

Objections to the salvation of all answered

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Just as a heads up, this Bible study is an edited excerpt from my (much longer) Bible study titled: *“What the Bible really says about heaven, hell, judgement, death, evil, sin, and salvation”* (and I’d highly recommend reading that one all the way through from beginning to end if you’re able to, in order to get the full picture of what the Bible is talking about when it comes to salvation; but for those who don’t have the time to read that one right now, please do read this Bible study carefully).

Those who have read my Bible study titled *“In Christ shall all be made alive”* (as well as the other foundational Bible studies I mentioned in that one, including *“Things that differ,” “Immortality and the second death,” “What the Hinnom?”*, *“What is death?”*, and *“Heaven isn’t what you think it is”*) are now aware that the Bible teaches the eventual salvation of all humanity (and if you aren’t aware of this fact, please go read those studies now; or, better yet, just read the longer Bible study I mentioned in the first paragraph, because everything from those studies and this study is included in that one, since they’re all edited excerpts of that larger study). And while the scriptural interpretations and arguments for the salvation (and reconciliation) of all humanity made in that study aren’t the only arguments proving the salvation of all (there are *many more*), those should be enough to make it clear that the only way to avoid the conclusion that everyone will eventually experience both salvation and reconciliation is to insert words into Paul’s epistles that aren’t there, to redefine certain words into meaning something other than what the writers meant by them, or even to change (or simply ignore) the order of the words in some verses. But there’s just no justification for doing so, especially when we consider the fact that there’s no basis for believing in never-ending conscious torment in the lake of fire—or even in an afterlife realm—to begin with, as we learned in those various studies. However, I know that there are still a number of common objections to the idea that everyone will eventually experience salvation which you’ve no doubt

heard, or perhaps even raised yourself at some point, as well as a number of so-called “proof texts” in the Bible which you’ve no doubt been taught support the traditional doctrine of never-ending punishment in the lake of fire; and while it should be pretty clear by now to those who have been paying attention to everything we’ve covered in those study that, when you take everything Paul wrote about salvation—as well as the difference between the various types of salvation mentioned in Scripture that we learned exist in the *“Things that differ”* study — into consideration (not to mention the fact that the dead aren’t conscious, and that no humans in the lake of fire remain alive while in there, as we learned in the *“Immortality and the second death,” “What the Hinnom?”*, *“What is death?”* studies), none of these arguments or supposed “proof-texts” can actually support the popular assumptions most of us grew up with when it comes to this topic, we should still take a look at them (beginning with the objections, then moving on to the “proof-texts”).

For example, one common objection is: “If it’s true that everyone will get saved, why is that almost no churches teach this?” Well, while it’s technically a statement connected with Israel’s specific type of salvation, I would suggest that Jesus’ reference to the strait and narrow gate¹ can be seen as a trans-dispensational (or trans-administrational) truth. Because, honestly, there’s no way that a religion with as many followers as the traditional Christian religion has — about a third of the human population of the planet at the time this study was written — can possibly be the “narrow way” that few find, so a better question would be: “If never-ending torment in hell is true, why is it that almost all churches teach it?” (And I’d also suggest that this goes for nearly every other popular, “orthodox” teaching within the Christian religion as well.)

¹ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. — Matthew 7:14

Another extremely common objection is simply that the doctrine of the salvation of all humanity has been declared to be a heresy by certain denominations, thus it can't be true, but this is largely based not only on the assumption that the council which supposedly declared this had the authority to make such a declaration, but also on the assumption that it actually *did* make such a declaration to begin with, and many people believe it actually didn't make such a declaration at all, but rather condemned something else altogether, and that the idea that the doctrine of the salvation of all was condemned at that time is based on a misunderstanding of what was actually condemned (although I'm not going to get into the details of that debate here because it doesn't matter, since I base my theology entirely on what the Bible says rather than on council meetings of Christian denominations I'm not a part of and that weren't recorded in Scripture). All that said, the actual definition of "heresy" isn't "false teaching" anyway, just as the word "orthodoxy" doesn't mean "truth." In fact, the meaning of the Greek word which is transliterated as "heresies" in the KJV — ἁῖρεσις/"hah'-ee-res-is" — is simply "sects" (or "divisions")² and not "incorrect doctrine" at all, and "orthodox" only means "that which is commonly accepted," and there's always been plenty of commonly accepted error out there. For example, Galileo was technically put on trial as a heretic by the very religious organization that supposedly condemned the doctrine of the salvation of all humanity as a heresy, because he taught that the earth isn't the centre of the universe, but he was still quite correct that it wasn't. Meanwhile, that religious organization considered their view that our planet is the centre of the universe to be the orthodox one, but they were entirely incorrect. And if they could be wrong about *that* official teaching and declaration of heresy, they could be wrong about *any* official doctrine they teach, which really means that everything they consider to be

² For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. — 1 Corinthians 11:19

“orthodox” should be considered suspect. It’s also important to keep in mind that, if you’re an evangelical or some other form of Protestant, the entire existence of your church has been officially declared to be heretical by that very same religious organization. But even if your denomination has also declared the doctrine of the salvation of all humanity to be heretical, the fact that it is true, as already proven from what we’ve covered in this study so far, once again reminds us that just because something is “heretical” doesn’t mean it’s incorrect, and something being “orthodox” doesn’t make it true. In fact, both Jesus and Paul were considered to be heretics by the orthodoxy of their day, so consider yourself in good company when someone calls you a heretic, and keep the words of a wise theologian in mind: “Heretic” is the highest earthly title which can be bestowed at this time.

It’s also often asserted that, “If everyone gets saved, then Jesus died in vain.” This is a very strange, yet also extremely common, claim you’ll hear from many Christians who aren’t thinking things through particularly carefully. But the truth is, if Jesus didn’t die, then *nobody* would get saved. Really, this assertion is no different from saying, “If only a few people get saved, then Jesus died in vain since some people will not suffer without end in hell.” Either way, we (should) all realize it’s what Christ did that saves us, and recognize that this statement is a sign of lazy thinking.

Some Christians will also claim that a sin against an infinite God requires an infinite punishment, because a sin would affect an infinite being more than it would affect a mere human; but aside from the fact that you won’t find that assertion made anywhere in Scripture, which means they have no basis for making it in the first place, Scripture actually appears to say the opposite anyway, in Job 35:5-8 where Elihu (the one friend of Job who wasn’t

condemned by God for his words³) said, *“Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man.”*

Another argument is that we’re putting too much of an emphasis on God’s love, but forgetting His justice and wrath. And while I purposely left out the fact that the Bible says God is love⁴ in my study on the salvation of all, in order to demonstrate that one can prove the salvation of all humanity from Scripture without having to even bring that point up, the truth is that none of us have forgotten about the passages which talk about judgement or justice or God’s wrath. It’s just that we believe an attribute like His justice and wrath can never outweigh His essence, which is love. And if love is His very essence, then in the long run everything He does must ultimately be beneficial for (and work out in the best interests of) all the creation He loves, which means His love can’t ever take a back seat to an attribute like His justice or wrath, but rather His justice will always have to be influenced by His love (which always perseveres and never fails) for all of His creation. And since allowing any of His creation to suffer without end in fire with no hope of escape could not be said to be an expression of His love for said creation (except in the most horrifically twisted

³ And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job. — Job 42:7-9

⁴ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. — 1 John 4:7-8

of religious minds), we know that His justice could not allow this to happen since it would conflict with His love towards all of His creation. And, just as a quick aside, some will try to claim that God might define words such as love differently than we do since “His ways are higher than ours,”⁵ but A) Scripture already defines love for us,⁶ and B) if we aren’t using words in a way that we can actually all understand them, there’s no point in using these words at all in the first place, and we might as well just stop studying Scripture altogether. And really, if “love” can somehow actually include never-ending torture in a fiery “hell” for some of those it’s directed towards, I don’t even want to begin to think about what “heaven” might actually include for those of us who are headed there instead, but to say it might not be pleasant would likely be an understatement. Regardless, this argument by Christians could really be used against *any* Christian, since anyone who is saved (according to their understanding of salvation) is missing out on the same justice that they’re afraid non-Christians might miss out on if the salvation of all humanity is true (unless they believe justice is *actually* served by choosing to believe the right thing rather than by Christ’s death for our sins, but that would mean we provide our own justice), so it’s not really as helpful a point as they might think.

Others will say things along the lines of, “The justice of God demands that the wicked be punished for their sins without end, and if people don’t have to

⁵ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither; but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: — Isaiah 55:8-10

⁶ Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. — 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

choose to receive the gift of Christ's sacrifice in order to experience salvation, then His justice hasn't been satisfied." But no, this isn't true at all. In fact, as we learned in my "*In Christ shall all be made alive*" study, Jesus died in order that the penalty for our sins could be justly set aside, meaning so that everyone can be forgiven, justified, resurrected (if they've died), and even made free from ever being able to die again. And so, if someone insists that salvation *isn't* guaranteed for everyone simply because of what Christ earned for us through His death, and that God's justice *isn't* indeed satisfied if people don't also *choose* to believe that Christ's sacrifice was enough to satisfy God's justice, they're ultimately saying that they themselves really don't believe Christ's sacrifice was enough to satisfy God's justice at all, but rather that an individual's choice to believe a very specific thing is *also* required *on top* of what Christ accomplished in order to satisfy God's justice (even though this would mean that they want us to choose to believe something they themselves think isn't even actually true, somehow making what they believe to be a lie — that what Christ did was enough to satisfy God's justice — become true by choosing to believe it), even though this would make us our own (at least partial) saviours. And if any of them do happen to admit that God's justice *was* satisfied by what Christ accomplished, but then also try to insist that people *still* have to choose to believe it in order to experience salvation anyway, it would mean that their objection isn't actually about God's justice at all, and that they're simply using claims about God's justice as a distraction from the real issue, which is that they want people to at least have to do *something* in order to gain salvation, even if it's just something as seemingly simple as having to choose to believe the right thing. But the truth is, if anyone at all doesn't get saved simply because of what Christ earned — which is the general salvation of anyone who has ever sinned⁷ — then God actually *would* be unjust, because He wouldn't be

⁷ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. — 1 Timothy 1:15

giving His Son what He now deserves. So if anyone ever tries to use the excuse that, “God is love, but He’s also just,” in order to try to object to the idea that everyone will be saved, you can agree with them, and then explain that it’s *because* He’s just that everyone *has* to eventually experience salvation.

Some also argue that teaching the salvation of all humanity undermines evangelism, saying things like, “If the salvation of all is true, it doesn’t matter whether you believe now or not, so why bother to evangelize at all?”, as well as undermines the necessity of believing the Gospel, making similar statements along the lines of, “If the salvation of all is true, it doesn’t matter whether you believe now or not, so why bother to become a Christian?” From one perspective (the most narrow of perspectives), yes, that could be said to technically be true. But from a broader perspective there are still very good reasons to believe now, as well as to evangelize. For one thing, if it is true, isn’t it better to believe (and teach) the truth rather than a lie (especially since the Bible so heavily condemns false teachers who teach lies)? But even beyond that, belief in this doctrine helps bring serious peace of mind that almost no Christians truly have (I interact with people on a regular basis who are Christians yet who are still terrified that they’re going to suffer without end in a place called hell). But on top of all that, there’s another really good reason to believe this, and this is the fact that only those who do believe it get to join the body of Christ (since, if you don’t truly understand what it means that “*Christ died for our sins*,” can it be said that you actually believe it, and if you don’t actually believe it, how can it be said that one has joined the body of Christ?). However, I suppose someone who says this is implying that, if it’s true that everyone gets saved, then there’s less urgency to preach the Gospel, or even for people to become Christians. Whether this is true or not comes down to what one means by evangelism, as well as whether “becoming a Christian” is really all that important in the first place, and, really, what the Gospel about how we’re

saved actually even is. From the perspective of those of us who believe what I've covered in this study, we see the idea of having to become a Christian in order to be saved as religion rather than good news. To put it simply, we see religion as anything which teaches that God will only look kindly upon us if we do the right thing(s) before we die. The good news which Paul primarily taught, on the other hand (that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day), is not a religion at all, but is instead the announcement of the end of religion (it's a proclamation, not a proposition). Religion, to those of us in the body of Christ, consists of all the things (believing, behaving, worshipping, sacrificing, etc.) the religious think they have to choose to do (and then actually do) in order to get right with God, but no action (which would include choosing to believe something specific, and then actually believing it) on our part can ever take away our sins or make us immortal. Thankfully, everything necessary for salvation from sin and death has already been done, once and for all, by God through Christ. And while God calls members of the body of Christ to proclaim Paul's Gospel to those He calls us to proclaim it to, believing it isn't essential to one's ultimate salvation since our ultimate salvation was already guaranteed some 2,000 years ago, and God doesn't intend to bring everyone to a knowledge of the truth in this lifetime anyway (while He's guaranteed salvation for everyone through Christ's actions, He only elects certain people to join the body of Christ — or perhaps to join the Israel of God instead — in this lifetime). So if someone doesn't believe the Gospel, they won't have the peace of mind we have that God in Christ did indeed save all of us already (at least proleptically speaking), and they might also miss out on living through one or two future ages, or at least miss out on "everlasting" life during those two ages, but I'd also suggest that one's concern that they might not become believers if they think the good news I just presented is true is actually less of a concern than one might think because, if they truly believe that they don't have to become Christians simply because of what Christ accomplished, not only

have they already believed the actual Gospel Paul taught (since, if they actually believed they could avoid “converting,” so to speak, because the above is true, then they’ve technically already believed Paul’s Gospel before they even realized it, at least presuming they also understand what death actually is) rather than the “gospel” the Christian religion teaches, but they’re now in the body of Christ as well. So, perhaps that does undermine “evangelism” from a traditional Christian perspective, but not from the scriptural perspective that those of us in the body of Christ come at things from. And, of course, there are also certain rewards to be had in heaven after Christ comes for His body, which is also incentive to evangelize. That said, wanting to share good news is human nature. There’s a reason I wrote this study in the first place, after all (not to mention why I share it so widely and never charge for it), and belief in the salvation of all humanity has never stopped any of us from wanting to let everyone know this good news, or from actually sharing it.

