of God as love, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and goodness, it also reveals that God is holy, a consuming fire, and a God who is just and righteous.

As human beings created in the image of God, we have various aspects of His character that make up the sum of who we are. God also has various aspects to His character that uncloak the sum of who He is. The monumental difference is - our character is flawed. His is not. Our

² C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Macmillan, 1962), p. 118
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character changes. His does not. Our character is selfish and proud. His is not. Our character is learned. His is not.

God didn't have to learn to be honest. Honesty is who He is. God didn't have to learn to be righteous. Righteous is who He is. God didn't have to learn to be holy. Holy is who He is.

Hell doesn't alter the fact that God is love. It does, however, validate that God is holy and just. Each character trait is not opposed to one another but part of the sum of who God is.

Read 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:4.

What do these verses teach us about God's desire for every person on the planet? What He wants for them? What He desires doesn't happen to them?

Read John 3:16.

What did God do to obtain eternal life for all who would believe?

Imagine for a moment that someone had killed one of your loved ones, ransacked your house and stole something very valuable to you, or injured a friend who would have to suffer with a lifetime disability or chronic pain. Now imagine the person responsible for doing such a heinous crime standing before a judge and the judge letting him go scot-free. It wouldn't be fair. It wouldn't be just.

The guilty must be held accountable or what's the law for? And how can the guilty be guiltless? Justice requires payment is made.

God is holy and just. His just-ness demands justice. Righteous justice. But God's holiness intertwines His love.

It was God's love that compelled Him to send His Son to the cross. It is God's holiness that cannot just wink at sin and scoot us past the throne of the Just One.

John 3:16 contextualizes both God's love with God's holiness. Both His love and His justice meet in this verse and collided on the cross of Christ.

Read Romans 5:8 and Isaiah 53:6.

How do these verses describe how Jesus paid the debt we deserve to pay because of the sins we have committed against God?

God has done everything possible to make a way for all to be saved. It's not His will for people to perish. It's His will for all to be saved. He relentlessly pursues our hearts and gives us an opportunity to receive the gift of eternal life through the sacrificial and vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Jesus paid the debt we all deserve to pay. But His payment is only applied to the debt of those who call upon Him as Lord - those who trust Him as their Savior - those who believe that the cross was for them.

Those who snub their noses at the sacrificial substitutionary death of Jesus Christ seal their own doom. Not because it's what God's wants but because it is what they choose.

“Only the bad people go to hell.”

When I was a little girl, my mind swirled with images of heavenly scales where God weighed our deeds and doled out our just due. More good deeds assured entrance into those palatial Pearly Gates. But hell awaited those whose scales tipped heavy with bad deeds done.

There are no scales in heaven balancing our good deeds and our bad.

Read Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:10 and answer the questions below.

What are we all like? _____

What is our righteousness likened to? _____

How many of us are considered righteous? _____

Our good can't be good enough. That's why Jesus came to a cradle. His goal was the cross. He was the only One who was the spotless, sinless Lamb whose sacrificial and substitutionary death made it possible for the vilest of sinners to be saved.

One of the greatest wonder-of-wonders in Heaven will be the sheer numbers of those who will be there among those who thought they never would.

Hell is full of the good, bad, and vile. It's not about how good or bad someone seems. Being a sinner is universal. The Bible says there is none good - no not one ([Romans 3:12](#)). Even our best deed is shrouded by sin and considered filthy rags in the sight of God. ([Isaiah 64:6](#))

When God tells us that He sent His Son to pay for the sins of the world, no sinner was exempt. Not the best. Not the worst.

Heaven isn't reserved for nice people. It's prepared for those who know they could never be nice enough or good enough to get to Heaven on their own - for those who trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The thing is, no matter how much I don't want it to be true...hell is real. It's not something preachers should avoid preaching about, nor is it something Christians should avoid talking about. The reality of hell should motivate us to love audaciously, forgive perpetually, and embrace our common urgent calling to reach a world in need of the only One who can save their souls.

