
*The Hell Test –
Tested*

By

Mark A. McGee

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Introduction

A parent of one of our martial arts students recently asked me to read an online article called “The Hell Test.” What she saw there concerned her, so she asked me to look at it. *The Hell Test* is made up of dozens of questions, most presented in short, rapid fire methodology. I say “methodology” because *The Hell Test* is a method of attacking what people believe about hell. In martial arts we call it “sensory overload” – causing the body pain as quickly as possible in as many parts of the body as possible. It’s a process of dominating someone physically through “pain control.” When the body’s senses are overloaded with pain, the brain shuts down a physical response until the pain stops or becomes tolerable. Bullies know how to use sensory overload to dominate and control their victims. What we teach in self defense is how to effectively respond to bullies and take back control of our response mechanisms.

The same is true in spiritual warfare. Questions about what you believe come at you so rapidly that your mind shuts down any effective spiritual response until the pain stops or becomes spiritually tolerable. One way Christians respond to those kinds of spiritual attacks is to back down from their beliefs that lead to pain. They believe it is easier and less painful to get along with everyone and not cause problems. However, in faith defense we learn methods and techniques to effectively respond to difficult challenges until we can take back the control. Our purpose in testing *The Hell Test* is to do just that – take back control of our spiritual beliefs.

The Challenge

“The Hell Test” (A test every pastor, Bible teacher and seminary professor should be required to take before being allowed to teach.)

One would be amazed how little the average pastor knows about the subject of Hell. Most of their knowledge comes from what Jesus called “The traditions of men which make the word of god of no effect.” Matt. 15:6-9 Give a copy of this test to those to whom you have submitted yourself. See whether they know their subject. If salvation is indeed deliverance from a Hell of everlasting punishment, then the answers to these questions are vital to your well being.” (The Hell Test)

That is how *The Hell Test* begins – with a direct, head-on attack on the people most Christians depend on to know the answers to difficult spiritual questions – their pastors, Bible teachers, and even seminary professors. That’s similar to physically taking out the strong men in the house or the lead officers on the field of battle. Take out the officers and the soldiers will turn and run. Take out the strong men and the family will cower in their own home. So, how do we respond to these attacks? First, find out who’s behind the attack.

The author of *The Hell Test* identifies himself as a Christian who used to believe in hell, but struggled with the hypocrisy of it all until he asked God to take him out of this world. The author wrote – “God answered my prayer not by killing me, but killing a lot of ‘traditional teaching’ I had swallowed which did NOT come from Him NOR from the Bible in its original languages.” Here’s how he describes himself today - *“Many consider us experts on the topics of universal salvation and proving that Hell is not scriptural. Our sites are considered the leading sources for materials on these subjects.” (tentmaker.org)*

The attacks continue with the words “traditional teaching,” and “did NOT come from Him NOR from the Bible in its original languages.” After taking out the pastors, Bible teachers, and seminary professors, the next technique is to cause Christians to question what they had been taught for all of the years they had been under the ministry of those people. Could it be that my pastor, my Bible teacher, my seminary professor, was lying to me or just doesn’t know? Could it be that what they taught me is not from God nor from the Bible “in its original languages?”

I have no problem being challenged about what I believe. If what I believe is not from God, not from the Bible in the original languages, then I don’t want to continue to believe it. That’s been my goal in more than 40 years of studying the Bible – to get it right. So, let’s see what we have here as we get ready to put *The Hell Test* to the test.

The author claims to be an expert on “the topics of universal salvation and proving that Hell is not scriptural.” He calls his belief system “Christian Universalism” and defines it as the “Ultimate Reconciliation in Christ.” You may have heard of Unitarian Universalists, but have you heard about Christian Universalists? They are quick to distinguish themselves from Unitarian Universalists and say they believe Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the promised Messiah, the only begotten Son of God, the Second Adam, and the only way to the Father. In addition to the term Christian Universalism, they also use the following to describe themselves: Ultimate Reconciliation, Gospel of Inclusion, Blessed Hope, Victorious Gospel, and Irresistible Grace. Here is what they believe about salvation:

“Christian Universalists believe that the correct interpretation of Christianity and the Bible is not the exclusive fundamentalist view (‘convert or burn’), but an inclusive view of salvation in which all people — even the sinful and unbelieving dead — will eventually find reconciliation with God

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by repenting of their sins and going through a transformation process, so that nobody will spend eternity in hell. God's judgments work for the purpose of correction and reform; they are not the expression of vindictive rage." (christianuniversalist.org)

The following is taken directly from the Christian Universalist's Statement of Faith:

"We believe in the ultimate triumph of divine mercy and grace: that no being ever created will be condemned or allowed to suffer forever, but God has arranged through a benevolent plan of learning and growth for all souls to attain salvation, reconciliation, restoration, and reunion with the Source of All Being, in the fullness of the ages." (christianuniversalist.org)

They go on to say that the cornerstone of Universalism "is belief in universal salvation, the idea that there is no such thing as eternal hell or annihilation because God has planned the universe to produce a positive outcome for all sentient beings He has ever created." (The Christian Universalist Association)

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, a Christian parent brought *The Hell Test* to my attention for the purpose of my responding to it, and respond to it I will. I believe that hell is a real place with "everlasting fire" that God "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). I believe that at the end of the ages God will cast into the lake of fire "anyone not found written in the Book of Life" (Revelation 20:15). As Jesus explained to His disciples about the approaching time of His Great White Throne Judgment, "these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). I believe there is a major difference between Biblical Christianity and so-called "Christian Universalism."

Why Test The Hell Test?

Why are we testing *The Hell Test*? Because *The Hell Test* asked to be tested – and because it **should** be tested. The author of *The Hell Test* says he is an expert on the subject of **universal salvation**. He doesn't believe in hell and eternal punishment for unbelievers. He believes they will eventually be saved and go to Heaven.

“We believe that all men (and women) will eventually be saved ONLY because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, not because of any other way. We do NOT believe all religions lead to heaven. The way into Heaven is through Jesus Christ alone.” (tentmaker.org)

It is true that Jesus is the only Way to eternal life in Heaven (John 14:6), but will **everyone** get there no matter what they believe before death? No matter what sins they commit? No matter whether they repent or ask God's forgiveness before death? No matter whether they “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31) or not before they die? Whether they believe the Gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16-17) or not before their death?

Christian Universalists (their identification) believe that “even the sinful and unbelieving dead — will eventually find reconciliation with God by repenting of their sins and going through a transformation process” (christianuniversalist.org). Is that true? Do the unbelieving dead get a second chance after death to repent of their sins, go through a “transformation process,” and reconcile with God? What would cause an unbeliever, even a God-hater, to change their minds after death and repent of their sins and want to be reconciled to God? And why would God want to save someone after death who rejected Him during their life?

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That theory reminds me of some of the spiritual lessons I learned as a teenager while studying Buddhism. Reincarnation was presented as a transformational process that could lead to a god-like state. I learned about the **Four Noble Truths** and **Eightfold Path**. The goal was the **cessation of *dukkha***, which included the Buddhist concept of righteousness: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

As I compare the transformational process of **universal salvation** with the path to the **cessation of *dukkha***, it causes me to wonder if **Christian Universalism** is just another way of carrying out the teachings of Buddha – but after death instead of during life.

Let's put *The Hell Test* to the test.

Question - "If Hell is real and describes a real place, why does the English word 'Hell' come from a pagan source instead of the ancient Hebrew writings of the Bible? Why is the word 'Hell' not found in the Jew's Bible which is the Christian's Old Testament? Furthermore, the word "Hell" has completely disappeared from the Old Testament Scriptures in most leading Bibles. Why? Because the best scholarship demands it. (The word 'Hell' comes from the Teutonic 'Hele' goddess of the underworld 'Hell' of northern Europe. The description of this ancient mythological place has very little resemblance anymore to the modern Christian image of Hell. See any Encyclopedia or dictionary for the origin of the word.) Seeing that the Bible is supposed to be 'Holy,' why have pagan religious words been added to our modern English Bibles? Please understand, the English word 'Hell' and its concepts are NOT in the Hebrew nor Greek. They come into the English through Northern European mythologies, NOT from the roots of Christianity." (*The Hell Test*)

Answer - The first question in *The Hell Test* is an old technique of putting up a “smoke screen” to hide the real fighting force, or doctrinal issue in this case. Spending time tracking and debating the source of the English word for “hell” is a distraction that takes our attention away from the real issue. The Bible was not written in English. It was written in Hebrew and Aramaic (Old Testament), and Greek (New Testament). We can debate whether translators chose the best words for translations later, but first we need to see what words the Holy Spirit chose when He inspired the human authors of the Bible and what He wanted them to know.

Let’s begin with some of the **Hebrew** and **Aramaic** words in the Old Testament that deal with death. I’ve listed the words and their basic definitions to help you in your study.

sheol - grave, death, realm of dead *qeber* - grave, tomb

q’burah - tomb, grave, burial *muth* - die, dead *mot* - death

mamot - death *mawet* - death, die *t’mutah* - death, die

bor - death, pit *gawa* - dead body *g’wiyyah* - body, corpse

r’pa’iyim - dead, spirits of the dead *nakah* - death, murdered, killed, struck down

halal - dead, slain *n’belah* - body, corpse *peger* - dead bodies

ittiyim - spirits of the dead *abad* - dead, perished *nepes* - dead body

sapad – mourn, lament *abal* – mourn, grieve *qadar* – mourning

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abaddon - destruction *shaḥat* - pit, destruction *tehom* - abyss

As with most doctrines (teachings) of Scripture, the Holy Spirit reveals details over time. Name the doctrine (e.g. Heaven, hell, love, hope, fear, salvation, righteousness, justice, morality, goodness) and you'll learn more about it as you read through the Bible. Things that seemed unclear in the Old are clarified or completed in the New. For example: God introduced the doctrine of the **Seed** in Genesis 3 and revealed more about the Seed to Abraham and others in the centuries that followed, but we don't find out that the Seed is Jesus Christ for thousands of years after God first mentioned it in the Garden of Eden. The same is true about what happens to people after they die. God introduced the concept of death soon after creating Adam, but revealed details about what that meant over a period of thousands of years until it was fully revealed by Jesus Christ – who conquered death.

Here are some of the general principles concerning death in the Hebrew Bible.