Another variation of that objection is, “If you’re right, then I’ll miss out on some stuff, but I’ll be okay in the end,” and some even add, “However, if I’m right, you’re going to burn in hell for eternity.” It’s interesting how some believe it’s more important to accept a doctrine because it might have a worse possible outcome than accepting its alternative might have, regardless of whether that doctrine is correct or not, but I’m far more interested in truth than I am in worrying about unfounded threats (and if we needed to choose a theology based on it having the worst possible outcome if we don’t believe or follow it, some religions have even worse end results for those who don’t follow them than the traditional version of Christianity does, so this argument doesn’t help their case the way they might think it does). The real truth, however, is that if I’m wrong, I’ve still believed the Gospel (since I still believe there’s nothing I can possibly do to save myself from sin and death, and that only Christ’s death for our sins, along with His subsequent burial and resurrection on the third day,

saved me), so that isn't actually the case at all. And so, if I'm wrong, I've actually only been teaching that God is better than He really is, since I'm claiming He'll actually succeed in accomplishing His will that everyone be saved; whereas if I'm right, those who make this claim have actually spoken terrible blasphemy, basically accusing God of doing horrible things to the creation He supposedly loves by torturing them in fire with no chance of escape (or at least of giving up on the majority of them, letting nearly everyone cease to exist completely, never to enjoy consciousness again, if certain other Christians are correct). This truth is lost on those who are lost, though, thanks to their slavery to the demonic teachings of the modern Christian religion, because if most of humanity *were* to suffer consciously in the lake of fire without end, all this judgement would do is torture the majority of people who ever existed nonstop, which would serve no purpose at all other than to stand as an never-ending reminder that Satan, death, and "hell" won the ultimate victory after all (a Pyrrhic victory though it might be for Satan, a defeat of God in the battle over souls it would remain nonetheless — and the same goes if those who believe that the punishment is simply never-ending annihilation are right instead, by the way; it would mean God still lost to Satan, death, and "the grave" in the struggle for souls), and that God was a failure in ridding creation of sin and evil (simply quarantining sin and evil to a small corner of the universe does nothing to eliminate sin and evil from existence, and the only thing it would really change is to add infinitely more suffering to the universe than it currently has, just in a more compressed area, which would actually be worse than what we have today), ultimately making Him and Jesus A) monsters (only the most horrific of monsters could force, or even allow, someone to be tortured without the possibility of escape; the worst person to ever live could never do anything like that, but many religious Christians want to accuse God of doing something that would make Hitler look like a saint in comparison, since all he was able to accomplish was killing millions of people but even he

couldn't torture anyone without end), and B) the biggest sinners of all for "missing the mark" (which, again, is literally what the word "sin" means) by failing to accomplish their goals. (And don't try to bring up satisfying God's justice as a possible purpose, because we've already determined that Christ's death was all that God's justice required, and for Him to require anyone else to suffer too wouldn't be about justice at all, since His justice was satisfied by Christ's death regardless of whether someone believes it before they die or not.) And honestly, if we're going to worry about a "Pascal's Wager" sort of scenario here, I'd much rather err on the side of accusing God of being too good and too loving and too successful than accusing Him of being the exact opposite.

Some also like to say, "Those who believe everyone will be saved just want an excuse to sin," but if someone truly understands and has believed what I've written in this study then they've already believed the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, and has hence already been saved, so it makes no more sense to say this about us than it does about any traditional Christian who believes they've been saved themselves (especially to a Christian who believes in OSAS, meaning "Once Saved, Always Saved").

On a similar — yet somehow even worse — note, some Christians claim that, "If there isn't a place of never-ending torture in a place called 'hell' for sinners, then there's no point in being good in the first place," and some even go on to assert that, if they believed it was true that everyone will experience salvation in the end, they'd be out there robbing and raping and murdering people. (Seriously, I've had multiple Christians say this to me.) I have to hope they're just using hyperbole there, although if they're being serious, and the threat of never-ending torment in a place called "hell" is the only thing keeping them

civilized, then perhaps it is a good thing that they don't believe the truth about this topic, because that's a seriously disturbing admission about who they really are and what they wish they could be doing. But regardless of their sincerity in making these statements, they really aren't thinking things through. I'll start with the second claim first, which is to point out that very few believers in the salvation of all are out there committing the crimes these Christians are telling us they apparently wish *they* could — and, if they believed the salvation of all was true, supposedly would — indulge in. However, presuming they aren't actually being honest about how their belief in never-ending torment is keeping them from acting out some twisted desire to steal from and hurt others, perhaps the bigger admission that Christians who resort to these sorts of arguments are making is that they don't trust grace at all. This is actually a bigger topic than just how it applies to the topic of the salvation of all, and I don't have the time to really get into all the problems connected with this fact right here, but the bottom line is that most Christians really don't trust grace in the slightest and are always trying to add at least a tiny bit of law to it (just to be safe), even though mortal humans trying to perform religious law *always* leads to more sin, not less⁸ (and not just the Mosaic law, but any religious rules at all, which is what law ultimately is), and so this ends up with the exact *opposite* result of what they're hoping to achieve through their attempt to shoehorn religious rules into salvation. And as far as the first claim goes, for those Christians who *haven't* forgotten that salvation isn't based on "being good" anyway, since our good works can't save us, this statement is about as logical as saying, "If criminals eventually get out of prison, then there's no point in avoiding crime in the first place." Aside from the fact that the threat of life sentences in prison (and even the death penalty, depending on where you live) doesn't deter the criminals who commit major crimes from the actions

⁸ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: — Romans 5:20

that result in these sentences, you don't find most Christians out there living lives of crime (or, if they are, most of them are hiding it pretty well), so we can assume they're just not thinking things through when they say these things (and, just as with the last objection, any Christian who believes in OSAS and makes these claims forgets that they could then be out there committing the horrific crimes they tell me they wish they could be committing, since they're guaranteed to still remain saved regardless, according to their own soteriology, so they aren't being consistent with these assertions at all). Besides, almost no Christian actually believes someone should remain in prison for the rest of their life over a petty crime like shoplifting or jaywalking, so the idea that people should then be tortured without end in "hell" for the same — or even lesser — infractions of the secular law really makes no sense at all (and if someone really believes that sin is actually so serious that it requires someone to be tortured in fire without end, the idea that "the punishment should fit the crime" would be an entirely erroneous idea when it comes to their take on the judicial system as well, since they already believe that every wrong — which includes breaking the secular law, in most cases — *does* deserve a much worse punishment than just a fine or a period of time in prison, even when it comes to extremely minor offences, so they should really be arguing for life sentences, the death penalty, or maybe even torture, for *every* crime, if they wish to be consistent, since they believe that we all deserve far worse consequences than that for committing these actions).

Another very common objection I hear all the time is that Jesus didn't preach the salvation of all humanity, and that if it were true, He would have mentioned it. Well, if you've read the whole study from the beginning up to this point, of course, you already know why this is a bad argument, but I'll elaborate anyway. Simply put, Jesus *couldn't* have preached the salvation of all humanity, and this is for the very same reason there had to be two Gospels. Because His death for

our sins (and subsequent burial and resurrection) is the basis for the salvation of all humanity, had He taught the salvation of all humanity publicly during His earthly ministry, the spiritual powers of darkness would have almost certainly put two-and-two together and realized that Him dying for our sins and God raising Him would be the only possible way that all humanity could be made made immortal (these are highly intelligent beings, after all), and they would have then *avoided* their plan to have Him killed, resulting in nobody being saved at all.⁹

And while there are likely more objections than just these which I could cover here (and if I come across them, I'll try to come back and add them in future revisions), I'll wrap this list up with a classic: "God is a gentleman who won't coerce people into salvation, or force anyone to go to heaven against their will" (some even go so far as to compare the idea Him saving people without them first specifically choosing to be saved to rape; and it's odd how many Christians seem to have this obsession with using sexual assault in their objections to the salvation of all humanity, and so perhaps they're telling us something about themselves there and actually *are* as interested in participating in this crime as many of them who make the last objection we just covered seem to imply). Well, if you've read everything I've written in the studies I mentioned at the beginning of this one, you already know that we believe only members of the body of Christ will end up living in heaven (with everyone else eventually being resurrected to live on the New Earth), so right off the bat that's a straw man argument. But regardless, we don't believe God will force anyone to be saved against their will anyway, but rather that He gives

⁹ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. — 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

people the will¹⁰ to want to be saved in the first place. And since Paul told us that everyone is going to experience salvation in the end, He'll certainly make sure that everyone is willing to enjoy immortality and sinlessness/perfection by the end of the ages. And those who still insist that God just wouldn't force someone to experience salvation without having to specifically choose to experience it, aside from the fact that this isn't an assertion found anywhere in the Bible (this is just an unfounded assumption certain Christians make in order to try to hold on to their preferred soteriological doctrines), most of these people *do* believe that God will instead force people to suffer without end in a place called "hell," even though nobody would actually choose that either. This means that, at the end of the day, it seems as though these Christians don't actually care if God forces people to experience something against their will at all, so long as He doesn't let them enjoy what's to come against the will of the Christians who want people to have to choose to do something specific in order to avoid experiencing suffering instead, the way they think they did.

And with all that being said, let's move on to the so-called "proof texts" that we've all heard used to support the doctrine of never-ending punishment in hell, in order to finally determine what they're actually talking about once and for all.

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. — Matthew 18:8–9

¹⁰ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. — Philippians 2:13

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. — Mark 9:43–48

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. — Revelation 20:7–10

I already discussed these three passages, which are among the most commonly quoted in order to prove the doctrine of never-ending punishment for unbelievers, in my “*What the Hinnom?*” study, which you should have read before reading this one, so I’m not going to bother repeating what I covered in that one (so please go read all the studies I mentioned at the beginning of this one if you haven’t already, because they’re necessary for understanding what I’m writing here).

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered,

every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.
— Daniel 12:1–3

Now, the events of this passage do take place at least partly around the time of the Great White Throne Judgement (at least the negative part of it), but all it says is that some people will be resurrected to shame and “everlasting” contempt (this also means that nobody is dead in this passage, at least at first, since they’ve just been resurrected, so it can’t be talking about the “hell” one’s soul is figuratively said to be in after they’ve died), and shame and contempt aren’t even remotely close to the same thing as torture in fire. Besides, aside from the fact that “everlasting” has to be meant to be interpreted figuratively rather than literally here anyway, based on everything we’ve already covered about the salvation and reconciliation of all humanity (and those who have read the aforementioned studies also now know that “everlasting” is generally a figurative term in the less literal Bible versions which use words like “everlasting,” “eternal,” and “for ever” to refer to judgements and rewards), as well as what we’ve covered about how the word is generally meant to be read qualitatively rather than quantitatively in the KJV, it’s also only the contempt that is said to be “everlasting,” not the shame (and the contempt is experienced by others rather than by the ones being judged in this passage themselves). This tells us that, when they’re resurrected, many people will feel shame while being judged at the Great White Throne, and then, after they die a second time in the lake of fire, their corpses will be looked upon with “everlasting” contempt by those who see their dead bodies being consumed on the New Earth (this is referring to the contempt, or abhorrence, that those spoken of in Isaiah

66:24 will feel when looking upon the carcasses of those in the lake of fire,¹¹ being translated from the same Hebrew word — דָּרָא/“der-aw-one” — in both verses). But at the end of the ages, when everyone who died a second time has been resurrected (in order for death to be destroyed¹²), this “everlasting” contempt will finally end.