HEAVEN

I don't even know where to start. I ache for a place where the Bible says I'm already seated ([Ephesians 2:5-6](#)). Positionally, I'm there. But until I step across the finish line of this life, I'm called to a sole sacred calling...to know Him and to make Him known. For now. For today. For this life He has given me under the sun.

But this is not my home. If you've received Christ, it's not yours either. ([Hebrews 11:16](#), [Philippians 3:20](#))

Our hearts were created to crave an eternal home with our eternal Father and our forever family. Heaven. It's the place our hearts hunger for.

There's so much about heaven that we don't have time or space to cover in this lesson. Things like where Old Testament believers went, what kind of bodies we will have between our death and the resurrection, what the Bible says about soul sleep, and so much more.

Our study will focus on what heaven will be like, but I'd like to recommend a couple books that will help deepen your level of understanding about heaven. [David Jeremiah](#) recently released a book entitled *Revealing the Mysteries of Heaven* giving great detail of what heaven will be like. You could also get [Randy Alcorn's](#) book, *Heaven*.

So, let's dig in girls. Heaven awaits!

To give you a bit of a foundation, it's important to know that the Bible uses several words in both singular and plural forms that speak of heaven in general terms.

Scripture defines heaven as:

- The atmospheric heaven where the birds fly, clouds exist, and rain forms ([Genesis 6:7 YLT](#)).
- The heavenly region where the moon, stars, and planets exist. An outer space kind of heaven ([Deuteronomy 4:19](#)).
- The Third Heaven - the Heaven of heavens - the place where God dwells ([Deuteronomy 10:14](#), [Hebrews 9:24](#)).

So, when you see the word *heaven* in the Word of God, pay close attention to the context of the passage to help you determine exactly which heaven that particular passage is referring to.

If you've ever lost a loved one you know that what you really want to know is where they are. Undone. Desperate. Searching for answers. Clutching to an unseen place as if your grip on truth will somehow breathe in their presence for just a second more.

Until you cross your own finish line you want to know they're there - in heaven - beholding the Savior. Savoring the Divine. And that one day you'll be able to see them again. Face-to-face. Glorified. Pain-free. Tearless. Completely, flawlessly who they were ultimately created to be. Until then, be encouraged to know that all who die in Christ are alive in Christ eternally.

Read John 14:1-3 and explain why Jesus encouraged us to be untroubled.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. What does Paul say that is encouraging to the hearts of those who have lost someone they love?

We grieve for those we have lost to this life knowing they've embraced eternity and are more alive than they've ever been. So, while our grief is real, our hope gives our grief a pillow to rest on and a lens to see through.

But what is heaven like? What are they experiencing? What will engulf us the moment we cross our own eternal threshold?

Below, I've provided a list of heaven-filled verses. If you're doing the study online, I've placed all the verses in one link so you don't have to go back and forth. What you learn on your own journey through the Scriptures will teach you much more than I can.

Take a few minutes, read through them, and then write every detail each verse unearths. As you dig for those heavenly nuggets, remember, heaven is defined not only by what is there, but also by what is not. So be sure to note what is not there as well.

Have yourself a heavenly scrump-delicious time, sweet friend! Ready. Set. Dig!

Psalm 16:11, Micah 4:3, Luke 23:42-43, 1 Corinthians 2:8-9, 1 Corinthians 6:3, 1 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Corinthians 15:35-56, 2 Corinthians 5:7-8, Philippians 1:21-23, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 12:22-24, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 4:4-11, Revelation 19:11, Revelation 20:6, Revelation 21:3-4, Revelation 22:10-27, Revelation 22:1-7

Psalm 16:11

Micah 4:3

Luke 23:42-43

1 Corinthians 2:8-9

1 Corinthians 6:3

1 Corinthians 13:12

1 Corinthians 15:35-56

2 Corinthians 5:7-8

Philippians 1:21-23

Philippians 3:20

Hebrews 12:22-24

1 John 3:2

Revelation 4:4-11

Revelation 20:6

Revelation 21:3-4

Revelation 22:10-17

Revelation 22:1-7

One day, every etched imagery of heaven held dear will fade forever forgotten by the breathtakingly brilliance of His glorious glory!