#1 – Death was something to fear

“... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:17

“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.” Exodus 21:12

“And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Exodus 21:15

“He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.” Exodus 21:16

“No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death.”

Leviticus 27:29

[The Law of Moses is filled with many crimes punishable by death. Death was the ultimate penalty for crimes against God and man thousands of years ago, even as it is today. People feared death then as they do today because it is the end of physical life as we know it.]

#2 – Death was connected to sin

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.” Deuteronomy 24:16

“If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.” Deuteronomy 21:22-23

The death penalty is connected to sins against God and against people. There are sins deserving of death.

#3 – Death caused grief

“Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.” Numbers 20:29

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“When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.” 2 Samuel 11:26

Death, then as now, causes the living to grieve and mourn.

#4 – Death brought an end to what people could do while alive

“For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?” Psalm 6:5

“For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth.” Isaiah 38:18

#5 – Death was not the end of God’s involvement with people

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16:9-11

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.” Psalm 139:7-10

“Though they dig into hell, From there My hand shall take them; Though they climb up to heaven, From there I will bring them down; And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, From there I will search and take

them; Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, From there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them; Though they go into captivity before their enemies, From there I will command the sword, And it shall slay them. I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good.” Amos 9:2-4

#6 – Death was not the end for those who sinned against God

“For behold, the Lord will come with fire And with His chariots, like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword The Lord will judge all flesh; And the slain of the Lord shall be many ... And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” Isaiah 66:15-16, 24

What About The Old Testament?

Question: If Hell is real and if good people go to heaven and bad people go to Hell, why does EVERYONE, good or bad, go to the same place in the Old Testament? They ALL go to Sheol which the King James Version translated 'Hell' thirty-one times, 'grave' thirty-one times and 'pit' three times? Are we all destined to go to Hell or did the King's translators make some gross translation errors?
(*The Hell Test*)

Answer: The question begins poorly because it is based on a false premise. The author asks "if Hell is real" and combines that with "and if good people go to heaven and bad people go to Hell ...". The problem with using that as a statement of fact is that Heaven is not for "good people" and Hell is not for "bad people." All people are bad and "hell" was not made for people.

"The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one." Psalm 14:2-3

"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.'" Romans 3:10-12

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Matthew 25:41

The second part of the question is also a problem because it goes to the King James Version translation again. We addressed that in a previous study. God did not call His people to defend translations of His Word; He called us to defend what His Spirit inspired the authors of Scripture to write in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages.

Stripping away the red herrings and smoke screens the *The Hell Test* throws at people to distract them from the real issues, we find ourselves looking at what the Holy Spirit says about what happens to human beings after they die. That is a legitimate question, and for the purpose of continuing to test *The Hell Test*, we'll look at the part of the question concerning the Hebrew word *sheol*. What is it, where is it, and who is there?

First, an observation. The family of Israel (Jacob) spent hundreds of years in Egypt, many of those years as slaves helping the Egyptians build their pyramids, temples and other buildings dedicated to the Egyptian immortality cult. One of the primary Egyptian texts concerning life after death was *The Book of the Dead*. The Israelites knew what was inside the pyramids and would certainly have understood what the Egyptians believed. Based on what we saw the Hebrew people do during their wilderness wandering, Egyptian beliefs and practices had deeply impacted their spiritual thinking.

God gave Moses what could be called *The Book of the Living* (Torah) in the wilderness. God was quick to get His Word into the minds and hearts of His people so they would know what was true about life and living, and death and dying. Life was so important to God that He told Israel that the penalty for taking life from someone could be their own death. In fact, God imposed the death penalty on Israelites for even more than taking the life of another person (e.g. cursing mother or father, committing adultery, homosexual sex, man marries woman and her mother, man or woman has sex with an animal, man or woman

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is a medium or has familiar spirits, working on the Sabbath). God imposed a strong Law on Israel to teach them the difference between the God of Heaven and the gods of Egypt, and to protect them from the pagan wickedness they would encounter as they entered Canaan.

[You can read more about Israel, Egypt and the immortality cult in my book, "[A History of Man's Quest for Immortality](#)," Fifth Estate Publishing, 2007]

Sheol is used 66 times in the Hebrew Bible. Here's how several English versions of the Old Testament translate *sheol*.

NIV – grave, death, realm of death

ASV – lowest Sheol

HCSB – Sheol

NLV – place of the dead

RSV – depths of Sheol

GNT – world below

NLT – depths of the grave

AMP – Sheol (Hades, the place of the dead)

Here are some thoughts about the meaning of *sheol* from Hebrew scholars.

“Sheol denotes the place where departed souls are gathered after death; it is an infinitive form from sha-al, to demand, the demanding, applied to the place where inexorably summons all men into its shade.” C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. I, p. 338, 1978

“Whatever be the derivation of this word, there can be no doubt of the scriptural application of it to the state and abode of the dead; hence the grave in which the body rests, and the invisible world, to which the souls of men depart in death.” Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies, 1870 AD, Dr. William Wilson, Queen’s College, Oxford

“It connotes the place where those that had died were believed to be congregated. Jacob, refusing to be comforted at the supposed death of Joseph, exclaims: “I shall go down to my son a mourner unto Sheol” (Gen. xxxvii. 36, Hebr.; comp. ib. xlii. 38; xliv. 29, 31). Sheol is underneath the earth (Isa. vii. 11, lvii. 9; Ezek. xxxi. 14; Ps. lxxxvi. 13; Eccus. [Sirach] li. 6; comp. Enoch, xvii. 6, “toward the setting of the sun”); hence it is designated as (Deut. xxxii. 22; Ps. lxxxvi. 13) or (Ps. lxxxviii. 7; Lam. iii. 55; Ezek. xxvi. 20, xxxii. 24). It is very deep (Prov. ix. 18; Isa. lvii. 9); and it marks the point at the greatest possible distance from heaven (Job xi. 8; Amos ix. 2; Ps. cxxxix. 8).” 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia

What does the Hebrew Bible teach about who goes to *sheol*? Living people who die. Human beings have life because God gave them life - “And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7) God “formed” (*yasar*) man using the dust of the ground. That’s the physical aspect of the creation of humanity. Then, God “breathed” (*napah*) in the man’s nostrils the “breath of life”

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(*nesamah hay*). That's the soul-life aspect of the creation of humanity. God breathed into them with a force that brought about the vital energy of life.

What happens in a hospital delivery room when a baby is born but doesn't make a sound? Doctors and nurses go into action quickly to get the baby to breathe. That's because once outside of the mother's womb the baby must breathe air on his/her own to continue living. The greatest sound to a parent is to hear their newborn breathe. Breath means there is life.

The same is true about death. It is the end of breathing. Interestingly, the Hebrews understood that as a natural part of life – "To everything *there is* a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2) The people of the Old Testament were under no illusion that their physical life would go on forever. They knew death was coming and they knew where they were going.

Job, who may have lived during the time of Abraham, said that after his death God would bring him to "the house appointed for all living" (Job 30:23). The Hebrew word translated "house" is *bayit* and carried the idea of being "within a place." The word has also been translated as "temple, family, people," and even "prison." Job thought of himself going to a designated place after his death. In Job 38 where God revealed His Omnipotence to Job, the Lord spoke to Job about "the gates of death" and "the doors of the shadow of death." When King Saul tricked the witch into bringing the dead prophet Samuel up from *sheol*, Samuel asked Saul why the king had disturbed him by bringing him "up," which gives some credence to the idea of *sheol* being underground. King David single-handedly killed more people in his lifetime than most ancient armies did with all their soldiers. David had faced death many times and lived, but he knew his time was coming. David spoke about "the gates of death" (Psalm 9:13) and referred to dying as sleeping "the sleep of death" (Psalm 13:3). David's son, King Solomon, spoke of death as "the assembly of the dead" (Proverbs 21:16).

What About Sheol?

“If Hell is real and if good people go to heaven and bad people go to Hell, why does EVERYONE, good or bad, go to the same place in the Old Testament? They ALL go to Sheol which the King James Version translated ‘Hell’ thirty-One times, ‘grave’ thirty-one times and ‘pit’ three times? Are we all destined to go to Hell or did the King’s translators make some gross translation errors?” (The Hell Test)

Did everyone who died during the Old Testament times go to *sheol*? If so, what was it like?

Answer: Burial of a dead body was the practice of ancient people. The Hebrew word *qeber* means “grave, sepulchre, tomb.” It comes from *qabar* which means “to bury, to be buried.” This is the process of a living person placing the body of a dead person in a grave, sepulchre, tomb, or other physical location. If the body of a dead person was exhumed at a later time (except for bodies that were mummified), only bones would be left. The dead person’s flesh would have decayed. However, is that the end of the person’s existence? What did the Hebrews believe?

When the living soul (*nephesh hayah*) turned into a dead soul (*nephesh met*), the person became an empty and weakened “shade” (*rephaim*) of their former self. We saw in a previous study that King Saul deceived a witch into bringing the dead prophet Samuel from *sheol* so he could ask him a question. Look at what we learn about a *nephesh met* from this exchange.

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“When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, ‘Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!’ And the king said to her, ‘Do not be afraid. What did you see?’ And the woman said to Saul, ‘I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth.’ So he said to her, ‘What is his form?’ And she said, ‘An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle.’ And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down. Now Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’ And Saul answered, ‘I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do.’ Then Samuel said: ‘So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.’ Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.” 1 Samuel 28:12-20

This was an extremely unusual event in Scripture that the soul of a dead person would speak to a living person, but it was something God allowed for His purpose concerning the end of Saul’s rule as the king of Israel. Samuel had been a priest, prophet, and kingmaker. Even though he was dead, Samuel was going “unmake” King Saul. Because of that event in Israel’s history, we have the rare opportunity to look into the afterlife.

- The witch said Samuel appeared as “a spirit ascending out of the earth.”
- Even though Samuel was a “spirit” (*elohiym*), he looked like “an old man” who was “covered with a mantle.” Saul perceived that it was the spirit of Samuel and showed respect. It’s interesting to see that even as a spirit, Samuel looked something like that of his physical body.
- Samuel’s first words to Saul were, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Samuel viewed being brought back to the land of the living as a disturbance. The Hebrew word for “disturbed” is *ragaz* and means “be agitated, be perturbed, be angry, tremble, quake, quiver.” Samuel expressed a human emotion to being brought from *sheol* to the land of the living.
- Saul answered Samuel because he heard the prophet’s voice. The spirit of Samuel spoke to Saul in a way that Saul’s ears were able to identify and understand.
- Samuel was aware of Saul’s relationship with God – “So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy?” Samuel was also familiar with what he had done as a prophet before his death – “And the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me.” Samuel knew what God was doing in Saul’s life that day – “For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day.” The spirit of Samuel also knew the Lord’s future plans for King Saul – “Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons *will be* with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”

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The Book of Samuel does not say what happened to the spirit of Samuel after his encounter with Saul, but we are left with the impression that he returned to *sheol*.