Before moving on, though, this seems like a good time to remind you that not once did the Hebrew Scriptures ever threaten never-ending torture (much less torture in fire), either while dead or after one is resurrected, as a punishment for breaking the Mosaic law (or even for sin in general). At most, they threatened physical death for certain capital crimes. And even if this passage in the book of Daniel had actually said that certain people will be tortured in fire without end while they’re dead (which isn’t what it says at all), or even after they’ve been resurrected, there’d never been a threat of a never-ending conscious punishment before that passage, so there’s no good reason to assume it was suddenly being proclaimed here, centuries after the giving of the Mosaic law, when no Israelite had ever heard of it before, and when the readers of Daniel clearly couldn’t have possibly understood it to mean that prior to Jesus’ statements about “hell” anyway (presuming we ignored the context of those warnings, which we learned from Isaiah and Jeremiah, of course, as covered in my *“What the Hinnom?”* study). You’d think that, at the very least, God’s chosen people would have been given a warning about something as horrific as never-ending torture (in fire, no less), not to mention be told who would be experiencing such a thing or why, or how to avoid it, for that matter, prior to Jesus (or even prior to Daniel) supposedly doing so. The fact is, not

¹¹ And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh. — Isaiah 66:24

¹² The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. — 1 Corinthians 15:26

only was no Israelite ever warned about it (at least not that we see in Scripture, and we need to base our doctrines on what Scripture says), nobody prior to Israel was ever warned about it either, at least that we're told of. Not even Adam and Eve were warned about suffering without end in a fiery place if they sinned, much less anyone who lived from their time to the time Daniel was supposedly warned about it. And even if to "surely die"¹³ (which was obviously a figurative translation in the KJV, as we've already discussed, since Adam didn't physically drop dead the day he sinned) *was* referring to the so-called spiritual death that many Christians mistakenly believe in, there's no hint of being tortured in fire without end in that expression anyway. I say "mistakenly," of course, because "spiritual death" is actually a completely unscriptural and meaningless term (at least outside of the fact that those in the body of Christ died with Christ when He died,¹⁴ but that isn't what Christians mean when they talk about the so-called "spiritual death" of sinners) since, if our spirits *could* die, we'd drop dead ourselves.¹⁵ And if the term is simply a metaphor, then it isn't actually "spiritual death" so much as "metaphorical death"; and if it really is just a metaphor, it can't be a metaphor for being separated from God, as some assume, because "*in Him we live, and move, and have our being*," as Paul explained,¹⁶ so to be separated from God would mean to cease to exist, if that were even possible at all. And it can't be a metaphor for ending up in the lake of fire either, because Adam didn't end up in the lake of fire on the day he ate the fruit. Besides, if Adam *did* only die metaphorically, then we'll also only die metaphorically as well (and Christ would have also only died and risen

¹³ But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. — Genesis 2:17

¹⁴ Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: — Romans 6:8

¹⁵ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. — James 2:26

¹⁶ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. — Acts 17:28

metaphorically too), which we know isn't the case, so there's just no good scriptural basis for interpreting these things the way most Christians have been taught to interpret them, and it should really be clear that this figurative warning in the KJV should be interpreted as meaning Adam would gain mortality leading to eventual physical death, as we learned from those other studies. (That's not to say death *isn't* ever used as a metaphor in Scripture, but passages like Ephesians 2:1¹⁷ which seem to do so — at least depending on your translation, since not all Bible versions translate it in such a manner — have to be interpreted carefully so as to not to descend into absurdity; and regardless, they simply can't be saying that people are literally "spiritually dead," for the reasons we just covered, especially the KJV translation of Ephesians 2:1 which also says we've been quickened, despite the fact that we *haven't* literally been quickened¹⁸ yet (sometimes also referred to as being vivified, depending on your Bible translation, which refers to having our mortal bodies be made immortal¹⁹ as happened to Jesus after His resurrection,²⁰ being "*made alive*"²¹ beyond the reach of death,²² which means being incapable of dying,²³ as well as

¹⁷ And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; — Ephesians 2:1

¹⁸ I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; — 1 Timothy 6:13

¹⁹ But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. — Romans 8:11

²⁰ For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: — 1 Peter 3:18

²¹ For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. — 1 Corinthians 15:22

²² So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? — 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

²³ Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. — Hebrews 7:16

never being subject to the corruption²⁴ and the humiliation of mortality ever again²⁵), since we're still mortal.

Besides, as I already mentioned, the passage in Daniel is talking about a physical resurrection on earth anyway. It wasn't referring to a spiritual existence in an afterlife realm while dead at all. The negative part of this passage is referring to those resurrected to life at the Great White Throne Judgement before they're either sent off to their second death — when they're tossed into the lake of fire to die a second time for a while — or to their time paying off “the uttermost farthing”²⁶ on the New Earth (which is a whole other topic that most Christians aren't familiar with at all, and which has nothing to do with “earning salvation,” as some think would be the case if it means what we believe it means, because nobody gets saved by paying off their debt since that doesn't gain anyone any of the types of salvation we've already covered in the other Bible studies I mentioned at the beginning), so it seems safe to say that this isn't actually talking about what most people have read into it, and that we should move on to the next passage.

Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. — Isaiah 14:9–11

²⁴ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. — 1 Corinthians 15:53

²⁵ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. — Philippians 3:21

²⁶ Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. — Matthew 5:26

The word “hell” in this passage is obviously not referring to the inescapable place of conscious torment that most Christians believe in, since, as we just discussed, nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures had ever threatened never-ending torture (much less torture in fire), so there’s no way anyone who read it when it was written could have possibly interpreted it that way. Instead, it should be pretty obvious that the English word “hell” here is being used as metonymy for “grave” (at least in Bible versions that use the word “hell” in this passage; many use “sheol” instead, since it’s translated from the Hebrew שְׁאֹל/“sheh-ole”), as the inclusion of the word “grave” in verse 11, not to mention the references to worms — which are creatures that consume corpses — should also make pretty clear. This passage was simply using the figure of speech known as personification (something done multiple times in Scripture,²⁷ including in this

²⁷ Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together — Psalm 98:8

very book by the same prophet²⁸) to taunt the king of Babylon²⁹ (no, the reference to “Lucifer” in that passage in the KJV isn’t talking about Satan, as most Christians have mistakenly assumed it is because they haven’t read the whole chapter particularly carefully), pointing out that even someone as proud and powerful as him ends up in the same place that nearly everyone else ends up in (the grave). And since we already know that the dead are unconscious, the reference to the other dead kings speaking to him is just more figurative language, letting this very human king know that he’d end up in the same place as them (unless you believe these dead kings are sitting on literal thrones and

²⁸ For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. — Isaiah 55:12

²⁹ that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the LORD of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the LORD. — Isaiah 14:4-22

ruling over an afterlife realm, but I'm trusting that you can see just how figurative this whole passage is).

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. — Matthew 5:29–30

This is just an earlier telling of the same warning Jesus gave in Matthew 18 that we covered in the “*What the Hinnom?*” study. The reason I didn’t include it along with that passage is because this one doesn’t refer to the duration of one’s time spent in hell (or, more accurately put, the duration of the *existence* of this particular “hell” — which is the Valley of Hinnom, being translated from the Greek word γέεννα /“gheh'-en-nah” — since the other passage technically didn’t mention the duration of one’s time spent there either), but everything I already said about that passage applies to this one too, so there isn’t really much to add to those comments here, although perhaps I should point out that Jesus said “*thy whole body*” could be cast into this particular “hell,” so His warning can only be referring to something that happens to physical bodies in a geographic location here on earth rather than to ghosts in an afterlife dimension, which lines up perfectly with what we’ve already learned from that prophecy about carcasses in the book of Isaiah and from that prophecy about the Valley of the Son of Hinnom in the book of Jeremiah that Jesus was referencing with this warning.³⁰

³⁰ Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place. — Jeremiah 7:32

Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. — Matthew 5:21–22

Jesus said this shortly before the last passage we just looked at, but you'll notice that he didn't say anything about being conscious in hell, or being there without end, so the same comments apply to this warning as well.

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. — Matthew 18:6

This passage doesn't actually mention any version of hell by name, but it precedes one of Jesus' suggestions that people amputate body parts in order to avoid the hell known as the Valley of Hinnom, so I wanted to mention it because these verses all seem to suggest that if people either kill themselves (or allow themselves to be killed) after committing a certain type of sin, or mutilate their bodies in order to avoid committing certain types of sins, they can avoid being punished in hell, which really doesn't seem to fit with the traditional Christian doctrine of salvation, at least not that of most evangelicals and other Protestants. And if they aren't taking the methods of avoiding being punished in hell in these passages literally (or at least interpreting the methods figuratively to mean that one must do whatever they can to avoid sinning in order to avoid hell, which also doesn't fit with the popular doctrine, because most Protestants don't believe we can avoid hell by avoiding sinning, considering the fact that by the time anyone had heard or read these warnings they'd already have sinned at least once in their life, guaranteeing them a one-

way trip to their version of “hell,” if they were right, and so these warnings would have come far too late to be useful to anyone if most Protestants are correct), they can’t really use these passages to defend their assumptions if they want to remain consistent.

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. — Matthew 12:31–32

Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation. — Mark 3:28–29

And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. — Luke 12:10

These are parallel passages that are all talking about the same thing: the so-called “unforgivable sin.” The first thing to note is that none of these passages mention either hell or the lake of fire, so any assertion that not being forgiven for this sin means ending up in the lake of fire is simply an assumption one is reading into these passages based on their presuppositions rather than based on what Scripture actually says. It’s also important to note that the passage in Matthew tells us how long the figurative “never,” as mentioned in Mark’s account, will actually last, which is this “world” and the “world” to come. This is another case of the word “world” being used as a synonym for “age” in the KJV, as discussed in the previously mentioned studies, and there are at least two

“ages” or “worlds” to come still, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:7³¹ (note the plural “ages” in this verse). This means that, while someone who is guilty of this sin won’t be forgiven in this world/age, or even the next world/age, they could theoretically be forgiven during the world/age after that (which, as those who are familiar with the Doctrine of the Ages believe, will be the final world/age on the New Earth, prior to the time Christ destroys death), not to mention after the final world/age has concluded (as all ages will have to do, based on the definition of the word “age”).

Not only that, none of those parallel passages actually mention what the sentence or punishment actually is. You see, “damnation” only means “condemnation,” and is simply the verdict, not the sentence; time spent in the lake of fire is not implicitly meant by the word “damnation” — all it means is “a verdict of guilty” — and since neither hell nor the lake of fire are mentioned in any of these passages, to read punishment in the lake of fire into those passages without a good reason to do so is simply eisegesis. But even if we did eisegete the lake of fire into these passages, we already know that there’s no basis for believing any human is conscious in the lake of fire, much less that they’ll remain there without end, anyway, so that doesn’t help the traditional interpretation either. Besides all that, though, even if “*hath never forgiveness*” was meant to be taken literally and meant they wouldn’t eventually be forgiven, people don’t necessarily need forgiveness (although the passage in Matthew tells us that this is almost certainly a figurative translation in the KJV, since it explains how long “never” actually lasts here, as we’ve already covered). That might sound like a strange statement, but there are two factors to consider here. The first is simply that someone who is condemned doesn’t require forgiveness in order for a punishment to end, because even today when

³¹ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. — Ephesians 2:7

someone is sentenced to a certain number of years in prison, they still leave the prison once they've served their time, even if they are never forgiven or pardoned (and to assume that the sentence of those who commit the so-called “unforgivable sin” is without end is also nothing more than eisegesis, especially since we already know it only lasts until the end of the next world/age, and that there's a world/age to come after that one ends). But the second thing to consider is that there's actually something even better than forgiveness, and that's justification. Forgiveness implies guilt, and just means that the forgiver is overlooking the guilt of the one being forgiven by not implementing a penalty for their crime (and said forgiveness can be revoked as well³²), whereas justification means “not guilty” to begin with, or “declared to be righteous” (it's sometimes well explained as, “just as if I'd never sinned at all”; and it's important to note that justification can't be revoked the way forgiveness can be — at least not the sort of justification Paul wrote about, anyway — and there's no reason to believe that a “not guilty” verdict by God could suddenly become a “guilty” verdict), so even if somebody does miss out on forgiveness entirely,

³² Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. — Matthew 18:21-35

justification is far superior to it anyway, and that passage doesn't even hint at the idea that they won't eventually be declared justified (which it seems they eventually will be, based on everything we went over from Paul's epistles).