One day, God will make all things new. A new heaven. A new earth - and the sheer essence of His presence will illuminate with an eternal, irrepressible light.

On that gloriously glorious day, we will see His face! Our crowns will become our humble offerings. Basking in His beauty. Beholding the Divine.

On that day, death will die forever. Sickness will cease. Pain will perish. Tears, forever gone. The sorrow that once blinded us will be consumed by the brightness of His presence.

The deadly will become docile ([Isaiah 11:6-9](#)) in this brand new breathtakingly beautiful new place where heaven hovers incomprehensibly above the earth and yields way to the true meaning *coexist*.

Everything new. Everything glorious. And every eye will be on the One whose relentless love rescued and ushered us into our eternal home. It will truly be heaven. And it will be more than we could have ever imagined.

And just think. Heaven. It's what He died to give us. Eternally at home and eternally His.

DIG DEEPER

MORE ABOUT JUDGMENT

To begin digging deeper, let's take a look in the rearview mirror of history at the first five Judgments known as the Past Judgments.

1. The Judgment on Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:14-24)
2. The Judgment of the Flood a/k/a The Judgment of the Antediluvian World (Genesis 7:17-24)
3. The Judgment at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:5-9)
4. The Judgment on Egypt (Exodus 7 - 12)
5. The Judgment of Believers' Sins on the Cross (Isaiah 53:4-8, John 3:18, John 5:24, Romans 5:8)

Moving forward in history there are Judgements that are happening currently right in our very midst. These are known as Present Judgments. Some theologians consider them two separate Judgments. Others condense them into one Judgment. We're going to show them separately for clarity.

1. Self-Judgment is a believer's responsibility to judge himself/herself (1 Corinthians 11:28-32)
2. God's Active Judgment on His Children a/k/a Divine Discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11, 1 Corinthians 11:32)

Now fast forward beyond our earthly existence to the Future Judgments.

1. Tribulation Judgments (Revelations 6 - 16)
2. Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Hebrews 6:10, Revelation 3:11)
3. Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46)
4. Judgment of Angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3, Jude 1:6)
5. Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)

MORE ABOUT HEAVEN

Is heaven really where the saved spend eternity?

Doctrinally speaking, heaven, as we typically think of it, is a like a layover for believers until God makes all things new. It is then that we will have access to the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. (Revelation 21)

Is there such a thing as soul sleep?

What word does John 11:11 and Acts 7:60 use to describe death? _____

The word used for sleep often comes from the word meaning to recline. So, while the body is seen as asleep (*koimaō* - still, recline), the soul is not asleep.

Throughout Scripture various verses use the term sleep in Matthew 27:52, Matthew 28:13, Luke 22:45, and 1 Corinthians 15:18 to mention just a few equate sleep with death.

Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. He was dead as dead gets. Stephen had been stoned to death, not stoned to sleep. The term *sleep* was used to describe death. Not as a reference to soul sleep.

Perhaps you've heard that when we die, we sleep. Our bodies sleep (they are *still, recline*), but our spirits and our souls live forevermore in either heaven, or in hell and then ultimately the Lake of Fire.

Will we recognize one another in heaven?

Scripture teaches us that we will recognize one another in heaven.

- During the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and even the disciples recognized them. (Matthew 17:3-4).
- David looked forward to seeing his child who had died (2 Samuel 12:23).
- The rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham were recognizable after death (Luke 16:19-31).
- And since the Bible says that we will see Him as He is and that we will be like Him (1 John 3:2) - and since Jesus was recognizable after His resurrection (John 20:16,20, John 21:12, and John 15:4-7) - then we will also recognize one another.

TIDBITS:

- Cremation doesn't condemn you nor is it forbidden in Scripture. (Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.)
- There are different levels of punishment in hell - ultimately, the Lake of Fire.
- When Old Testament saints who trusted God's promise to send a Redeemer died, they went to Paradise a/k/a Abraham's Bosom until Jesus went to the cross and then resurrected from the grave. (Luke 16:19-31, Luke 23:43, Ephesians 4:8).