The Old Testament is clear that both the righteous and unrighteous go to *sheol* after they die. Jacob said he would go to *sheol* (Genesis 37:35; 42:38). Moses said that Israelites whom God rejected would go to *sheol* (Numbers 16:28-34). In Job's discourse about the wicked he said, "They spend their days in wealth, And in a moment go down to the grave. Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us, For we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.'" (Job 21:13-14) King David also spoke of the wicked and all nations that forget God going to *sheol* (Psalm 9:17). The prophets spoke often about *sheol* being a place the wicked would go after their death (Isaiah 5:14; Ezekiel 32:17-32).

So, what happened to the righteous and wicked who died and their souls went to *sheol*? A better question might be – what did God do with the righteous and wicked after their deaths? The souls of all people are in the hands of God. It is a matter of His holiness that should concern us. Anyone who thinks God looks at all of the souls of the dead in the same way is dangerously mistaken.

"And He said: 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no faith. They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains. 'I will heap disasters on them; I will spend My arrows on them.'" Deuteronomy 32:20-23

["hell" is the NKJV translation here for sheol]

Where Did They Go?

“If Hell is real and if good people go to heaven and bad people go to Hell, why does EVERYONE, good or bad, go to the same place in the Old Testament? They ALL go to Sheol which the King James Version translated “Hell” thirty-One times, “grave” thirty-one times and “pit” three times? Are we all destined to go to Hell or did the King’s translators make some gross translation errors?” (The Hell Test)

We’ve seen that the Hebrew word translated “hell” in the King James Version is *sheol*. We’ve also seen that the souls of the righteous and unrighteous dead in Old Testament times went to *sheol*. So, is it correct to say that they all went to “hell?” No, it’s correct to say that they all went to *sheol*. So, does that mean, as so-called “Christian universalists” believe, that God will eventually open Heaven and the gift of eternal life to all souls in *sheol* - righteous and unrighteous? I think not – and here’s why.

A-C-A-B

A – Attributes

C – Character

A – Attitude

B – Behavior

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I know what God's "behavior" will be based on His "attitude." I know what His "attitude" will be based on His "character." I know what His "character" will be based on His "attributes."

I am fascinated by the attributes and character of God because I once did not believe He even existed. One of the men who God used to answer my many atheistic questions gave me a book about God's **essence** and **attributes** soon after I was saved. Here's some of what I learned and why it helps us answer questions from *The Hell Test*.

God's Essence

God's essence (substance) is not material; it is Spirit – "God is Spirit." (John 4:24)

God's essence is immaterial and incorporeal – "a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Luke 24:39)

God is invisible – "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead." (Romans 1:20) Paul wrote this about Jesus Christ – "He is the image of the invisible God." (Colossians 1:15)

God is alive – "By this you shall know that the living God *is* among you ..."
(Joshua 3:10)

God is a Person and is Self-Existent and Self-Sufficient – "And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" (Exodus 3:14)

God is immense – “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You.” (1 Kings 8:27)

God is eternal – “Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” (Psalm 90:2)

Non-Moral Attributes of God

What are God’s attributes? We understand them in two general categories: **non-moral** and **moral**. By non-moral we do not mean “immoral,” since there is no immorality in God. The term non-moral simply means those attributes of God that do not involve qualities of morality.

Omnipotence – God is all-powerful. He can do whatever He wills to do.

Omniscience – God is all-knowing. He knows Himself and all things perfectly from everlasting to everlasting.

Omnipresence – God is everywhere-present at the same time, yet not limited by time and space.

Immutability – God is unchangeable. He does not vary in His essence and attributes. He is eternally consistent.

Moral Attributes of God

Loving – God is love and demonstrates His love to His creation.

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Good – God is good and demonstrates His goodness to His creation.

Merciful – God is merciful and demonstrates His mercy to His creation.

Forgiving – God is forgiving and demonstrates His forgiveness to His creation.

Gracious - God is gracious and demonstrates His grace to His creation.

Patient – God is patient and demonstrates His patience to His creation.

Longsuffering – God is longsuffering and demonstrates His longsuffering to His creation.

Holy – God is gracious and demonstrates His holiness to His creation.

Righteous - God is righteous and demonstrates His righteousness to His creation.

Just – God is just and demonstrates His justice to His creation.

Truth - God is truth and demonstrates His truthfulness to His creation.

We could add many more, but for the purpose of answering *The Hell Test's* questions I'd like to focus on these moral attributes. God is a perfectly balanced blend of all of these. God cannot be anything less than perfect and balanced. His **Love** is perfectly balanced with His **Holiness** and His **Graciousness** and His **Righteousness** and His **Patience** and His **Justice** and His **Mercy** and His **Longsuffering** and His **Truthfulness** and His **Forgiveness**.

We cannot and should not try to determine God's behavior in dealing with the unrighteous dead without understanding that God is not like us. We are like Him in many ways because He created us in His image, but He is not like us. Even though many people try, we cannot create God in our image. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. The Bible tells us to walk in God's ways, not the other way around. If we try to understand God based on the way we think and feel, we will miss the glory that is our Eternal God. God will be consistent in all these things.

Here's the problem as I see it – "Christian" universalism believes God's Love trumps every other moral attribute. Here is the fifth declaration of the Christian Universalist Association from their Statement of Faith:

"We believe every person is the divine offspring of God, created in the image of the Heavenly Parent of all; and that every person is destined to be raised up from imperfection to maturity according to the pattern of the archetypal Christ, the Son of God, the Perfect Human in whose image all humanity shall be transformed."

We'll learn more about "Christian" universalism's beliefs in future articles, but it's important to note here that they depend on God's Love to bring about the primary belief that every person who has ever lived or will ever live will be spiritually transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

I disagree. Why? Because of what God says about the **unrighteous** in the Bible and how He says it. Here are some examples, starting with one we can all understand. In the context of having differing measures in order to cheat your neighbor, God said this –

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“You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 25:13-16

If you’ve ever been cheated by someone, you know what it feels like. I covered hundreds of stories as a journalist about people being cheated and I don’t remember one victim who liked what was done to them. They all wanted justice and they wanted it to be quick and complete.

It was a practice in ancient times (even as it is today) for merchants to falsify weights so they could charge more and give less. Moses wrote that people who do that, who behave unrighteously, are an “abomination” to the Lord your God. The Hebrew word is (*to’ebah*) and was used for sins that were an “abomination of the highest degree” (1906 Jewish Encyclopedia). It came from the word *ta’ab*, which means “to abhor.” It carries the idea of “loathing” and “detesting.” Many English versions of the Old Testament use the word “detest” when translating *to’ebah*.

To’ebah is used more than 100 times in the Old Testament. It’s interesting that the first use of the word was in the context of what Egyptians thought of Hebrews during the time of Joseph – “So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that *is* an abomination to the Egyptians.” Hebrews were *to’ebah* to the Egyptians. We learn a little later in Genesis that shepherds were also *to’ebah* to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34).

The list of what was an “abomination” to God in the Old Testament is long. It includes all types of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality (read Leviticus 18 to see what God calls *to’ebah*). Idolatry is also called *to’ebah* in the Old Testament (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:25-26; 13:12-16; 17:2-7). Giving your child to be burned as an offering to a false God is *to’ebah* (e.g. Deuteronomy 12:31). Sacrificing a blemished animal to God is *to’ebah* (Deuteronomy 17:1) Practicing witchcraft, being a soothsayer or sorcerer, conjuring a spell, being a medium, or spiritist, or one who calls up the dead is *to’ebah* (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

These are just some of the many things God views as an abomination. What I want you to see is that God views using a false measure in the same way. Justice and fairness are extremely important to God. The lack of justice and fairness is an abomination (*to’ebah*) to Him.

Is God A Monster?

“When contemplating on these questions, let us remember that ‘unless we become as little children we shall not enter the kingdom of God.’ (Matt. 18:3) Could children really love a god who created a place in which his parents, brothers and sisters or friends would be endlessly tortured? Could you truly sit on Hitler’s or Charles Manson’s lap and love them unconditionally? If not, what makes you think you can honestly love a God who is endlessly torturing almost all of mankind? Can a human being honestly love a being who planned to endlessly torture almost all of mankind which MAY include his parents, children AND if honest with him or herself, possible themselves? Can one REALLY love such a god IN THEIR HEARTS? or do they do what Jesus said they do: ‘Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me and in vain they worship Me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (The Hell Test)

The author of *The Hell Test* and other “Christian” universalists would have us believe that we could not really love a God who is endlessly torturing almost all of mankind. The author paints a picture of someone sitting on the lap of Hitler or Charles Manson and loving them unconditionally in the same light as sitting on the lap of God Who would send people to eternal hellfire and loving Him unconditionally. As we’ve seen in previous studies, the author of *The Hell Test* attempts to prove that God sent the souls of all dead people to the same place during Old Testament times (*sheol*) and that there is no difference in how He will behave toward them in the future – they will all be saved and enjoy the rewards of Heaven.

I strongly disagree. In the previous chapter we looked at the importance of seeing God as He sees Himself. He is Loving, Merciful, and Forgiving. God is also Holy, Righteous, and Just. God expresses His anger and wrath toward wickedness and unrighteousness in the Old Testament and will deal severely with those who disobey Him. Here is a powerful example of that from the Old Testament.

The Old Testament makes it clear that God will judge the souls of the righteous and unrighteous at a future time and that they will not share the same eternal reward.

“At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.” Daniel 12:1-3

We know from Old and New Testament prophecy that Israel will go through a time of great tribulation. Everyone who is found “written in the book” will be delivered. Question is, what book?

The first time we read about being written in God’s “book” is in Exodus 32.

“Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your

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book which You have written.’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.’ Exodus 32:31-33

Did you know that God has a **book** with people’s names written in it? Did you know that God can “blot” people’s names out of the book? It’s true. Moses knew about the “book” and asked God to blot his name out of His book if He would not forgive the great sin of God’s people. God responded, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.” God then told Moses He would “visit punishment” upon the people who sinned against Him.