But if the actual sentence for the damnation isn't specifically spelled out in those passages, what is the punishment for the condemnation that these passages are referring to? Well, there were various reasons one might end up experiencing this sentence, but as we learned in my *"Things that differ"* study, there was basically only one ultimate punishment that Jesus ever threatened His Jewish audience with: missing out on getting to live in Israel when the kingdom begins in earnest there (regardless of whether the cause of missing out on life in the kingdom is because one is dead at the time — either in the lake of fire or otherwise — or because one has been exiled from the kingdom at the time, missing out on living in Israel during that thousand-year period was basically the bottom line when it came to the punishments Jesus spoke about). But as big and bad a threat as that was for Jesus' audience (and it was a pretty major threat for them), missing out on getting to enjoy life in Israel for that thousand-year period wasn't the end. Jesus said that *"the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"*³³ to the chief priests and the elders of the people,³⁴ but that doesn't mean the chief priests and elders won't ever go into the kingdom of God. In fact, they indeed will, just not until a point in time *after* the first group has already done so (He said "before you," not

³³ Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. — Matthew 21:31-32

³⁴ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? — Matthew 21:23

“instead of you”), and since both groups are currently dead, with the first group not even having enjoyed life in the thousand-year kingdom yet, the only time and place left for the second group to possibly enter the kingdom will be on the New Earth, after the Great White Throne Judgement has ended (since they won’t be resurrected until after the thousand years are over³⁵), which proves that people who miss out on the salvation Jesus spoke about can still make it to the New Earth. Please note that I’m not saying they’ll have been forgiven at this point, though. In fact, I’m willing to concede that they probably won’t have been forgiven at that time, and they certainly won’t have been saved at that point (at least not when it comes to the sort of salvation Jesus primarily spoke about, since they’ll have been dead during the thousand years, or at least for most of that period of time; and they won’t be made immortal at that time, so they won’t experience the salvation Paul taught about at that time either). But that’s okay because, as we’ve already covered, one doesn’t need to be forgiven once they’ve paid the penalty for a crime, and the penalty for this particular crime was simply to miss out on life in Israel for the thousand years that the kingdom of heaven will exist there, at least based on every other judgement passage that quotes Jesus talking about Israelites missing out on salvation (simply put, forgiveness is only necessary for getting to live in the kingdom of heaven during the thousand-year period of time it exists on this planet, or for getting to live in heaven itself during the same time period, although the forgiveness that the Israel of God experiences is conditional, whereas the “forgiveness” that those of us in the body of Christ experience was given to us by God without us having to do a single thing to enjoy it,³⁶ simply because He chose to bless us more than anyone else, and the word

³⁵ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. — Revelation 20:5

³⁶ And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. — Ephesians 4:32

“forgiveness” when it comes to us is mostly just referring to being dealt with graciously by God, but that’s a much bigger discussion than I have the room to get into here, although it really should be pretty evident based on everything else I’ve covered about our salvation in this study).

To reiterate all that, there are people who will get to enjoy the kingdom of God when it begins on earth shortly after Jesus’ Second Coming, in the next world/age (this would include the tax collectors and prostitutes Jesus spoke of, among others). But after the Great White Throne Judgement, during the final world/age (which will be the world/age *after* “the world to come”), the kingdom will be located (at least to begin with) in the massive city³⁷ known as the New Jerusalem,³⁸ and it’s during this world/age that people such as the chief priests and elders, as well as those who are said to “*hath never forgiveness*,” will get a chance to enter the kingdom (which refers to getting to enter the New Jerusalem; it isn’t a reference to simply living on the New Earth, since there will be plenty of people living on the New Earth who aren’t living in the New Jerusalem). Not everyone will get to do so until they’ve paid off “the uttermost farthing,” however (which I personally suspect means, at least in part, paying the people they wronged in this lifetime back in some way while on the New Earth). But when they have, they’ll also get to enjoy life in the kingdom of God (even if they missed out on the salvation Jesus spoke about, since they didn’t

³⁷ And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. — Revelation 21:16-17

³⁸ And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. — Revelation 21:2-4

get to live in Israel when Jesus first returned). This doesn't mean the salvation *we're* concerned with is through works, though, because this has nothing to do with the salvation Paul wrote about at all. Nobody who goes to live in the New Jerusalem after paying off their debt on the New Earth will be made immortal at that time, which is what the salvation Paul wrote about was largely referring to (although they'll remain alive, thanks to the fruit and leaves of the tree of life, but it seems they'll need to continue consuming the tree's products regularly in order to remain healthy and alive — presumably on a monthly basis, based on Revelation 22:2³⁹ — and so while they won't technically be mortals at this time, since the tree's produce will protect them from death by aging or illness, they'll be in that state I discussed in those other studies referred to as being “semi-mortal” rather than being truly immortal, since true immortality refers to being incapable of dying, which means they wouldn't need the produce of the tree of life to remain alive, and hence this isn't the salvation Paul wrote about).

The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?
— *Isaiah 33:14*

I'm sure it should go without saying, by this point, that the “devouring fire” and “everlasting burnings” can't be referring to any version of “hell.” For one thing, as we've already covered, nobody who heard or read this warning at the time it was given could have possibly interpreted it as referring to any version of “hell,” since no location referred to as “hell” in any English version of the Bible had ever been described that way in Scripture yet, and this verse doesn't mention

³⁹ In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. — Revelation 22:2

“hell” either, so there’s no way anyone could have made a connection between this particular “fire” and any version of “hell” back then (and there’s nothing in the verse that even hints at an afterlife, so there’s no way it could have been interpreted as referring to an afterlife punishment either). So what was this talking about? Well, the first thing to note is that it’s a reference to specific sinners in a specific location — Zion — telling us that this is a judgement specifically meant for Israel, and the fire is simply a figure of speech for certain judgements of God against Israel. Why does God use fire as a symbol of judgement? Because the judgement comes directly from Him, and God Himself⁴⁰ is referred to as a consuming fire⁴¹ (and I hope you don’t believe that God is hell, or the lake of fire, Himself, which He can’t be since we already know that the lake of fire will be located in a valley in Israel). The Hebrew Scriptures⁴² are full of examples⁴³ of this symbolism being used⁴⁴ to refer

⁴⁰ For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. — Deuteronomy 4:24

⁴¹ For our God is a consuming fire. — Hebrews 12:29

⁴² Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. — Psalm 50:3

⁴³ Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. — Isaiah 29:6

⁴⁴ He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about. — Lamentations 2:3

to judgements of Israel,⁴⁵ so to assume this one verse is a reference to the lake of fire is just reading one's preconceived doctrinal bias into the text. But the question does remain, who among Israel shall be able to dwell in the "fire" when God judges Israel? Well, the answer to that question is given in the very next verse (Isaiah 33:15): *"He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil."* Those Israelites who walk righteously will be able to dwell among the fiery judgements themselves without being devoured, yet we know the righteous won't be cast into the lake of fire (only certain unrighteousness people are said to end up

⁴⁵ And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD. — Ezekiel 22:17-31

there⁴⁶), so it should go without saying that this verse was never talking about the lake of fire to begin with. This also serves as a good reminder when reading the rest of the Bible that just because you see the word “fire” in a passage — even if it’s a passage about judgement — doesn’t mean it’s necessarily referring to the lake of fire, but rather that it might simply refer figuratively to someone being judged in some way *without* ending up in the version of “hell” known as the lake of fire (especially if you don’t specifically see the words “hell” or “the lake of fire” in the passage in question).

In addition, it’s also important to remember that, when we see a passage about judgement, that being judged doesn’t imply that someone will be punished without end anyway (or even that they’ll be punished at all). First of all, judgement can be a good thing⁴⁷ (the judgement of the body of Christ at the judgement seat of Christ should make clear as well). But second of all, many of the punishments based on negative judgements throughout the Bible eventually ended (or were promised to be reversed in the future⁴⁸), so we’d have no basis for simply assuming that doesn’t apply to the judgement referred to in this verse either, even if we didn’t already know what Paul wrote about the salvation of all humanity.

⁴⁶ But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. — Revelation 21:8

⁴⁷ With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. — Isaiah 26:9

⁴⁸ When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them: that thou mayest bear thine own shame, and mayest be confounded in all that thou hast done, in that thou art a comfort unto them. When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate. — Ezekiel 16:53-55

For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever. — Isaiah 34:8-10

This is, of course, typical figurative, prophetic language, just like in the last passage we looked at (which was in the chapter immediately before this one), and aside from the fact that neither “hell” nor the lake of fire are mentioned anywhere in this chapter either, the reference to the dust becoming “brimstone” and the land becoming “burning pitch” which “shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof” which “shall go up for ever,” not to mention the part of the passage saying, “from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever,” isn’t even talking about people burning at all, but rather is talking about land. This passage is basically a prophecy about the judgement awaiting the land the nations live in during the Day of the Lord’s Vengeance, as the passage says, which is referring to the Tribulation. And since we know that the rest of the world which isn’t Israel isn’t going to be a desolate, burning wasteland for the entire 1,000 years that the kingdom of heaven exists in Israel (because we already know people will be living out there in the “outer darkness” during that time period, or else nobody would exist to rise up against Israel at the end of the thousand years one last time, as Revelation tells us will happen⁴⁹), not to mention the fact that this entire planet is going to be destroyed after the thousand-year kingdom of heaven in Israel ends and will be replaced with a New Earth, we know that this isn’t meant to be taken any more

⁴⁹ And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. — Revelation 20:7-9

literally than the “*everlasting burnings*” in chapter 33 are meant to be, since the smoke which is going to “*go up for ever*” would have to eventually stop rising, if it were literal smoke, because there won’t be any land left to burn after this earth is destroyed and replaced with by the New Earth, and that the “*for ever and ever*” of this entire judgement takes place for no longer than 1,000 years, give or take. This is all just telling us that the land the nations live in will be judged harshly, but we know that the “*burning*” language in this prophecy is purely figurative based on what else we know about the state of the rest of the world⁵⁰ during the thousand year period of time that the kingdom of heaven will exist in Israel.⁵¹ But either way, there isn't anything in this passage which even implies that any humans will suffer without end.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.
— Matthew 13:24–30

⁵⁰ From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. — Zephaniah 3:10

⁵¹ In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. — Isaiah 19:23-25

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. — Matthew 13:47–50

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of

these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. — Matthew 25:31–46

I'm covering all three of these passages together because I believe they're talking about similar judgements which occur around the same time. And since pretty much every Christian I've ever spoken with believes these are either similar judgements which take place around the same time, or are referring to the exact same judgement, it seems safe to do so (although, if you believe these are actually referring to separate judgements that don't take place around the same time, I'd be curious to learn how you interpret these passages).

If someone reads those passages over without taking the time to break them down, and ignores the fact that no version of "hell," nor the lake of fire, is mentioned by name anywhere in any of these parabolic prophecies, it's sort of easy to see why someone might assume they're talking about true believers going to heaven and non-believers ending up trapped in hell. But whatever the cause of the outcome mentioned in these passages is, I hope it's obvious by now to anyone who has made it this far into the study that Jesus' main point here had to be about getting to enjoy life in the kingdom of heaven on earth vs not getting to do so, just as pretty much *all* of His judgement teachings were about. As I mentioned in my *"Things that differ"* study, at the end of His explanation of the first parable, Jesus says the angels *"shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth,"* and we now know from the various studies you should have read before this one that the kingdom of heaven is going to be here on earth, not in an afterlife realm, which means the identity of the "righteous/just/sheep" and the "wicked/them which do iniquity/goats" likely isn't what most Christians have assumed either. Of course, most Christians assume that the sheep, or the righteous, represent true believers,

and that the goats, or the wicked, are everyone else, and while neither hell nor the lake of fire are actually mentioned by name in any of these passages, if people are being judged and going into fire for eternity, as the passages seem to imply when one doesn't consider the context and recognize the figurative language (or understand that everyone will eventually experience salvation, per Paul's epistles), most also assume that it must be talking about the Great White Throne Judgement and the lake of fire. Of course, as most Christians are aware, but seem to forget when they read these passages for some reason, there won't be any true believers being judged at that particular judgement (those in the body of Christ will have already been "judged," so to speak, over 1,000 years earlier, at the Judgement Seat of Christ, and will have been living in the heavens for all that time, while those in the Israel of God will have been living on, and reigning over, the earth that they inherited for the thousand years before this occurs,⁵² and there's no reason to think that either group would be judged after that period of time ends, especially since most of them will have been made immortal at this time, and immortality for humans is always connected with salvation in Scripture; besides, believers within the body of Christ will likely *participate* in judging those at the Great White Throne Judgement⁵³ — Christ is the judge⁵⁴ at that judgement, and it would take a very long time for one person to judge every single human being who ever lived, even if one excludes all those who have already experienced salvation, so it makes sense that the rest of His body will assist Him here — and no, this judgement doesn't take place outside of space and time, but rather takes place in our physical universe after the dead have been physically resurrected into

⁵² Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. — Revelation 20:6

⁵³ Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? — 1 Corinthians 6:2

⁵⁴ For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: — John 5:22

mortal bodies, which should be more obvious than it is to some, considering the fact that it's technically impossible for anyone who isn't God to be outside of space and time anyway, as well as that nothing can occur without space and time, so nobody could experience being judged if they weren't existing within space and time, considering the fact that movement requires one to exist within space and change requires one to exist within time), which means the sheep can't actually represent true believers at all. Not to mention, there's no reference to a resurrection in any of these passages, which would be necessary to occur if these are about a judgement of everyone who has ever lived. Instead, all one needs to do is take a look at the verse in Matthew 25 which says it takes place "*when the Son of man shall come in his glory,*" and look at the context of the rest of the chapter, as well as the chapter before it, which makes it obvious that it's talking about the time immediately after Jesus returns to the earth at His Second Coming, telling us that these passages must be talking about a judgement (or judgements) which takes place on earth shortly after the Great Tribulation ends, rather than the Great White Throne Judgement which takes place a thousand years after Jesus returns.⁵⁵

Of course, if "life eternal" and "everlasting punishment" literally meant that every single human living on earth were going to be judged and sent to afterlife realms called heaven or hell for eternity, as most Christians have always assumed would happen at the time the judgement in these parables takes place, that would cause other obvious problems. For example, it would leave nobody living on the earth for the next thousand years to reproduce, as

⁵⁵ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. — Revelation 20:5

Scripture says will happen in Israel when the kingdom begins there⁵⁶ (as well as on the New Earth,⁵⁷ after the thousand years ends and our current planet is destroyed). As I mentioned in those other studies, the Bible teaches that those who have been made immortal will be like the angels⁵⁸ and will no longer marry or reproduce at that time, and if all the non-believers are going to be sent to the lake of fire to die a second time at that point, with everyone else being given their immortality at that time, that doesn't leave anybody else to fulfill the prophecies about the New Covenant, or even the New Earth, that are supposed to take place after the Tribulation ends. Not only that, it also wouldn't

⁵⁶ Again the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. — Zechariah 8:1-5

⁵⁷ For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. — Isaiah 65:17-20

⁵⁸ For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. — Matthew 22:30

leave⁵⁹ any Gentiles to fulfill⁶⁰ the many prophecies⁶¹ about the nations⁶² during the thousand years,⁶³ not to mention the fact that no Gentiles would be left to rise up against Israel at the end of the thousand years one last time if all the non-believers are cast into the lake of fire at this point.

Hopefully you've also asked yourself why there's nothing in there about the sheep "asking Jesus into their hearts" or "accepting Jesus as their Lord and Saviour" in these passages, if you're still assuming this is talking about the salvation Paul wrote about (not that either of those are actually scriptural ways

⁵⁹ Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you. — Zechariah 8:22-23

⁶⁰ And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. — Zechariah 14:16-19

⁶¹ And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. — Isaiah 2:2-4

⁶² In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. — Isaiah 19:23-25

⁶³ And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. — Revelation 2:26-27

to be saved), or even about them believing that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, and why it seems like the positive outcomes in these parables appears to be dependent upon being just or doing good works rather than being said to be by grace through faith. Most people just brush those concerns aside, of course, because they “know” these passages have to be talking about what they’ve always been taught by their religious leaders that they are, and decide to believe, even though it doesn’t actually say so in the passages, that the reason for the positive outcomes in these passages (especially during the judgement of the sheep and the goats) *has* to be figurative and has to be talking about works as the fruit of faith rather than good works being the actual cause of the sheep’s “life eternal” as that passage says they are when taken literally (and then push the thought that “many non-believers do the very things Jesus seemed to say would result in everlasting life while many believers don’t” to the back of their minds and try to forget that fact as well), because if one were to read it literally it would become obvious pretty quickly that it just *can’t* be talking about what one has always assumed it is at all (although one is then also forced to push the thought that, “if the *cause* of “life eternal” and “everlasting fire” is figurative, then there’s no reason to believe that the actual reward and punishment, or even their durations, aren’t also figurative,” to the back of their mind as well, but most successfully do so). But even if this could all somehow be twisted into meaning the sheep are true believers who will go to heaven, and the goats are non-believers who will go to the lake of fire, we already know from what we’ve previously covered that there’s no basis for believing that any human is going to remain in the lake of fire without end (and that there’s no reason to believe any human is conscious in it either), and we in fact know that everyone who dies a second time will have to be resurrected and quickened in order for death to actually be destroyed, so mangling the passage in such a manner doesn’t actually help defend the traditional doctrine anyway.

But as for what these passages are *actually* talking about, in order to figure this out, one needs to first be aware of certain passages in the Hebrew Scriptures which are the key to understanding the true meaning of being in a furnace, because this isn't talking about the lake of fire at all. Instead, if you look at passages such as Deuteronomy 4:20, which says, "*But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day,*" or Jeremiah 11:4, which says, "*Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God,*" it should be obvious what it's referring to. And those are only two of the many references⁶⁴ in the Hebrew Scriptures to being judged in a figurative furnace,⁶⁵ as well as to being "refined in a

⁶⁴ For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron: — 1 Kings 8:51

⁶⁵ Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD. Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee. Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it. And I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries, and will consume thy filthiness out of thee. And thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself in the sight of the heathen, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you. — Ezekiel 22:8-22

furnace,”⁶⁶ none of which refer to spending time burning in literal fire in an actual furnace made of iron, but are basically talking about time spent in parts of the world that aren’t Israel (no Christian believes the “furnace” part of the parable is literal anyway, and if the “furnace” in the warning isn’t a literal structure with fire burning inside of it, it stands to reason that the “fire” in the figurative “furnace” in this warning isn’t literal fire either, but is simply a symbolic reference to judgement, as we’ve now learned that mentions of “fire” and “burning” very often are in the Bible). And so, what the first two parables are actually saying is that there will be righteous Israelites and unrighteous Israelites when Jesus returns, and some will wail and gnash their teeth (which is a figure of speech used in various parts of the Bible to refer to the extreme negative emotions of the living,⁶⁷ not the dead⁶⁸) because they’ve been forced to live in parts of the world that aren’t the kingdom of heaven/Israel (these parts of the world being referred to parabolically as “the furnace of fire,” also referred to in other passages as the “outer darkness,” which we already learned from the other studies can’t refer to the lake of fire, since *it* will be located in a valley *inside* the kingdom, and since Israel is where the kingdom of heaven will be located when it begins on the earth, those parts of the world far from the light of the King and His kingdom⁶⁹ will be in “outer darkness,” also referred to in Isaiah 34 as a figurative “*burning pitch*” which “*shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof*” going up “*for ever*”), unlike the righteous Jews who *will* get

⁶⁶ Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. — Isaiah 48:10

⁶⁷ The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish. — Psalm 112:10

⁶⁸ All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it. — Lamentations 2:16

⁶⁹ Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. — John 8:12

to live in the kingdom of heaven/Israel at that time (which is where everyone who heard Jesus when He spoke wanted to live when the kingdom fully arrives on earth in the future). It's actually very simple to grasp once you come to understand who Jesus' audience was and what His message was all about, especially when you also take all of Paul's references to the salvation of all humanity in his epistles into consideration. But when you assume He was talking about an afterlife for ghosts in another dimension rather than the life and death which physical bodies on this planet will go through, and think that Jesus was directing His message to everyone rather than specifically to Israelites, it's easy to get extremely confused about *all* of His sayings.

As for the parable of the sheep and the goats, this judgement simply refers to certain Gentiles of the nations (based on Jesus' statement that "*before him shall be gathered all nations*") being cursed⁷⁰ for not being a blessing⁷¹ unto the least of Jesus' brethren during the Tribulation period, which this judgement takes place immediately after (Jesus' "brethren" obviously being a reference to faithful Israelites,⁷² presumably those who will be taken into captivity among the

⁷⁰ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: — Matthew 25:41

⁷¹ Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. — Genesis 12:1-3

⁷² While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. — Matthew 12:46-50

nations during the Tribulation,⁷³ and not simply to random people who are suffering today), by being forced to reside outside the kingdom of heaven, as well as to other Gentiles of the nations *getting to live* in the kingdom in Israel at that time⁷⁴ as a reward for blessing the faithful Israelites who were persecuted during the Tribulation. We know from Zechariah 14:16–21 that there will be Gentiles not living in the kingdom of heaven at this time, consisting of “*every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem*”⁷⁵ at the end of the Tribulation,⁷⁶ meaning the Gentiles who didn’t support Israelites during the Tribulation and hence won’t get to enjoy 1,000 years of “life eternal” in Israel at that time, but who didn’t die at Armageddon since they weren’t a part of the army that gathered against Jerusalem there, so we know from this passage that

⁷³ Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. — Zechariah 14:1-2

⁷⁴ So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD. — Ezekiel 47:21-23

⁷⁵ And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts. — Zechariah 14:16-21

⁷⁶ And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. — Revelation 19:19

the goats definitely won't actually be killed in the lake of fire at this judgement, because if they were, there wouldn't be anyone left to fulfill that prophecy, especially since it appears from those prophecies, as well as from elsewhere in Revelation too,⁷⁷ that every nation will be involved in rising up against Israel at that time. This, of course, also means that the fire prepared for the devil and his angels isn't any more literal than the "furnace of fire" is, but rather that it's simply a figurative reference to the parts of the planet outside the kingdom of heaven where these people are sent to live as their punishment (the parts of the planet that are referred to as a "furnace" for exiled Israelites at that time, or, again, as the land which was referred to as a figurative "*burning pitch*" which "*shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof*" going up "*for ever,*" which makes sense, considering the fact that what we've seen so far tells us that "fire" rarely, if ever, speaks of the "hell" known as the lake of fire when either that specific location isn't also referred to by name in a passage using the word, or the word "hell" itself isn't used in the passage in the KJV), since people living in those parts of the world — or at least their descendants who don't get saved during that time,⁷⁸ one thousand years later — will give in to temptation by Satan to rise up against Israel one last time at the end of the thousand years, having been "*prepared for the devil and his angels*" to tempt them to do so (keeping in mind the "Mountain Peaks" aspect of prophecy discussed in the

⁷⁷ And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. — Revelation 16:12-16

⁷⁸ And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. — Isaiah 49:6

previous studies when reading this passage if it sounds confusing that it could be talking about the distant offspring of those who didn't help Israelites during the Tribulation who are ultimately the ones "*prepared for the devil and his angels*"). This also means that the urban legend many Christians repeat, that "God created hell for the devil, not for humans, but humans sinned so He had to punish them in hell too," is based on a complete misunderstanding of this passage, and actually has no scriptural basis at all, since this passage isn't even talking about hell to begin with.

And don't worry, this interpretation of the judgement of the sheep and the goats isn't teaching salvation by works either. In fact, it isn't technically talking about salvation at all, but is just talking about a reward for blessing Israelites.

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. — 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10

This passage is obviously also talking about Christ's Second Coming (compare the details of verse 7 here to the details mentioned in Matthew 25:31⁷⁹ if there's any doubt in your mind), which means that what I've already written about "fire" in the parables we just looked at applies to this passage as well. Paul was simply pointing out the sort of punishment some of those who will be alive at the time Jesus returns will have to endure, and it's just as figurative as when

⁷⁹ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: — Matthew 25:31

Jesus spoke about it (referring to not getting to live in the kingdom of heaven when it begins on earth, including both *“them that know not God,”* meaning the Gentile “goats” of Matthew 25, as well as them *“that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,”* meaning Israelites who are not a part of the Israel of God). Besides, almost no Christian takes the word “destruction” in this verse literally (since most somehow manage to interpret this word as a figure of speech referring to being tortured in the lake of fire without end), and if *that* word is figurative and not literal, there’s no good reason to believe that the word “everlasting” before it is any more literal than it is.

(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) — Philippians 3:18-19

We know that anyone who experiences “destruction” will still eventually also experience salvation, based on what Paul taught in the rest of his epistles. This means that the “end” which the enemies of the cross of Christ that Paul is condemning here can only be an “end” from a relative perspective, since we know the “end” they’ll experience at the end of the ages will ultimately be salvation.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. — Matthew 10:28

Notice the word “destroy” there, which, just like the word “destruction” in the last couple passages, we have no basis for interpreting figuratively in the manner most Christians do (in the sense that to be “destroyed” somehow figuratively refers to suffering without end in the lake of fire). Even if we didn’t know about all of Paul’s teachings on the eventual salvation of all humanity, I’d

still argue that it would make far more sense to interpret it in a way that lines up with what Jesus was *actually* teaching throughout His earthly ministry: about the kingdom of heaven beginning in Israel in the future, and how to either get to live there when it begins, or end up missing out on it at that time. With that in mind, I'd suggest that this verse is simply saying that Jesus' Jewish audience at the time He gave the warning (along with those Israelites who live through the Tribulation) should not fear men who might kill them for their faith, because God will still resurrect them to live in the kingdom of heaven when it begins on earth if they're martyred. But if they die without that faith, on the other hand, or have rejected Jesus in order to temporarily save their lives, God will *not* resurrect them at that time, and they'll presumably even die a second time in the lake of fire, which means they'd miss out on the greatest desire of their soul (this is what the figurative language of having one's "soul destroyed in hell" means, or at least this is a far more scripturally consistent interpretation of the phrase than what most Christians assume it means, as should be obvious by this point), which for anyone listening to Jesus would have been (or at least should have been⁸⁰) to get to live in that kingdom when it begins in Israel in the future. Like Judas,⁸¹ it would have been far better for them to have died in the womb or in childbirth than to have been born at all, since babies who die in childbirth will at least be resurrected at the Great White Throne Judgement so they can grow up on the New Earth, while Judas will likely end up in the lake of fire when he's resurrected, at least prior to the time Christ destroys death (yes, even Judas will be resurrected and quickened at that time, but he'll have missed out on so much in the meantime).