The Old Testament mentions many books – Book of the Law of Moses, Book of Jasher, Book of the Acts of Solomon, Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, Book of the Chronicle of the Kings of Judah, Book of Samuel the Seer, Book of Nathan the Prophet, Book of Gad the Seer, Book of Shemaiah the Prophet, Book of Jeremiah the Prophet – but all of those books were written by men. There is another book that is written by God. In fact, God called it “My book.”

Daniel spoke of people who were “found written in the book.” That would be God’s “My book.” “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth” is another way of saying those who had died. What is their future? “Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

God revealed to Daniel, and Daniel to the world, that those who “awake” (Hebrew – *qiys*) from death go to “everlasting life” (Hebrew – *hay olam*) or to “shame and everlasting contempt” (Hebrew – *dera’on olam herpah*).

Notice the Hebrew word *olam*. It translates into English as “eternity, forever, forevermore, ancient, endless, long time, always, old, distant past, distant future” depending on the context. The word in Daniel is in the future tense. The concept

of the “afterlife” for many Jews is called *Olam Ha-Ba* (The World to Come). The first stage is known as *sheol* – the world of souls – and is concurrent with *Olam Hazeh* (this present age). The second stage is known as *Olam Ha-techiah* (The World of Resurrection).

Dera'on appears only twice in the Old Testament – Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 66:24. The context of Isaiah 66 is the end of days when God will defeat His enemies on earth and establish “the new heavens and the new earth” (Isaiah 66:22). In that context, God speaks of those who transgressed against Him - “And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Isaiah 66:24) The English word “abhorrence” expresses the idea of the Hebrew word along with “a thrusting away.” That thrusting away (*taab* - to abhor) is a rejection of something or someone based on “loathing.”

Herpah means “shame, disgrace, reproach, scorn, contempt, insult, mocked,” and is used more than 70 times in the Old Testament.

Daniel’s prophecy says that some of the dead at the end of time will awake to “everlasting life,” while others will awake to “shame and everlasting contempt.” Those who awake to everlasting life are the wise who will “shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.” This is consistent with a God Who is Loving, Merciful, Forgiving, Righteous, Holy, and Just. He rewards those who are faithful and obedient and punishes those who are faithless and disobedient.

If you and I were to go in front of a judge with the hope that our case would be treated fairly and justly, what kind of judge would you want? Don’t think only like a defendant who wants only mercy, also think like a victim who desires justice. What kind of judge would you want? We should rejoice that our God is the

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Perfect Judge and will deal with righteous and unrighteous souls in the way that meets all of the criteria that flows from His Attributes and Character.

Question: If Hell is real, why don't the Jews, many who know the Old Testament better than most Christians, not believe in the modern Christian concept of Hell? They say they don't believe it because it is not in their Scriptures. Most scholars today can not find Hell in the Old Testament. Most leading Bible translations no longer contain the word Hell in the entire Old Testament." (*The Hell Test*)

Answer: This is another trick of the "Christian" universalists to get true Christians to question their understanding of the Old Testament. If Jews who know the Old Testament so much better than Christians don't believe in eternal punishment for the wicked, then it must not be true. Think about that for a minute. Most of the Jews who saw Jesus heal the sick, perform miracles, and teach the oracles of God did not repent of their sins and follow Him as their Messiah. Most Jews to this day do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, so why would you think they would understand the Old Testament better than Christians? The Apostle Paul, a Hebrew scholar and expert in the Law of Moses, taught that the Old Testament is a "schoolmaster" that leads to the Christ of the New Testament (Galatians 3:24-25). Don't let "Christian" universalists mislead you with their trickery. Christians have a unique insight into the Old Testament because of the "keys" Christ has given us to understand spiritual things.

The only way to answer questions about the future of the wicked dead and finish testing *The Hell Test* is to hear from the greatest Expert on The Old Testament and the future judgment of human souls – the Judge Himself – Jesus Christ.

Here Comes The Judge!

One of my favorite TV shows during the late 1960s and early '70s was Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In. I especially liked Gary Owens since we both had radio shows at the time. Laugh-In was well known for its short and funny skits. One of them starred entertainer Sammy Davis Jr. where he played the part of a comical judge who ended each of his segments prancing off stage saying - "Here come da judge! Here come da judge! Here come da judge!"

At the time I didn't realize how prophetic those words were. I first heard them as an atheist, then later as a theist. What I learned as a theist was that an important role God plays in His universe is as the final Judge.

- Job in his discourse on the wicked asked - "Can *anyone* teach God knowledge, Since He judges those on high?" (Job 21:22)
- Israel's King David reminded the people of Israel that "God *is* a just judge, And God is angry *with the wicked* every day." (Psalm 7:11)
- David's son King Solomon wrote, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, For *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work" (Ecclesiastes 3:17) and "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).
- God spoke through His prophets to remind Israel that He was their Judge – "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,' says the Lord God. 'Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.'" (Ezekiel 18:30)

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That theme of God judging the wicked and His people continues in the New Testament, but with an extraordinary twist – Jesus Christ is the Heavenly Judge -

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” (John 5:22-23)

How can it be that the God of the Old Testament said He would judge the wicked and Israel, but that Jesus says in the New Testament that the Father had committed all judgment to Him? What does that have to do with *The Hell Test*? If God the Father committed all judgment to His Son Jesus Christ, then what Jesus says about future judgment is what we must accept as the will of God for the wicked and the righteous.

Understanding the Triune God is not an easy thing for mere mortals like us. That’s because God exists outside of our dimension and the rules and laws there are different than here. What we cannot understand in time and space are easy to understand in eternity.

As we move from the Old to the New Testament we must be careful not to see Jesus as just a man with extraordinary powers for an extraordinary mission. He is so much more than that.

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Matthew 1:22-23

“There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’ It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Mark 1:7-11

“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:30-33

“Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world,

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and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-14

The Gospels contain an amazing “birth announcement” concerning God the Son. They are clear about the fact that Jesus existed prior to His human birth, that He came to earth to be Savior and King, and that He is the Creator God of the Old Testament. No mistake about it. Jesus Christ is God.

Jesus judging the world was not an afterthought in God’s plan. It was something considered and decided before Jesus created the world.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:3-6

Before the foundation of the world ... before Jesus created the world ... He **chose** us that we should be “holy and without blame before Him in love.

Before the foundation of the world ... God “predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

God's choosing us "before the foundation of the world" included our holiness and predestination to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ. Why would holiness and adoption as sons be necessary if sin and its devastating penalties had not entered the picture? God created Adam and Eve as His perfect children. No issue of adoption would have been necessary without sin. Sin brought a curse on the human race, but God had a plan. God the Son would die to break the curse.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith.' Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them.' Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Galatians 3:10-14

The scene is set. God the Son came to earth in the form of man to "become a curse for us" so that "the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles." That was God's plan from before the foundation of the world.

As we read earlier in John 5, God the Father committed "all judgment" to God the Son. Why? "... that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father."

Everything in the Bible is based on an eternal relationship – the relationship of God the Father with God the Son with God the Holy Spirit. How does that relationship impact the eternal future of all people?

Did Jesus Really Teach That?

“If Hell doesn’t exist in the Old Testament, how could Jesus and his disciples teach that salvation was deliverance from a place that is not even found in their Scriptures? (There was only the Old Testament at that time.) Would that not make Him appear like a false teacher? Or could it be that Jesus never taught such a concept in the first place? Could it be that this concept has been added to the church and SOME Bibles through “traditions of men?” (The Hell Test)

Here’s another trick of the so-called “Christian” universalists: state a theory as if it is fact and attack anyone who disagrees. As we’ve shown in previous studies, the God of the Old Testament **will judge the wicked**. That’s clear from the many Hebrew Scriptures we quoted during our test of *The Hell Test*. The question is **how** and **how long**?

Here’s what “Christian” universalists believe about the eternal future of unbelievers:

“We believe in the ultimate triumph of divine mercy and grace: that no being ever created will be condemned or allowed to suffer forever, but God has arranged through a benevolent plan of learning and growth for all souls to attain salvation, reconciliation, restoration, and reunion with the Source of All Being, in the fullness of the ages.” (Christian Universalist Association, What We Believe – #4)

The universalists question how Jesus and His disciples could possibly teach that salvation was deliverance from a place that is not even found in the Hebrew Scriptures. They make thinking that even more terrible by suggesting that anyone

who believes such a thing would be making Jesus to “appear like a false teacher.” They go even further to claim that what Jesus said about His judgment – “has been added to the church and SOME Bibles through ‘traditions of men.’”

Jesus was certainly not a false teacher, so whatever He said about the future of the unbelieving would be the **final answer**. As for the Words of Christ concerning His coming Judgment being “added to the church and SOME Bibles,” it’s ridiculous to say that in light of the thousands of ancient copies of the New Testament that can be investigated. If something had been “added” to Church doctrine and “SOME” Bibles, we would see that clearly and easily in the ancient records of the Church.

The reason we’re testing *The Hell Test* is because the author of *The Hell Test* asked us to saying it is “a test every pastor, Bible teacher and seminary professor should be required to take before being allowed to teach.” That’s another trick of the universalists: to present themselves as having full knowledge (*gnostic*) and everyone else needing to learn at their feet.

“Give a copy of this test to those to whom you have submitted yourself. See whether they know their subject. If salvation is indeed deliverance from a Hell of everlasting punishment, then the answers to these questions are vital to your well being.” (The Hell Test)

We agree. The answers to **God’s Test** are vital to everyone’s well-being. Are you ready to put *The Hell Test* to the test again? So are we.

We learn in John 5 that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus for at least two reasons: (1) He healed on the Sabbath, and (2) made Himself “equal with God” by saying that God was “His Father” (John 5:18). What Jesus said to His persecutors next gives us great insight into His position on the future of saved

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and unsaved as the final **Judge** of all things.