⁸⁰ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. — Matthew 6:33

⁸¹ The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. — Matthew 26:24

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. — Matthew 10:32–33

This statement almost certainly has to do with who will get to be resurrected to live in Israel when the kingdom begins there vs who won't be, based on the last passage we just looked at (which was stated just moments before this one), and doesn't tell us anything about what happens to anyone *after* the thousand years come to an end, so it doesn't really help support the popular doctrine.

When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever. — Psalm 92:7

Just like the other passages referring to being destroyed that we've looked at, we know that being "*destroyed for ever*" in this verse can't be referring to never-ending torment in hell without reading one's doctrinal bias into the phrase, and we also know from everything we've learned from Paul's epistles about the salvation of all (as covered in those other studies) that nobody remains dead (or even dying) at the end of the ages, so the "for ever" here has to be as figurative as it is in any other passage we've already looked at, and by now it should be clear that this just means they'll miss out on getting to live in the kingdom of heaven, but not that they won't eventually experience salvation at the end of the ages, when the figurative "for ever" comes to an end.

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?
— *Matthew 23:33*

All this verse says is that the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking at the time⁸² will be condemned to hell, although not until after the Great White Throne Judgement, since this particular “hell” hasn’t even begun burning yet (and so, while the prophecies about having one’s corpse consumed in the Valley of Hinnom are referring to dead bodies being destroyed in a literal, geographical location, we do have to take the “Mountain Peaks” of prophecy into consideration with such references as well, because they are sometimes referring to a location on our current planet, and sometimes referring to a location that will exist on the New Earth instead, if not referring to it happening in both locations, depending on the person). It doesn’t say they’ll be in this particular hell without end, though, nor does it say they’ll be conscious while they’re in it (and we know from what we’ve already learned that they won’t be), so this really isn’t a helpful verse for anyone trying to teach never-ending torment in hell.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. — Matthew 7:13–14

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. — Matthew 7:21–23

⁸² But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. — Matthew 23:13

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. — Luke 13:23–30

Of course, there's nothing about hell or the lake of fire in these passages, but they're quoted so often to defend never-ending punishment that I thought I should include them regardless. That said, based on everything we've covered so far, you should really be able to interpret these for yourself by now. But for those who do need an explanation, Jesus is simply talking about certain people who won't be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven after He returns, because they've continued to live particularly sinful lives (this also makes it clear that this isn't a warning for members of the body of Christ, because there is *no* condemnation for us,⁸³ and nothing can separate us from the love of God,⁸⁴ not even sin, since where sin abounds, grace much more abounds⁸⁵). He

⁸³ There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. — Romans 8:1

⁸⁴ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 8:38-39

⁸⁵ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: — Romans 5:20

obviously isn't talking about ghosts not being allowed to live in an ethereal afterlife realm called heaven when they die, based on everything we've already covered, and He likely isn't even talking about unbelievers (I'd think that anyone who can do the things in His name that the people He was condemning were able to do are probably believers, but it wasn't lack of belief He condemned them for anyway; rather, it was for their iniquity). Jesus' statement that many *"shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God"* in the passage in Luke also confirms that this all takes place on earth. So, in answer to the disciple's question, yes, there are relatively few that will be saved, at least when it comes to the sort of salvation Jesus preached about during His earthly ministry. This doesn't mean they can't later experience the sort of salvation Paul taught about, though, because it's an entirely different sort of salvation, as I've already explained in my *"Things that differ"* study.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. — John 14:6

Like the last passage, this one doesn't mention hell or the lake of fire either, but I thought I should quickly cover it as well. Aside from the fact that Jesus was talking to Jews in this verse, which tells us that it's technically about the sort of salvation Israelites were looking forward to (which, again, involves getting to live in Israel after He returns, not "going to heaven" as ghosts after one dies), if anybody comes to the Father *after* the thousand years are finished, as Paul promised everyone eventually will, it would still be "by" (or "through," meaning "because of") Christ.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. — Acts 4:12

Once again, there's nothing about "hell" or the lake of fire in this verse, and this statement was made by Peter to the religious leaders of Israel, so we already know it can only refer to the sort of salvation that pertains to Israelites (getting to live in the kingdom in Israel after Jesus returns, in other words), and has nothing at all to do with the sort of salvation Paul later taught about to the nations.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. — John 3:16

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. — John 3:36

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. — 1 John 5:12

Every single Christian out there already interprets basically every part of these passages extremely figuratively, reading "going to heaven" into the word "life," and "suffering without end in hell" into the word "perish," for example. Based on everything I've written above, though, it should really be quite clear by now to anyone who has been paying attention that these verses are simply saying that those Israelites who don't "believe on the Son" won't get to enjoy life in Israel after Jesus returns (and while it's too big of a tangent to dig into the details of it right now, references to "the world" in the writings of John that aren't talking about specific ages are generally, if not always, referring to "the world" of Israelites, not the whole planet or every human to ever live). And what does it mean for an Israelite to believe on the Son? Well, it simply means to believe that Jesus is Israel's Messiah (or Christ) and the Son of God, as John

also wrote in John 20:31⁸⁶ (and I trust you noticed the lack of having to believe that “*Christ died **for our sins***” in that verse which tells John’s Jewish readers *exactly* what they have to believe in order to have “*life through his name*,” and have figured out that this is because that particular belief wasn’t necessary to experience the sort of salvation Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry, realizing that John certainly *would* have included it in that list of things they have to believe in order to experience the sort of salvation John was writing about if it actually *was* a necessary thing for his readers to believe in order to experience the sort of salvation he was writing about, since it wouldn’t make sense for him to leave out such a crucial detail of what his readers needed to believe to have life if that was the main reason he wrote the book, as he claimed it was in that verse, especially since he wrote it *after* Jesus’ death and resurrection).

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. — John 3:1–7

Modern-day evangelicals are obsessed with this passage, insisting that everyone has to choose to be “born again” if they want to experience salvation.

⁸⁶ But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. — John 20:31

Unfortunately, just like Nicodemus, they have absolutely no idea what Jesus meant by the term.⁸⁷ To get the obvious out of the way first, nobody can choose to be born a first time, and this second birth is no different⁸⁸ since it happens to those who “*received him [Jesus]*” and were “*given power to become the sons of God*” not “*of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,*”⁸⁹ so it’s obviously not something any individual can choose to experience out of the strength of their own will power, but is instead something that is ultimately decided for them by God (once again demonstrating that receiving something isn’t necessarily based on a choice we make ourselves).

But equally important to know, unless you’re an Israelite, you can’t be “born” a second time, because you haven’t been “born” a first time, at least not when it comes to the sort of “birth” that Jesus was talking about there. Remember, Jesus wasn’t talking about the same sort of salvation Paul primarily wrote about (in fact, throughout Paul’s epistles, he never even once spoke about a new birth; instead, he taught about a whole new creation altogether—or “*a new creature,*” as the KJV puts it⁹⁰—which is even better than being “born” a second time), but was referring to getting to live in the part of the kingdom of God that will exist for 1,000 years in Israel, so from that fact alone it should be obvious that this statement is only relevant to Israelites and not to Gentiles. But to make this even more clear, Jesus’ question (“*Art thou a master of Israel, and*

⁸⁷ Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? — John 3:9-10

⁸⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. — John 3:8

⁸⁹ He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. — John 1:11-13

⁹⁰ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. — 2 Corinthians 5:17

knowest not these things?") in response to Nicodemus thinking that any of this was about biological childbirth tells us that this Pharisee should have already known exactly what Jesus was talking about based on the Scripture available to him at the time. This tells us that we have to look to the Hebrew Scriptures to determine exactly what Jesus meant (and we know there's nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures about "asking Jesus into your heart," as most evangelicals explain being "born again" as meaning when they share their "gospel," or really anything else they use to try to explain the meaning of being "born again" either, for that matter).

So what was it in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus was referring to here? Well, Jesus was talking about a nation that was figuratively said to have been "born" a first time by Moses in Exodus 4:22 when he said, "*Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn*"⁹¹ (along with similar statements he made in Numbers 11:12⁹² and in Deuteronomy 32:18⁹³). That would be the first "birth" of those whom Jesus was referring to in this passage, telling us that it only applies to the nation of Israel. As for the second birth, this also has to be something spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures if Nicodemus should have known this already as "*a master of Israel*," so we have to look to passages that refer to Israel being born another time, and this would be Isaiah 66:8 which asks, "*shall a nation be born at*

⁹¹ And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: — Exodus 4:22

⁹² Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? — Numbers 11:12

⁹³ Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. — Deuteronomy 32:18

once?”,⁹⁴ prophetically referring to something that will happen to the nation of Israel in the future. Simply put, Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about Israelites experiencing their New Covenant⁹⁵ (which never applied to Gentiles, since we didn’t have an old covenant to be replaced with by a new one to begin with), and the rebirth of the favoured nation of God when they’re returned to their land and sprinkled “*with clean water*”⁹⁶ (this is why Jesus said they need to be born not just of the Spirit, but also of water⁹⁷), which will take place at the end of the Tribulation, when Jesus returns and the thousand-year kingdom begins.

⁹⁴ Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. — Isaiah 66:8

⁹⁵ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. — Jeremiah 31:31-33

⁹⁶ Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. — Ezekiel 36:22-32

⁹⁷ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. — John 3:5

This is also why Jesus specifically said, “*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*” Unfortunately, people who aren’t using the *King James Version* are unlikely to be aware of this, because most other Bible versions don’t use the precise grammar in their translations of that passage the way the KJV does (and even many people who do use the KJV won’t realize it, since few today know about 17th-century grammar), but “ye” is a plural word in the KJV, which means Jesus was simply saying: “Marvel not that I said unto thee [Nicodemus], Ye [the nation of Israel] must be born again.”

Now, it is true that Jesus said, “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,*”⁹⁸ and combined with the fact that they make the same mistake Nicodemus made in assuming the first “birth” was biological (which is what led him to ask his question about entering “*the second time into his mother’s womb*”), this has led evangelicals to assume that individual Gentiles today have to choose to be “born again” or they won’t be able to go to heaven, but we already know that going to heaven is only for the body of Christ, so this can only be referring to getting to live in the part of the kingdom of God that will exist on earth for 1,000 years rather than in the part of the kingdom of God that will be in heaven.⁹⁹ Simply put, Jesus was just referring to the specific Israelites¹⁰⁰ God chose to be a part of Israel’s second birth when it occurs (since Jesus didn’t specify that He was referring to or including the nations in this

⁹⁸ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. — John 3:3

⁹⁹ If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? — John 3:12

¹⁰⁰ For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. — Romans 2:28-29

statement the way He did in Matthew 25:32,¹⁰¹ and because we know that His teachings were pretty much only relevant to Israelites¹⁰²—not to mention the fact that Gentiles weren’t “born” a first time in the manner that Jesus was referring to there, so there’s no way they could be “born” a second time as well—it should be pretty obvious that His statement should be understood as meaning: “Except a [Jewish] man be born again...”), including a few who can be said to have (at least proleptically, if not literally) experienced the second birth earlier than the rest, such as those¹⁰³ Peter wrote to¹⁰⁴ in his first epistle¹⁰⁵ (where he called back to prophecies about this from Exodus 19:6¹⁰⁶ and from Psalm 22:30–31¹⁰⁷). And even then, we know that an Israelite only needs to be “born again” to “*see the kingdom of God*” during the first thousand years of its existence on earth, since the Mosaic law (and hence the New Covenant) will be irrelevant after those thousand years have been completed, after heaven and earth have passed away, which means the “born again” figure of speech will no longer be relevant either. This tells us that Israelites who missed out on getting to enjoy life in the kingdom of heaven (which refers specifically to the part of the kingdom of God that will exist in

¹⁰¹ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: — Matthew 25:32

¹⁰² But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. — Matthew 15:24

¹⁰³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, — 1 Peter 1:3

¹⁰⁴ Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. — 1 Peter 1:23

¹⁰⁵ But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; — 1 Peter 2:9

¹⁰⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. — Exodus 19:6

¹⁰⁷ A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this. — Psalm 22:30-31

Israel for 1,000 years) will finally have an opportunity to enter the kingdom of God on the New Earth (when it will be centred within the New Jerusalem). Some will try to argue that Jesus' *"except a man"* statement means this *has* to apply to all humans, of course, but they're ignoring the context of the passage. This is just like Paul's *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* statement, which we know is only referring to the part of the kingdom of God that will be in outer space (as you learned when you read my *"Heaven isn't what you think it is"* study), because we know that flesh and blood *will* inherit the part of the kingdom of God that's going to exist on earth during the thousand years (since not everybody who gets to live in the kingdom will have been quickened at that time), as well as on the New Earth (at least until the end of the ages), and there's no reason the word "man" can't be just as context-defined here as "kingdom of God" is in that passage (and, based on the scriptural references I linked to in this paragraph, as well as the other arguments I presented, it should be obvious that it is).

So no, unless you're a member of the Israel of God, you haven't been "born again," and neither can you be (since you weren't "born" a first time in the manner Jesus was speaking about), nor do you need to be, since the salvation of those in the body of Christ won't be enjoyed in the same part of the kingdom of God that Israel is looking forward to living in when it begins in earnest on the earth, and keeping the New Covenant in the way that being born again refers to is entirely irrelevant to us anyway, because we're not going to follow the Mosaic law perfectly in outer space (since we're not under law to begin with) the way Jeremiah said those in the house of Israel and the house of Judah will when the New Covenant comes fully into effect.

I realize that evangelicals and other Christians have various ideas about what it means to be "born again," but if their ideas can't be shown to be laid out in the

Hebrew Scriptures, they have no basis for the claims, because otherwise Jesus wouldn't have criticized Nicodemus for not knowing what He meant by the term. And I'm sure you've heard "testimonies" by certain Christians about how they were "born again" and became a whole new person, walking away from a life they considered to be sinful thanks to God changing them when they "got saved" (and, in some cases, it's true that they were leading particularly sinful lives, although it's also true that most Christians misunderstand even more of the Bible than just the topics we've been discussing, and misinterpret large parts of it to be teaching that many things are sinful which actually aren't sinful at all, but that's a discussion for another time). And yes, God was indeed behind the change, at least from an absolute perspective, because God is behind absolutely *everything* that happens (since all is of God¹⁰⁸). But from a relative perspective, their changed lifestyles had nothing to do with being "born again" at all, since we know from what we just covered that being "born again" is only for the Israel of God (and that's not to say the lives of Israelites who are "born again" won't change drastically, but that's because they'll finally be able to keep the Mosaic law perfectly when it happens, which isn't something Gentiles are meant to keep, and members of the body of Christ certainly aren't, whether they're Jewish or Gentile, which is another clue that being "born again" isn't for us).

So when you hear a Christian's "testimony" about how getting "born again" changed them, and are tempted to think it means you should remain a member of (or return to) the Christian religion (or to join it, if you've never been a member), remember that *many* people who have hit rock bottom have realized how destructive their lifestyles were and dramatically changed their lives for the better *without* becoming Christians at all (and that people who join other

¹⁰⁸ For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. — Romans 11:36

religions have similar “conversion experiences” to the ones Christians talk about as well), so joining this religion isn’t proof of anything other than that they decided something in their life needed to change. And if “fruit” is evidence of having believed the truth, just remember all the negative “fruit” of all those Christians you’ve met throughout your life (and even those who might seem to be living better lives now in some ways than they were before they converted all have “secret sins” they hide from the rest of us, so remember that you’re only seeing the “fruit” they’ve made public). As nearly everybody who hasn’t been blinded by the “light” of the leaders of the Christian religion¹⁰⁹ knows, the fruit of Christianity is anything but good, so don’t be tempted to return to it if you’ve already been saved from it, or to give it a try if you’ve been blessed enough to never have been imprisoned by it (and if you’re still a member, get out as quickly as you can). Those of us who have escaped the Christian religion (as well as many of those who were wise or blessed enough to never join it) know very well that, while nearly everything Christians think is sinful actually isn’t, almost all of the actions and attitudes that they live by are extremely wrong (and often quite evil, all the while calling their actions and teachings righteous and good¹¹⁰). As nearly everyone who looks in at it from the outside can see, greed, fear, paranoia, hunger for power, peer pressure, envy, hypocrisy, arrogance, prejudice, intolerance, anti-intellectualism, malice, spite, and all

¹⁰⁹ For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. — 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

¹¹⁰ Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! — Isaiah 5:20

manner of other actual sins¹¹¹ are the hallmarks of the Christian religion, but most Christians within the religion somehow just can't see what is plainly evident to the rest of us. That said, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds, so even Christians can technically experience God's grace (and eventually all of them will, of course). But as far as those who don't embrace His grace go, I really wouldn't want to be a religious leader or Christian "evangelist" at the final judgement, and those who willingly follow these leaders are in for a world of sorrow at that time as well (yes, it's likely that most Christians will actually end up at the Great White Throne Judgement due to their believing a false "gospel"). If the citizens of the cities that rejected Jesus' disciples are going to be judged more harshly than those of Sodom because they had the light revealed to them,¹¹² how much more severely are those in Christendom who have the completed Scriptures going to be judged for ignoring, and even rejecting, the truths found therein, following the myths of their religious leaders instead, because they prefer to have their self-righteous ears scratched?¹¹³ (And for anyone who is wondering, yes, members of the body of Christ might have been called Christians at one time,¹¹⁴ and while this

¹¹¹ This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. — 2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹¹² But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. — Luke 10:10-12

¹¹³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. — 2 Timothy 4:3-4

¹¹⁴ Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. — Acts 11:25-26

label *does* seem like it might have been used by members of the Israel of God in the past,¹¹⁵ there's no indication that any believers in the body of Christ used it for themselves, but rather it appears to be a label applied to them by others outside the body, and as such most of us avoid the label — so as to not be confused with those in the religion that uses the label today, which some of us suspect began with people such as Phygellus and Hermogenes and others who turned away from Paul¹¹⁶ creating the adulterated “gospel” of the Christian religion¹¹⁷ by merging parts of each of the two legitimate Gospels into one — and simply call ourselves members of the body of Christ, or sometimes just “believers.”)

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
— *Romans 10:9–10*

Similar to the above passages written by John, misunderstanding what Paul wrote in this passage has caused a lot of confusion and consternation among many people, and has also led to some pretty bad doctrines (such as “Lordship Salvation” for the body of Christ, as just one example). As I’ve already explained, however, there are different types of salvation, and different ways of experiencing “everlasting life.” If you’ve read the relevant Bible studies that come before this one, by now you should be well aware that anyone to whom

¹¹⁵ Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. — 1 Peter 4:16

¹¹⁶ This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. — 2 Timothy 1:15

¹¹⁷ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. — Galatians 1:6-7

God has given the faith to truly believe that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day will experience “everlasting life” in the heavens (rather than in Israel, which is where those who experience the salvation Jesus preached about will enjoy their figurative “everlasting life”). This means that, while it isn’t the choice to believe in Christ’s death for our sins, as well as His subsequent burial and resurrection, that saves someone (our special salvation to “everlasting life” is based on God’s sovereign election¹¹⁸ of those of us in the body of Christ long before we were even born,¹¹⁹ and has nothing to do with any decisions we make at all, as we’ve already determined from those other studies), if someone does truly understand what it means, and also believes, that He did die for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, they are among those whom God has chosen for membership in the body of Christ, and will get to enjoy “everlasting life” in the heavens after they’re caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. One thing you’ll notice that Paul *didn’t* say his readers did when they were saved, however, is confess Jesus as Lord (or “*confess the Lord Jesus*”), and yet verse 10 of Romans 10 seems to make it clear that the salvation written about there *is* at least partly based on confession. Now, this doesn’t mean that Jesus isn’t Lord to us, of course, since we’re told elsewhere that He is,¹²⁰ but His Lordship isn’t something Paul said his readers confessed at the time they were brought into membership in the body when he explained what they did when they were saved (nor did he say it’s something that they or we have to confess in order to be brought into the body; in fact, it’s simply having faith that he considers to be the important thing we do, as he makes clear all throughout the

¹¹⁸ Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. — 1 Thessalonians 1:4

¹¹⁹ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: — Ephesians 1:4

¹²⁰ But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. — 1 Corinthians 8:6

rest of his epistles, so there's no good reason to take this one reference to confession being necessary for salvation that happens to be sitting in the middle of a series of chapters which were primarily about Israel and their salvation and applying it to us, especially when it would contradict everything else we know about our salvation).

Likewise, while Romans 10:9–10 says that someone who experiences the salvation that confessing the Lord Jesus and believing God raised Him from the dead brings will indeed believe God resurrected Jesus (just as those in the body of Christ believe), which means they would obviously also have to believe that He died (just as those in the body of Christ also believe), there isn't anything in that verse about His death being "*for our sins*," which is a crucial part of what we believe when we're saved (there's nothing about His burial there either, I should add, which was also an important element of Paul's Gospel, as we now know from those other studies). The most important part of the belief connected to the sort of salvation Paul is talking about in Romans 10 is Jesus' resurrection, not His death *for our sins*. It might not seem like it to most, the first time they read this passage, but these are important distinctions between these two different sets of belief connected with two different types of salvation.

As I've already alluded to, something we need to keep in mind is that Romans chapters 9 through 11 are primarily about Israelites (they aren't 100% about Israelites, but a focus on Israelites is a large part of those chapters, including in the passage in question), and Paul's point about confessing and believing in that passage was connected to what Israelites have to believe in order experience the sort of salvation John wrote about, which is that Jesus is the Christ, meaning Israel's Messiah, and that He's the Son of God.¹²¹ This sort of

¹²¹ But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. — John 20:31

salvation/“everlasting life” has nothing to do with the salvation Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, nor does it have anything to do with residing in the heavens during the impending ages, but is actually about getting to live in the part of the kingdom of God that will be on planet earth, meaning living in Israel after Jesus returns. Belief that Christ’s death was “*for our sins*” wasn’t a requirement for salvation in any message that Jesus or anyone else preached prior to Paul proclaiming that it was necessary to be believed to be considered a member of the body of Christ, as we’ve already discussed (it couldn’t have been, since even Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand that He was going to die or be resurrected until after it had all taken place, which means they also couldn’t have known all that His death would accomplish prior to Paul trying to explain it to them,¹²² as we’ve also already discussed in the “*Things that differ*” study), and Jesus’ resurrection was only an important part of what they had to believe inasmuch as it proves He’s still able to be their Messiah because He’s no longer dead (with the confession part being connected to Him being the Son of God).

Of course, most Christians mistakenly assume that the whole Bible is to and about everyone, but by now it should be pretty clear to anyone who has made it this far into the study that there are two entirely different sets of messages for two entirely different groups of people in the Bible (one for the body of Christ and one for the Israel of God), as well as multiple different types of salvation written about in there, so don’t worry if you haven’t verbally spoken the words “Jesus is Lord,” or “confessed the Lord Jesus” with your mouth (especially if you have a disability making it so you physically aren’t able to speak and, as such, can’t verbally confess *anything*). One day you, and everyone

¹²² And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. — 2 Peter 3:15-16

else, will, of course.¹²³ But in the meantime, the only way to experience the special form of salvation Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 15:2 is for God to choose you for membership in the body of Christ; and if He has, He'll give you the faith to understand and believe what it means that Christ died *for our sins*, that **He Himself** was buried (and not just that His body was buried while He went somewhere else), and that He rose again the third day, at some point prior to your death or to the time Christ comes for His body.