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.’”
John 5:17-23

What Jesus said next is a key to the **how** and **how long** of His Judgment.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”
John 5:24-30

Jesus said, “he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” Do you see it? There is “no judgment” for the person who “hears” Christ’s Words and “believes in Him” who sent Him. Instead of facing Christ’s judgment, they pass “from death into life,” a life Jesus quantifies with the descriptor “everlasting” (*aionion*), used for both a long period of time and forever, as understood by usage and context. The question here is whether Jesus meant that people who believe in Him have life for a very long period of time or forever. If Jesus meant that people live for a very long period of time, when will that time end? A thousand years? Ten-thousand years? A million years? What happens to people when that period of time comes to an end? We’re not told because the clear understanding in the context is that people will live “forever.” There is no end to the *aionion* Jesus spoke of in John’s Gospel account. [You can use the same interpretive process in other instances of the word *aionion* in the New Testament.]

Jesus also said that the person who believes in Him “shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” What did Jesus mean by that? If He is not going to judge people in the context of *aionion*, why would it matter that someone who believed in Him would not come into judgment? It would seem from that way of thinking that believing or not believing in Christ had the same outcome if there is no judgment that means anything. If salvation is universal, what does it ultimately mean to those who choose not to believe in Jesus during their lifetime? Why would it matter that people who believe in Him “shall not come into judgment” if judgment had no consequences for *aionion*?

Jesus went on to say that He has the “authority to execute judgment” because He is the Son of Man. God the Father gave God the Son the responsibility of executing (*poiein*-to do, to make) judgment (*krisin*). Again I ask, what does it matter whether Jesus has the responsibility of executing judgment on people if

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that judgment means nothing in the context of *aionion*?

I believe that Jesus having authority to execute judgment does mean something because of what He said next – “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” A day is coming, Jesus said, when “all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” What will happen to them? Jesus presented only two options:

- “... those who have done good, to the resurrection of life ...”
- “... those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

This is what Jesus Christ, THE JUDGE, said will happen to “all who are in the graves.” They will hear His voice and come forth, either to “the resurrection of life” or to “the resurrection of condemnation.”

Could it be that SOME Bibles were changed centuries ago so that a false doctrine of Christ’s judgment would be added to the Church? Let’s look at several versions of John 5:29 to see.

“And they shall come forth, that have done good, unto the resurrection of life: but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of condemnation.”
GNV)

“And they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” (DRA)

“And they that have done good things, shall go into again-rising of life; but they that have done evil things, into again-rising of doom. [And they that

have done good things, shall come forth into rising again of life; forsooth they that have done evil things, into rising again of doom.]” (WYC)

“... those whose actions have been good, rising to new life, and those whose doings have been evil, rising to meet their sentence.” (KNOX)

“... those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.” (NIV)

“... those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” (RSV)

“Those who have lived the right way will walk out into a resurrection Life; those who have lived the wrong way, into a resurrection Judgment.” (MSG)

“... they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” (ASV)

“... those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (ESV)

“... those who did the good things to a rising again of life, and those who practised the evil things to a rising again of judgment.” (YLT)

“Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.” (NLT)

“... those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those

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who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of judgment.” (HCSB)

How does the Greek read?

καὶ ἐκπορεύονται οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς, οἱ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως. (Westcott/Hort)

και εκπορευονται οι τα αγαθα ποιησαντες εις αναστασιν ζωης οι δε τα φαυλα πραξαντες εις αναστασιν κρισεως (Byzantine/Majority Text)

καὶ ἐκπορεύονται οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως (1550 Stephanus Textus Receptus)

How does the Greek translate? *anastasin zoes* – “a resurrection of life” ... *anastasin kriseos* – “a resurrection of judgment”

What does the Greek mean? It means that the post-resurrection future of the saved is **life** and the post-resurrection future of the unsaved is a **judgment of separation** (*krisis* – a separating following the process of investigation that leads to a decision of condemnation).

Can these words of Jesus Christ be clearer? “... all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”

The Hell Test is tested and found severely wanting.

The Straw Man Argument

“If Hell was real, does that mean Jesus raised the wicked from an unconscious state, make them alive only to be endlessly tortured? Wouldn’t it be more merciful to just leave them eternally unconscious (which some believe)? (Ecc. 9:5; John 11:11)” (The Hell Test)

The author of *The Hell Test* is using the “straw man” technique to throw people off the trail of the truth – “If hell was real” ... “Jesus raised the wicked from an unconscious state” ... “make them alive only to be endlessly tortured” ... “Wouldn’t it be more merciful” ...

The “straw man” argument is a type of informal fallacy that misrepresents the position of people who believe in Christ’s eternal judgment of the wicked and creates the illusion that they have effectively refuted the position. The author of *The Hell Test* fails in his attempt to persuade because of the weakness of his argument.

The “straw man” argument is often used with highly-charged emotional issues where logic and facts are lacking on the side of those who build the straw man. It’s a process of moving attention away from the facts and toward the emotions (e.g. fear, pity, anger). The subject of Christ’s final judgment of the wicked deserves more and better than this.

First, let’s look at the two Scriptures listed in *The Hell Test*. Bending Scripture to support a straw man theory has been used for centuries and this is no exception. The author of *The Hell Text* presents them as “proof” texts for his proposal.

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“For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.” Ecclesiastes 9:5

“These things He said, and after that He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’” John 11:11

The problem with using these Scriptures as proof texts for the belief that people who die are in an “unconscious state” is that the interpretation doesn’t match the context. False teaching usually includes pulling Bible verses out of context and putting them alongside of other verses taken out of context until “false doctrine” is born. That’s the case with “Christian” universalism.

The writer of Ecclesiastes (King Solomon) begins with questions about life.

“Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’ What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again. All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 1:2-9

Solomon concluded that those things humans believe will bring them satisfaction in life – don't. It's interesting that Solomon, the wisest man on earth, knew that wisdom did not satisfy. Solomon talked with God and was deeply religious, but he knew that religious practices did not satisfy. Solomon was the richest man on earth, but knew that riches did not satisfy. Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines, but knew that sensual pleasures did not satisfy. He was deeply aware of the repetitiveness of life and its problems and unfairness.

King Solomon came to understand the futility of life, which lead him to consider the prospect of death. He watched as wicked people were buried and considered what they had done. He saw that the end of the wicked would be bad, while the end of the righteous would be good.

“Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity. Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God. There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.” Ecclesiastes 8:10-14

Solomon realized that death came to the righteous and the wicked.

“One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not

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sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.” (Ecclesiastes 9:1-4)

This is the full context that leads us to Ecclesiastes 9:5 - "For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten." Verse 5 continues Solomon's theme of the futility of life and demonstrates the certainty of death and that the living will forget the dead – bringing into question the worth of the labor of life. Trying to make Ecclesiastes 9:5 fit into a theology of universalism is abhorrent to the text.

John 11 contains one of the most amazing events in the Bible – bringing a dead man back to life. The dead man was Lazarus of Bethany. He was the brother of Mary and Martha and they were all friends of Jesus.

The story begins with Mary and Martha sending word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. When Jesus heard the news, He said – "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Those words, spoken by Jesus, should have been clear to anyone who heard it that something amazing was about to happen. Jesus did not say that Lazarus would not die. He said that the sickness "is not unto death." The Greek word is *thanaton* and means the separation of the soul from the body. The purpose of Lazarus' death would not be the separation of his soul from his body, "but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Jesus stayed an extra two days in the place where He was, then left for Judea. Jesus had healed thousands of people and worked many other miracles to glorify His Father in Heaven and confirm Himself as the Son of God and His Teachings

as of God. He could have easily gone to Judea quickly and healed Lazarus of his illness, but that was not His plan. Jesus was nearing the greatest event in human history – the Resurrection. He was going to teach His disciples and all others who would hear and read about Lazarus that He truly was the Resurrection and the Life.

“Then after this He said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ The disciples said to Him, ‘Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.’ These things He said, and after that He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’ Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.’ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.” John 11:7-15

Many people have wrongly interpreted Jesus as teaching “soul sleep” from this portion of Scripture. Jesus knew He was going to bring Lazarus back to life soon, so He was not teaching an elongated sleep of the soul. There is no indication in the language, usage or context of the passage that He had anything like soul sleep in mind. The Lord’s disciples misunderstood Him as well, thinking that Lazarus was sleeping because of his illness and getting necessary rest to heal naturally. However, Jesus meant the physical death of Lazarus and made that clear to the disciples.

When Jesus and His disciples arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Martha was understandably upset about her brother’s death and told

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Jesus that if He had been there Lazarus would not have died. She was aware of the Lord's power over sickness. Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha responded that she knew he would rise again "in the resurrection at the last day." That response led Jesus to say something that is extremely important for us to understand – "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.'" Jesus did not go to Bethany to teach people that the soul sleeps in an unconscious state after death. Jesus went to Bethany to teach people who He is – "I am the resurrection and the life." That's the message of John 11.

Friends of the family saw Jesus weep at the tomb of Lazarus and some said – "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" They had no idea what they were about to witness.

Lazarus was buried in a cave and a large stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha didn't understand and said, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Martha knew that her brother had died and she knew that after being dead four days a physical body would smell of decaying flesh. How did Jesus respond to that? It's very telling to the context and purpose of this event.

"Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.' Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let

him go.”

The Lord called Lazarus back to life from death publicly so that the many witnesses, including His disciples, would see the glory of God. It also most certainly led to the Lord’s arrest and death on the Cross. You can read more about that in John 11:45-57.

The Hell Test wrongly uses many Scriptures to attempt to prove their error, but no matter how hard one tries they cannot turn a lie into the truth.

I See Dead People!

“If there is a Hell and according to most denominations of Christianity the majority of mankind will go there, could you really enjoy heaven knowing your mother or father or children or best friend are suffering everlasting tortures the likes of which would make the Holocaust seem like a picnic? If the Rich Man and Lazarus story (Luke chapter 16) is real and NOT a parable, then we will be able to converse with our loves ones who did not make it into heaven. Would heaven really be paradise if this were true?”
(The Hell Test)

These are typical questions by universalists. How could we “enjoy” Heaven if our loved ones are suffering everlasting torture? Notice the emphasis on “our” enjoyment, not God’s justice and glory. Then there’s the question about whether the story in Luke 16 about the rich man and Lazarus is “real” or a “parable.” That’s an important question since truth is always the key to faith. Jesus told the story about Lazarus and the rich man for a reason. We need to know why He told it and how it impacts our life and the lives of the people we know and love.

It’s interesting to see the universalist’s question about whether Heaven could really be paradise if hell was true. That’s not an honest way to approach truth. We cannot and should not base our acceptance of what’s true on whether we like it or not. If we trust God, then His truth will always be the right thing.

With that being said, let’s put *The Hell Test* to the test.

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the

crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" Luke 16:19-31

The Hell Test asked whether Jesus' story was real or a parable. The only way to know for sure is to know what Jesus was thinking when He told it. How can we know what someone is thinking when they speak? Listen carefully for the language, usage, context, and intent. Jesus was always precise and focused with His Words. Compare what He says about hell here with what He says about hell in other settings. Do they complement or compete with each other? Do they support a growing understanding of the doctrine or cause conflict in comprehending truth?

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People have used parables for thousands of years to make specific points about real issues. An example from the Old Testament is the parable the prophet Nathan told King David about a rich man and a poor man who lived in the same city. Instead of giving a traveler a lamb from his own flock, the rich man took the only lamb the poor man owned and killed and prepared it for the traveler to eat. King David was so angry that he said, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.” (2 Samuel 12:5-6) Nathan responded to the king with these words: “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7). Nathan told the story about the rich man and poor man to show David how wrong he had been in having Uriah the Hittite killed and taking Uriah’s wife Bathsheba to be his wife (she was already pregnant with David’s child) (2 Samuel 12:8-9). The parable Nathan told made a specific point about a real issue in the king’s life.

The purpose of parables in the Old Testament was to point people to the God of Israel so that they might praise Him and glorify His Name.

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.” Psalm 78:1-4

We find Jews using parables as early as the period of the Judges (Judges 9 and 14). God instructed Ezekiel to speak in parables – “And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel.’” (Ezekiel 17:1-2) - “Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth *day* of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, write down the name of the day, this very day—the king of Babylon started his siege against Jerusalem this very day. And utter a parable to the

rebellious house, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' (Ezekiel 24:1-3) Isaiah spoke the parable of the Disappointing Vineyard – “Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard” (Isaiah 5:1) – then explained its meaning – “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.” (Isaiah 5:7)

Jesus was the “Master” of using parables to bring home powerful points about real-life issues. The Gospel of Mark explains Christ’s usage of parables – “And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” (Mark 4:33-34) Here’s how Jesus answered His disciples’ question about why He spoke to people in parables:

“And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did

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not hear it.” Matthew 13:10-17

Most of the Lord’s parables dealt with the Kingdom of Heaven since that was the primary purpose of Christ’s ministry on earth - ”From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) – “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14-15) – “Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.’” (Luke 4:42-43)

Some of Christ’s parables were shared in two or three of the Gospel accounts, but many of the Lord’s parables are found only in the Gospel of Luke (e.g. Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, Barren Fig Tree, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son). The question before us is whether the story in Luke about the Rich Man and Lazarus is one of them. The short answer is “no.”

Would Heaven Be Paradise If... ?

“If the Rich Man and Lazarus story (Luke chapter 16) is real and NOT a parable, then we will be able to converse with our loves ones who did not make it into heaven. Would heaven really be paradise if this were true?”
(The Hell Test)

The short answer to *The Hell Test*'s question about whether the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is real or a parable is – it's real. Parables are about real-life issues, but not real-life people. When you see a story with the names of real people used in it (e.g. Lazarus, Abraham), you know the story is real and not a parable. Another clue is when the writer identifies a story as a parable.

To help us see that the story of the rich man, Lazarus and Abraham is real and not a parable, let's first look at examples of Christ's parables in the Gospel of Luke.

“And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.’ When He had said these things He cried, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’” Luke 8:4-8

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“Then Jesus answered and said: ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.” Luke 10:30-37

“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ ‘So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:16-21

“He also spoke this parable: ‘A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the

ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’ Luke 13:6-9

“Then He spoke to them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.’ Luke 21:29-33

What do you see? Personal names? Specific locations? No, you see examples of humans behaving in various ways - “certain man” “keeper of his vineyard” “certain rich man” “certain priest” “certain Samaritan”

Look again at the story about the Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man.

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ‘Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and

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you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ ‘Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ Luke 16:19-31

Did Jesus lie about what happened to the man named Lazarus? What about what Abraham said? Was that also a lie? I don't think so. If Jesus said a man named Lazarus said something, he said it. If Jesus said Abraham said something to a rich man, he said it.

It's interesting that Luke recorded the story about Lazarus, the rich man and Abraham after the story about the unjust steward (obviously a parable without names and places). The conclusion of the Lord's story is Luke 16:13 – “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Some Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard what Jesus said to His disciples, “and they derided Him” (Luke 16:14). That's when Jesus told the Pharisees that though they justified themselves before men, God knew their hearts. “For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). The next story Jesus told the Pharisees was about the rich man, Lazarus and Abraham. The timing for telling that particular story was perfect because Jesus told the Pharisees exactly where their love of money was going to take them – just like the rich man in the story – to a place of

fiery torment.

What Jesus was telling the Pharisees was that the life they had chosen to live had eternal consequences. They presented themselves as servants of God, but they were in fact serving themselves through the gaining of riches (*mamonas* – material wealth). They had received their reward during their mortal lifetime. Jesus made the point that no servant can serve two masters. The Pharisees had a choice to make. If they chose to serve riches instead of God, they would be tormented in “hades.”

What Jesus Taught About Hades

“And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” Luke 16:23

In the previous chapter we saw Jesus declaring to the Pharisees the result of serving riches instead of God. It happened when the Pharisees heard Jesus telling His disciples the parable of the unjust steward. Jesus hit the Pharisees where it hurts – in their pride and pocket book.

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.’ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Luke 16:13-15

It was after those words that Jesus told the Pharisees about the rich man, Lazarus and Abraham. The story included the use of the word *hade* (hades).

“The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” Luke 16:22-23

It’s interesting to note that Jesus did not define *hades* or explain its existence to the Pharisees. There is no record of the Pharisees questioning Jesus about *hades* or the story He told. It appears from Luke’s Gospel that the message Jesus intended the Pharisees to hear and understand was received, though

probably not appreciated.

The Lord's story included specific details about hades:

- It is a conscious existence that includes the ability to hear, see, speak, taste and feel
- It is a place of torment that includes pain from fire (*phloyi* - flame) and horrible thirst
- There is a great distance between the saved and unsaved (*chasma* – chasm, gulf)
- The unsaved are trapped with no ability or opportunity to leave hades or communicate with the physical world

This was not the first or last time Jesus spoke of a place of torment called hades. In fact, Jesus included hades in earlier teachings.

“But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” Luke 10:14-16

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’” Matthew 16:17-19

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Jesus was using words and concepts the Jews understood. The Greek word *hades* was used to translate the Hebrew word *sheol* (realm of the dead, grave). As Jesus did with many other Hebrew words and ideas, He added details and a better understanding of the full meaning.

In Luke 10 Jesus included “Hades” with “the judgment.” The context is Jesus sending out the 70 disciples (two by two) to heal the sick and preach that the Kingdom of God “has come near you” (Luke 10:9). However, if the 70 went into cities that did not receive them, Jesus told them to wipe off the dust of those cities from their feet and say – “The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you” (Luke 10:11). Then Jesus told the 70 that it will be more tolerable in that “Day for Sodom than for that city.” Jesus explained what He meant by saying:

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” Luke 10:13-16

The word “judgment” is *krisei* and was often used in the New Testament for God’s final Judgment. Jesus mentions three cities in His “woes” – Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. These were three cities where Jesus did many of His mighty works, but where the people did not repent (Matthew 11:20). Jesus compared them to Gentile cities (Tyre and Sidon) and said that the people who lived there would have repented long ago if they had seen the mighty works Christ was doing in Israel. Because of the lack of repentance of the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, they would “be brought down to Hades.”

The Key To Understanding Hades

“You might want to reconsider the argument in your post. No serious scholar thinks this story is about hell.”

That is one of the written responses I received after posting the last chapter online. First, the premise cannot be proven because the term “serious scholar” is not defined and only known to the mind of the writer. Second, when described by a scholarly definition – “thoughtful and sober learned person who has done advanced study in a special field” (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary) – we will find many “serious scholars” who would agree that Luke 16:19-31 is about hell. Third, what does it matter whether anyone agrees with what you believe if what you believe is clearly stated in Scripture?

“And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’ John 9:39

Christ’s Judgment is the key to understanding *hades*, but Satan doesn’t want people to be concerned about Judgment Day. He knows that when people are concerned about how God will judge them, they might believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved (Acts 16:31).

Universalists under the guise of being “Christian” want people to believe that everyone will be eternally saved whether they believe in Jesus Christ or not. Universalists believe that a person’s faith and behavior do not need to undergo any kind of change during this lifetime to spent eternity with Christ because Jesus will provide salvation for everyone ever born. They will be given all the

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chances they need after this life on earth to “return home to their Creator.” Here are the universalists’ beliefs in their own words.

“We believe in the full and final triumph of the grace of God over the powers of sin and death: that the mercy and forgiveness of God are victorious; that this victory of redemption is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and that, therefore, no human being will be condemned or allowed to suffer pain and separation forever ... We believe in universal salvation, the idea that there is no such thing as eternal hell or annihilation because God has planned the universe to produce a positive outcome for all people of all times ... Our belief in the ultimate salvation of all is based on a strong trust in God’s omnipotence and benevolence. God is both powerful enough and loving enough to cause all souls to be rescued from a state of separation and returned to their intended state of unity and harmony with the Divine. All things that are good will be preserved and restored to their fullest manifestation, but all things that are bad will perish (Mat. 3:12, 1 Cor. 3:10-15). Since no human being is totally bad, no human will perish eternally. It is God’s plan to take what is good in each individual and multiply it, and replace the bad within us with an infusion of God’s divine goodness, until only the good remains ... God does not decide to condemn some people to hell because they sinned too much or they chose the wrong religious beliefs. Nor does God allow some people to remain in a hellish condition indefinitely because of making bad decisions of their own free will (Phil. 2:9-11). Negative experiences which happen to us are designed to produce learning and growth, for the advancement of the soul. It is through purgatorial “fires” of tests and trials that the human spirit is cleansed of negative attributes and attains a character that is compatible with God (Mal. 3:2-3, Mark 9:49, 1 Pet. 1:7) ... Souls that leave this life on earth without experiencing salvation will have other opportunities for conversion, learning and growth after death (1 Pet. 3:18-20, 4:6). No one will ever run out of chances to return home to

their Creator. Even the most evil beings who have ever lived can still be saved — and will be, in the fullness of time (Phil. 2:10). That is God's promise!" The Christian Universalist Association

I find these beliefs appalling based on the clear teaching of God's Word. If they had not quoted from the New Testament, I would have thought I was reading from the writings of Hindu or New Age philosophy. The Christian Bible reveals the True God as Holy and Righteous and the Judge of all who inhabit the earth. The Hebrew prophets foretold the Messianic Judgment centuries before Jesus Christ was born.

"Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." Psalm 2:10-12

"The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.' The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head." Psalm 110

"O enemy, destructions are finished forever! And you have destroyed cities; Even their memory has perished. But the Lord shall endure

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forever; He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness.” Psalm 9:6-8

“Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity.” Psalm 98:7-9

“The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers. ‘I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the Lord; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.’ Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord’s wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in the land.”

“Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. ‘I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of

the Lord of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger.” Isaiah 13:9-13

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. ‘The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. ‘And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.” Isaiah 11:1-10

These are just a small sampling of Old Testament Scriptures dealing with the Lord’s Judgment. It is clear that His Judgment comes from His “wrath” in the day of His “fierce anger.” Judgment Day is coming and Christ will express His wrath on that Day whether universalists believe it or not. The question is never what we believe – it is always what God believes.

Everyone Will NOT Get In...

It's interesting to me that people who call themselves Christians and present themselves as students of the Bible don't believe in God's judgment. Even as a brand new Christian, just saved from atheism, I knew that God was the Eternal Judge Who ruled from Heaven. Why did I believe that? Because as I asked Christians questions about the existence and nature of God, they presented His position as Judge of angels and humans to me clearly. And, I might add, nothing I've read, heard, or seen since that day more than 40 years ago has changed that fact

In the previous chapter we looked at what the Old Testament taught about Messianic Judgment. Jesus, Who the New Testament identifies as the promised Messiah, explained in detail who He would judge, why He would judge them, how He would judge them, where He would judge them, when He would judge them, and what sentence they would receive. So, let's get started.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that everyone is NOT going to be allowed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. That statement alone should end the debate about universalism.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" Matthew 7:21-23

Jesus also presented Himself, the Son of Man, as the King who would judge people of all nations by dividing them into a group on His left and another group on His right. To those on His left hand Jesus said, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Again, that would seem to end the debate about whether the Lord will judge people and send them to a place of “everlasting punishment.”

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy 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 them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say

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to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:31-46

God the Father has committed “all judgment” to God the Son. Another statement that should end all debate.

“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” John 5:20-23

Jesus will “execute judgment” and His “judgment is righteous.” Why? Because He does not seek His own will “but the will of the Father” Who sent Him. What happens to the people who Jesus will judge? Those who have done good “to the resurrection of life.” To those who have done evil “to the resurrection of condemnation.” Again, another debate-ending statement by the Lord.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I

can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”

John 5:24-30

What happened to the Lord's clear message of judgment and punishment after He ascended into Heaven after His Resurrection? Did the apostles drop that from their teaching? Acts 2:42 says that the new followers of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” Let’s take a look at “the apostles’ doctrine” for the first generation following Christ’s Resurrection.

“Then Peter opened his mouth and said ... Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Acts 10:34, 40-43

The Apostle Peter's doctrine included the fact that God ordained that Jesus “be Judge of the living and the dead.” What is basis for His Judgment? “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Faith in Christ brings “remission” of sins and that's tied directly to the Lord being the Judge of the living and the dead.

Peter also taught that “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” (2 Peter 2:9) He wrote that “the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (2 Peter 3:7)

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Here's what the Apostle Paul taught about the Judgment of Christ.

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:39-31

Paul preached that God “commands all men everywhere to repent.” Why? Because “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.” The “Man” God appointed to judge the world is Jesus and the standard and method of judgment will be “in righteousness.” How can we be sure that is true? “He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the proof that He is the Judge and that He will Judge “in righteousness.”

Paul was consistent throughout his ministry concerning the coming Judgment of Christ and his message caused fear among those who heard. One example is Felix, Procurator of Judea ... “And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” Acts 24:24-25

When Paul reminded Timothy about what he must do as a pastor and preacher of the Gospel, he wrote – “I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” (2 Timothy 4:1)

Paul said that “the judgment of God is according to truth” against the people who practice evil and that they would not “escape the judgment of God.” (Romans 2:2-3). Paul wrote often in his letters to Christians about Christ’s Judgment. He boldly pronounced that God would “judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” (Romans 2:16) One of Paul’s most powerful statements about the coming world-wide Judgment of Jesus Christ on humanity is in his second letter to the Thessalonians. Read this carefully and then tell me what you think will happen to those “who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”

2 Thessalonians 1:3-10

Would I be wrong to use words like “the righteous judgment of God” when sharing with someone about what the Lord is going to do one day? Would I be wrong in saying that people who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of

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our Lord Jesus Christ would have to deal with His using “flaming fire” in taking vengeance on them? Would I be wrong in saying that people who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power?” Would I be wrong or would I be simply sharing the clear Truth of God’s Word?

If I stopped right here and didn’t write another word ... the debate about universal salvation is finished. But I won’t stop here because God is not finished.

The Lake of Fire

“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:15

That’s an ominous statement concerning the human race, but I’m ahead of myself. Let’s go to the beginning to see how and why this will happen.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” Revelation 1:1-3

The “revelation” we see in Chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation came directly from Jesus Christ, “which God gave Him to show His servants.” Who did Jesus give His Revelation? John the Apostle – “who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.” What kind of document is Revelation? Prophecy. “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy.”

The Apostle John was the last apostle of Christ still alive on earth. The other apostles had been martyred. John was a prisoner of the Roman Empire on Patmos, a small Greek island in the Aegean Sea. John heard a loud voice behind him saying: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What

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you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” (Revelation 1:11) Patmos was less than a hundred miles from Ephesus and the other cities mentioned. Early Church writers of the 2nd Century AD wrote that John had ministered in Ephesus, so the churches of that region would have known John and been able to verify that he had written the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus began His Revelation by speaking directly to the seven churches in the seven cities. Then, the Lord called John up to Heaven. “After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’” (Revelation 4:1) John was immediately “in the Spirit” and he saw the Throne of God.

The rest of the Revelation of Jesus Christ takes place from John’s “heavenly” and “futuristic” perspective. In Chapter 5, John sees the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) taking the “scroll” and opening its “seals.” As Jesus opened the seals one by one, John witnessed God’s judgment on the earth and the people on the earth. The “seven seals” were followed by the “seven trumpets” and “seven thunders.” God’s judgment on the earth and the people on the earth continued.

When we come to Revelation 14, we see the proclamations of three angels concerning the Judgment of God on the wicked and disobedient humans on earth. Watch carefully for what the angels say happens to those people.

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’ And another

angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'

Revelation 14:6-11

It is going to be very difficult to live on earth during the “great tribulation” without receiving the “mark of the beast,” but those who do receive it will face “the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.” People who receive the beast’s mark “shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night.”

What does God’s Word say will happen to these people? They will “be tormented with fire and brimstone ... And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night.” That is a clear message. It’s not hard to understand the words. There’s no “mystery” about what will happen to people who receive the mark of the beast during the Tribulation. They will be tormented “forever and ever.”

The next thing John sees is Jesus Christ – “One like the Son of Man” – thrusting in His sickle to reap, “for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” Jesus thrusts in His sickle on the earth, “and the earth was reaped” (Revelation 14:14-16).

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Then John saw an angel come “out of the temple which is in heaven,” also having a sharp sickle in his hands. Another angel came out from the altar in Heaven, “who had power over fire,” and John heard him cry with a loud cry to the angel with the sharp sickle, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.” (Revelation 14:17-20)

God’s Judgment of the disobedient humans on earth continues in Revelation 15 with seven angels who have the seven last plagues – “for in them the wrath of God is complete.” That’s an important thing to note – the “wrath of God.” That’s the righteous anger and fury of the Almighty God and it’s not complete (finished) until seven angels do something with the seven last plagues.

(Quick question: why should anyone be afraid of the “wrath” of God and the seven “last plagues” if God is not going to judge anyone? If God is going to forgive everyone and welcome everyone into eternal peace and joy, why would anyone be afraid of God’s judgment?)

Look at what angels and other beings in Heaven sing at that moment.

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.”

Revelation 15:3-4

The “works” of the “Lord God Almighty” are “great and marvelous.” The “ways” of the “King of the saints” are “just and true.” People will “fear” God because He alone is “holy.” All nations will come and worship before God, for His “judgments have been manifested” (made known clearly).

Next, John saw the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven” opened. Out of the Temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues. One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls “full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.” The Temple was filled with smoke “from the glory of God and from His power,” and no one was able to enter the Temple until “the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”

In Revelation 16, John heard a loud voice from the Temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.” Notice that God’s judgment and wrath are still the focus of the Revelation of Christ. Here are the contents of the seven bowls “of the wrath of God.”

- Loathsome sores
- Sea turns to blood
- Waters turn to blood
- People are scorched
- Darkness and pain
- Euphrates dried up
- Earth utterly shaken

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Here is some of what John heard the angels say as they poured out the bowls of God's wrath. Notice the emphasis on God's "judgment."

"You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things." Revelation 16:5

"Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." Revelation 16:7

John writes about the scarlet woman and the scarlet beast in Revelation 17 and the fall of Babylon the Great in Revelation 18. In Revelation 19 we hear how the creatures of Heaven respond to God's Judgment.

"Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her ..." Revelation 19:1-2

Then, John writes about the Lord Jesus Christ executing judgment on the armies of the earth.

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He

Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great. And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.'" Revelation 19:11-21

Keep in mind that "Christian universalists" would have us believe that all of the people judged by God so far in the Revelation of Jesus Christ will be saved at some point after God kills them and will join the rest of the other unsaved people from earlier generations in Heaven to spend eternity with Him in blissful joy and peace. Oh, and those of us who confessed with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ and believed in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead will be there, too.

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of

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Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

In the previous chapter we saw that Jesus Christ revealed Himself to the Apostle John and the seven churches of Asia Minor as the Great Judge of the earth. In Revelation 20 we see Jesus sitting on His “great white throne” and the earth and the heaven disappearing from His “face.” We also see the dead, “small and great,” standing before Him. Books were opened and the dead were judged according to their works, “by the things which were written in the books.” Another book was opened, “which is the Book of Life.” Anyone not found “written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Could God have been any clearer about His intent to judge the dead and to “cast” those not found written in the Book of Life “into the lake of fire”? Well, maybe not. So-called “Christian Universalists” believe God has something else in mind for that lake of fire.

The author of *The Hell Test* and other universalists refer to Charles Pridgeon’s book “Is Hell Eternal? Or Will God’s Plan Fail?” as authoritative in addressing the doctrine of Christian Universalism. Here’s what Pridgeon wrote about the “lake of fire.”

“The Lake of Fire and Brimstone signifies a fire burning with brimstone; the word “brimstone” or sulfur defines the character of the fire. The word theion translated “brimstone” is exactly the same word theion which means “divine.” Sulfur was sacred to the deity among the ancient Greeks; and was used to fumigate, to purify, and to cleanse and to consecrate to the deity; for this purpose they burned it in their incense. In Homer’s Iliad

(16:228) one is spoken of as purifying a goblet with fire and brimstone. The verb derived from theion is theioo, which means to hallow, to make divine, or to dedicate to a god. (See Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon, 1897 Edition.) To any Greek, or to any trained in the Greek language, a “lake of fire and brimstone” would mean a “lake of divine purification.” The idea of judgment need not be excluded (see Chapter on The Judgments of God). Divine purification and divine consecration are the plain meaning in ancient Greek. In the ordinary explanation, this fundamental meaning of the word is entirely left out, and nothing but eternal torment is associated with it.” Is Hell Eternal? Or Will God’s Plan Fail?, Chapter 11, Pittsburgh Bible Institute, 1920

John the Apostle wrote in Revelation 20:14 that “Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire” and that it was the “second death.” The Greek in Revelation 20:15 is - και ει τις ουχ ευρεθη εν τη βιβλω της ζωης γεγραμμενος εβληθη εις την λιμνην του πυρος. The words for “lake of fire” are the same in both 20:14 and 20:15 (*limene tou puros*). The word “brimstone” does not appear in Revelation 20:14 or 15.

The word *limene* (lake) was also used in Luke’s Gospel for Lake Galilee (Luke 5:2; 8:22, 23, 33), also called Lake Gennesarret (Luke 5:1) and Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:8; Mark 7:31). John also called the Sea of Galilee the “Sea of Tiberias” (John 6:1). The lake was extremely large and held water, fish and other creatures, and plant life.

John used the same Greek word (*limene*) for the lake of “fire.” The word for fire, *puros*, was understood by ancient Greeks for something that was burning hot (e.g. literal fire, high fever). The writers of the New Testament often used the word *puros* in context of God’s judgment.

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Hebrews 10:27 – the “fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” in the context of God’s judgment and vengeance.

1 Corinthians 3:13 – the works of believers on earth ... “each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 – the Lord Jesus returning to earth with His mighty angels ... “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

Matthew 5:22; 13:42, 50; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:43; Luke 3:17 – the Lord Jesus judging the ungodly ... “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth ... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels ... but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.’”

God often used fire in His relationship with humans. He used a smoking oven and burning torch in making a covenant with Abram (Genesis 15:17). God appeared in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush when He revealed His covenant Name to Moses (Exodus 3:2). God destroyed the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire (Genesis 19:24). He descended in fire on Mount Sinai and spoke to the children of Israel (Exodus 19:18; 24:17). God led the Israelites through the desert by a pillar of fire at night (Deuteronomy 1:32-33).

The question before us is whether God's intent with the "lake of fire" is to punish unbelievers forever (without end) or to "fumigate, purify, cleanse and consecrate" unbelievers until they are fully prepared to serve God forever with the saints who were "washed, sanctified, and justified" in the "name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11) Did the ancients understand the words *limene tou puros* to be a lake of "divine purification and divine consecration?" Is that "the plain meaning in ancient Greek?"

First, let's look at what Greek words the writers of the New Testament used for "purification" and "cleansing." One of the words is *hegnikotes* – "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart..." (1 Peter 1:22) Another Greek word is *katharismos* - "And He charged him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.'" (Luke 5:14) The word *hagnismos* is used for a ceremonial purification – "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them." The Greek verbs for "purify" include *hagnizo* (cleanse from defilement) and *katharizo* (make free from admixture).

The Greek word *pur* is not translated as "purification, cleansing, or consecrating" in the English translation of the New Testament. Should it be? Is that the primary meaning of the word? Was that the primary understanding of ancient Greeks?

Universalist Charles Pridgeon's comment – "*To any Greek, or to any trained in the Greek language, a 'lake of fire and brimstone' would mean a 'lake of divine purification'*" - is interesting in light of the many Greek-speaking Christians who believe in a literal, eternal lake of fire. Here is what a Greek man, raised in a Greek family, speaking Greek from childhood and trained in New Testament

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Greek, wrote about *limene tou puros*.

“Of the eternal fire, the place of punishment and abode of demons, and the souls of wicked men in Hades, represented under various images, a fiery furnace ... the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8)” Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament, World Bible Publishers, 1992.

Dr. Zodhiates wrote this about the lake of fire in a commentary about Matthew 25:31-46:

“The contrast between the sheep and the goats continues in the commands given to the two. The King will invite the sheep with the personal “come” (deúte [1205]), the same personal invitation given in Matthew 11:28 to the “burdened and heavy laden.” But He will command the goats to “depart” (poreúesthe, the present imperative of poreúomai [4198], to march publicly; v. 41). This command is a decree; it cannot be disobeyed. The goats will be cast into the lake of fire. The Lord doesn’t ask them to remove themselves; He commands them to leave ... The ultimate destiny of unbelievers will be in an everlasting fire that God has prepared for the devil and his angels. The finality of this judgment is also supported by Revelation 20:14, which says that death (thánatos [2288]) and Hades (hádēs [86]) will be cast into the lake of fire, here defined as the ‘second death.’ Note that unlike the kingdom, the everlasting fire is not described as ‘prepared...from before the foundation of the world’ (Matt. 25:34).” From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers

Dr. Zodhiates is just one example of a Greek trained in the Greek language who believes that the lake of fire is a place of eternal punishment and everlasting fire. There are many other people well trained in Koine Greek who also do not believe that the lake of fire is a place of purification that will eventually lead unbelievers

out of the lake of fire and into the Heaven of God. That is not the clear teaching and meaning of Scripture in the original language of the text.

God's Eternal Plan for Man

"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." Revelation 21:22-27

We saw in the previous chapter that "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15) While that seems to be a statement of finality, there are still two chapters left in The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Maybe it will be there that we discover something missing in the argument of "Christian Universalism;" that God will one day redeem every human being ever born, no matter what they believed or what they did during their lifetime, and welcome them into the eternity of Heaven. Let's see.

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" Revelation 21:1-4

Revelation 21 introduces us to a “new” heaven and earth. Why? Because the first heaven and earth had passed away. After all that this current heaven and earth have been through because of the sin of Satan, Adam and Adam’s race, God puts away the old and introduces the new. Then Jesus said these words to John:

“Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’ And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.’ Revelation 21:5-8

Jesus again puts limits on who will be part of the “new” thing He does in Heaven. Jesus said He would give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts and the person who overcomes “shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.” That sounds great, but does it include everyone who has ever lived as the universalists would have us believe? Jesus said, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” There is a group of people, an apparently large group of people, that will not spend eternity in Heaven, but will instead “have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

It’s important to note that Revelation 21 is still in the visional context of the new Heaven and earth and the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. It is at this point that

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Jesus tells John about the kinds of people who will have their part in the lake of fire.

Immediately after Jesus spoke these words to John, one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to John and talked with him, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." The angel carried John away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed him the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God.

After measuring and describing the beauty and majesty of the New Jerusalem, John wrote that he saw no temple in the city because the "Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." John also noted that the New Jerusalem had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it because the "glory of God illuminated it." John said that "The Lamb is its light." John wrote that "the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." Notice the words "who are saved shall walk in its light." The universalists teach that everyone who has ever lived will be among the "saved" in Heaven. If so, then why does John write this? "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." John is quite clear that the only saved people in Heaven are those "who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." That is consistent with the rest of Scripture, as we have seen in our previous studies.

We come now to the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22. If something is going to prove the universalists' belief that everyone will go to Heaven no matter what they believed about God and His Christ during this life, this is their last chance. The final part of the vision concerning future things is the first five verses of Revelation 22:

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

Did you see anything that changed what Jesus said in Revelation 21 or 20 or 19 or any of the chapters that came before? Nothing’s changed. We see God’s servants serving Him and seeing His Face with His Name written on their foreheads. We see them reigning forever and ever.

That’s the end of the vision and nothing in that vision supports the universalists’ claim concerning the ultimate salvation of all souls. In fact, Jesus said to John, “behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last.’ Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.” (Revelation 22:12-15)

Again we see Jesus giving rewards to those who do His commandments. They are the ones who will have the right to the tree of life, to enter through the gates into the city. Will there be any outside of the city who will not be allowed inside? Yes. “But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers

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and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

Let's be fair. There are still six verses left in the Bible. Maybe something said in them will overturn everything we've seen in the Scriptures so far.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.’ And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. ‘For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Revelation 22:16-21

No. Nothing there to overturn everything in the Scripture that says God will punish the wicked with everlasting fire. Nothing. In fact, Jesus says clearly that if anyone adds to what's in the prophecy, God will take away their part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in the Book of Revelation.

What does that say about the future of so-called “Christian universalists?” They have added things to the Revelation of God that aren't there and taken away things from God's Word that are there. What does Jesus Christ say will happen to them? “If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.” Universalists have two

things headed in their direction: (1) the plagues written in the Book of Revelation, and (2) no part in the Book of Life, the Holy City, and the other amazingly wonderful and beautiful things written in the Revelation. Remember, that's what Jesus said. He's the Judge who sets the rules and that's what He says will happen to anyone who adds to or takes away from what is "written in this book."

The universalists are without any ground upon which to stand. They fail miserably in their attempt to prove that God will set aside everything He has said in His Word to save all people in some magical way after their physical death. It's just not there. *The Hell Test* is tested and receives an "F" for final failure in the glaring light of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The spiritual damage universalists have done is difficult to calculate, but it is most certainly great. Angels are keeping records and Jesus Christ will declare His judgment and sentence upon them for what they have done. As for those of us who believe in God's eternal judgment, let us go forward with the knowledge that what we preach and teach is correct and profitable for all who hear and obey.

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