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. — Romans 9:1-5

I'm including this passage because I've heard it asked, "How could Paul be willing to give up his salvation in exchange for the salvation of his kinsmen, if it were possible to make such a trade, if everyone will be saved?" Of course, based on everything we've already covered, we now know Paul taught about different types of salvation, and it should be obvious that this can only be referring to the special form of salvation which only a few will experience, meaning he'd be willing to give up his position as a member of the body of Christ if it meant all Israelites could join the Israel of God (remember, this is in Romans 9, which is largely about Israelites and their sort of salvation, as we just discussed when looking at the last passage), because he cared about his kinsmen that much,

¹²³ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. — Philippians 2:10-11

and we already know that not everyone will experience either of those types of salvation, so this passage isn't actually problematic at all when it comes to the type of salvation everyone experiences because of what Christ accomplished. But on top of that, few seem to consider the question of, if Paul actually *did* believe in never-ending torment, do you actually think he'd really wish to lose his salvation, even if it meant that every other Israelite would be saved? Can you imagine anyone would be willing to suffer fiery torture without end for any reason at all whatsoever? Anyone who has burned themselves even for a moment would know the answer to that question is a resounding "no" (those who believe in never-ending torment have to admit that not even Jesus was willing to make that sort of trade, yet some want to suggest that Paul was more generous than Him, or at least would be if their soteriological assumptions were correct), but they might be willing to trade their future glorified position in heaven for the benefit of those they care about, knowing that they'd still experience immortality eventually, and so this passage actually tells us quite definitively that Paul did *not* believe in the idea of never-ending torment. And since it's also pretty unlikely that someone would give up their existence altogether, never to be resurrected again, this is yet another passage supporting the idea that Paul believed in the salvation of all.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. — 1 Thessalonians 4:13

I've heard Christians use the line about those who have "no hope" here to try to prove that these people without hope can't ever be saved, but Paul was simply referring to people having no expectation in their minds (which is what the Greek word ἐλπίς/"el-pece'," translated as "hope" in this passage, means) of a future resurrection and salvation, not to having no possibility of resurrection and salvation, and he was referring to the sorrow of living people due to not

expecting their dead loved ones to be resurrected, not to the sorrow of people who were already dead, so anyone who tries to use this verse to prove never-ending punishment isn't reading the text very carefully.

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. — Matthew 18:3

Just like all the other passages we've covered, there should be no reason for me to point out that there's no mention of hell or the lake of fire in this verse either, and I shouldn't have to repeat that Jesus was simply talking about not getting to live in Israel after He returns when He said certain people would not enter the kingdom of heaven unless they've been converted, so I'll just leave it at that.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Romans 6:23

This verse is extremely misunderstood, and is almost always taken completely out of the context of the rest of the section of Scripture that it's in, but just like the last few passages we covered, this verse doesn't mention hell or the lake of fire directly, so one has to read the idea of never-ending torment in hell into the word "death" here if they want to continue believing in such a thing, which by now should be obvious that there's no basis for doing, since the concept doesn't even exist in the Bible to begin with, at least not in any of the passages we've looked at so far (and is clearly contradicted by Paul's writings about the salvation of all humanity anyway). As for what the verse is talking about, it would take a long study of Romans chapter 2 all the way through chapter 8 to really get into it, but to put it very simply, Paul is basically using this as a metaphor for the ongoing results of his readers continuing to allow Sin to reign

over themselves¹²⁴ (Paul anthropomorphized “sin” at times in Romans, although the KJV doesn’t make this as obvious as certain other translations do) while they’re alive (and the English word “wages” in the KJV is just as figurative as “death” is here, which is something that most Christians already agree with me on, even if they aren’t aware of what either word is actually referring to — the Greek word ὀψώνιον/“op-so’-nee-on” that it’s translated from really refers more to a ration than to a payment, but that’s too big of a tangent to get into here so I’ll leave it at that). What’s important to note is that Paul wasn’t talking about unbelievers in this part of Romans, but rather about members of the body of Christ who haven’t fully reckoned themselves to be dead to sin yet,¹²⁵ meaning they’re still allowing Sin to reign over them because they’re still having confidence in the flesh¹²⁶ and are actively trying not to sin using their own strength — which is what it means to “obey it in the lusts thereof” (referring to Sin’s lusts, not our own lusts), since walking after the flesh is compared to obeying Sin’s desires by allowing it to have dominion over you by

¹²⁴ Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. — Romans 6:12

¹²⁵ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Romans 6:11

¹²⁶ Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. — Philippians 3:1-11

following the law,¹²⁷ with walking after the spirit being compared to being free from law,¹²⁸ which would include being free from *any* of the religious rules that some Christians insist we follow as well (the reason we don't follow the Mosaic law isn't because there's anything wrong with the specific rules in the law themselves;¹²⁹ the commandment against murder is not a bad rule, which means that it isn't simply the specific rules in the Mosaic law we aren't supposed to follow, but rather it's religious rules *in general* that we aren't supposed to follow, because trying to follow religious rules like the Mosaic law simply leads to more sin and death,¹³⁰ and yes, this definitely includes the 10 Commandments, as Paul made clear by referencing the 10th commandment¹³¹ when he wrote Romans 7:7¹³² as a part of his teaching that we shouldn't allow ourselves to be placed under any parts of the law at all) — rather than simply trusting that Christ will live the life He wants us to live through us,¹³³ doing the things God wants us to

¹²⁷ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. — Romans 6:14

¹²⁸ There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. — Romans 8:1-4

¹²⁹ But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; — 1 Timothy 1:8

¹³⁰ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: — Romans 5:20

¹³¹ Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. — Exodus 20:17

¹³² What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. — Romans 7:7

¹³³ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. — Galatians 2:20-21

do and avoiding the things God wants us to avoid Himself through us (Sin — anthropomorphically-speaking — is just as happy when we purposely try not to sin as when we purposely do sin, because it likes any focus we can give it, since it takes our focus and trust away from Christ). Of course, he also contrasts this figurative “death” with the freedom of “eternal life” that one can experience instead, and this “eternal life” is just as figurative as the “death” in this verse is, as should also be obvious by now.

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.
— Acts 16:31

A common question I’ve heard asked is, “How can the salvation of all humanity be true if someone has to ‘believe on the Lord Jesus Christ’ in order to be saved?” Of course, by now it should be obvious that Paul had to have been referring to the special form of salvation which involves being a member of the body of Christ, and not to the salvation which all humanity will experience because of Christ’s death for our sins, burial, and resurrection on the third day, so this verse doesn’t actually cause any problems for the doctrine of the salvation of all humanity at all. (And for anyone who thinks Paul’s statement there was meant to be instructive to anyone reading the book as far as salvation goes, imagine only telling someone who didn’t even know who Jesus really was to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” with no further explanation of what that even means, and then ask yourself if that could possibly be enough for them to do in order for them to be considered saved; as you should now know from the other studies I mentioned, it’s important to remember that the book of Acts was a Circumcision writing primarily concerned with letting the Israel of God know why the kingdom temporarily ended up getting put on hold for them, and that Paul’s Gospel was never fully fleshed out anywhere in the book since it wasn’t meant for the book’s audience to believe, which is why the

writer left the full explanation of what Paul meant, which he would have later given to the Philippian jailor when they arrived at his house,¹³⁴ out of the book.)

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. — 1 Corinthians 6:9–10

¹³⁴ And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. — Acts 16:12-34

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. — Galatians 5:19–21

Inheriting the kingdom of God in these passages should not be confused with salvation. Paul was writing to members of the body of Christ who were already saved, and who couldn't lose their salvation no matter how hard they tried¹³⁵ (Paul said in that passage in Romans that, if you're called for membership in the body of Christ, you *will* be justified), so the inheritance here was simply about reigning with Christ.¹³⁶ It couldn't have been about salvation for those in the body of Christ because our special salvation isn't based on our actions — even if we stop believing in Him for some reason, He'll remain faithful to us from a salvation perspective since He can't disown, or deny, Himself,¹³⁷ and the body of Christ is now a part of Himself. Now, it might be that we *can* lose out on reigning with Him by denying Him in order to avoid

¹³⁵ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 8:29-39

¹³⁶ If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: — 2 Timothy 2:12

¹³⁷ If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. — 2 Timothy 2:13

suffering, but either way, we still remain His body, and He won't amputate and disown His own body parts, and body parts can't amputate themselves either. So even if a member of the body of Christ doesn't "inherit the kingdom of God," they'll still experience their quickening at the same time the rest of the body does. (Everything I wrote about Romans 6:23 also applies to these passages too, I should add, and reading the surrounding verses helps explain the context of these passages, but I'll leave it at that since this is a much bigger discussion than we have the space to get into here.)

*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. —
Philippians 2:12*

This verse is used not only to try to defend salvation by works, but also to claim that, if someone has to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, the possibility exists that they might end up not being saved in the end. My personal suspicion as to what this verse means is that Paul was instructing his readers to make sure (or to work out in their minds whether) they've truly believed his Gospel and hence really are saved (referring, of course, to the special "eternal life" sort of salvation which is only for the body of Christ, not the general salvation that everyone will experience). However, whether or not this is the actual meaning of the verse, whatever it does mean, just as it can't be telling people to do works in order to be saved, because that would contradict all the passages where Paul explained that salvation under his Gospel *isn't* based on works (and that anyone who does try to be saved by works under his Gospel will be accursed), it also can't mean that anyone will miss out on the general salvation he taught about, because that would contradict everything else he taught about his Gospel we've already covered in this study.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. — Revelation 3:14–19

A lot of people worry that they're a "lukewarm" believer, and that God will "spue" them out of His mouth, sending them to hell to suffer without end. Of course, we already know what "hell" refers to in Scripture now (in fact we now know what all of the "hells" mentioned in the KJV are), and that it isn't what most people have always assumed it is, but something else important to note is this passage is referring to a whole local church, not to any individual, so it's that local church itself that's at risk of judgement, and isn't talking about any individuals being at risk of "hell" to begin with (and I personally believe it's a local church that will exist during the Tribulation, although that's a discussion for another time; but regardless, since Revelation wasn't written by Paul, the local churches John wrote to have to be a part of the Israel of God rather than the body of Christ, so it isn't relevant to most of us anyway).

These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. — 2 Peter 2:17

I'm not going to get into all the details of this particular passage, because it's enough to point out that the sinners in question aren't literally wells, nor are

they literally clouds, so the “for ever” here should be taken about as literally as the rest of the verse (and about as literally as the other times it’s used in judgement passages in the Bible that we’ve covered as well), which means we can’t really use this verse to prove any particular soteriology.

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. — Jude 1:5–13

The “everlasting” chains in this passage don’t help defend any doctrine of salvation either, because this passage tells us they only lock up the fallen angels *until* (“unto”) their judgement. And the reference to Sodom and Gomorrha suffering the vengeance of “eternal” fire doesn’t help either because neither of these cities are currently still burning, and we already know

that Sodom will also eventually be returned to her “former estate” anyway¹³⁸ (and if Jude was just referring to the citizens of the city, Ezekiel 16:55 would then likely also have to be referring to its citizens). And as far as the “wandering stars” go, the lake of fire doesn’t seem like it could be described as a place of “blackness of darkness” (aside from the fact that it will be in a valley in the open air in Israel, underneath the sun and moon, the lake of fire would be anything but dark unless we aren’t taking the “fire” part of its title literally, and if one chooses to interpret the “fire” part figuratively, there’s no reason to interpret the supposed duration of the punishment literally either), and I’m assuming I don’t have to point out that they aren’t literally clouds or trees or waves or stars, which means we’re outside the territory of literalism to begin with here, telling us that we once again have no basis for interpreting “for ever” any less figuratively than we would these words either (and reminding us that, at least based on everything else we’ve covered so far, we seem to have no reason to ever interpret “for ever” as literally meaning “without end” in the Bible versions that use the phrase), nor do we have any way to use this passage to support any particular soteriology either.

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and 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 ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. — Revelation 14:9–

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¹³⁸ When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate. — Ezekiel 16:55

This passage is obviously extremely figurative. It can't simply be about being cast into the lake of fire because the lake of fire will be located in a valley down here on earth after the Tribulation ends, not up in heaven where it would presumably have to be in order to be tormented in the presence of "the holy angels" and the Lamb, if we were taking it literally. And for those who would suggest, for some reason, that it's about those who worship the beast during the Tribulation getting cast into the lake of fire *after* the Great White Throne Judgement, 1,000 years later rather than immediately after the Tribulation, the lake of fire will be outside the New Jerusalem on the New Earth, not inside it where it would have to be for those words to make sense (plus, we know from what we learned from Isaiah in the other relevant studies that no humans will be alive in the lake of fire anyway, so the reference to torment here tells us it can't be about suffering consciously in the lake of fire, but that it must be referring to something else altogether). As for what it means, considering everything we've already learned about the word "fire" when it's used in passages that don't also specifically refer to "hell" or the lake of fire by name (and this passage doesn't use either of those names), it makes far more sense to interpret this passage in the KJV as simply being extreme hyperbole (since Revelation is an extremely figurative book) about the judgement of those who take the mark and worship the beast, and the intense suffering they'll go through while still alive during the Tribulation for doing so, as described just

two chapters later.¹³⁹ This is similar to the way that when the great whore of Babylon is judged¹⁴⁰ — which I don't believe any Christian interprets as referring to an actual person being burned in fire, but rather as a satanic religious, political, and/or economic system being utterly destroyed — and when “her” smoke rises up “for ever and ever,” we know there isn't going to be any literal smoke rising because there's nothing literally being burned, so the concept of smoke rising for ever and ever seems to simply be apocalyptic language referring to an intense judgement in whatever manner it might happen to occur in.

Either way, though, that was quite literally the *only* passage we've looked at which even *suggests* that any human might be conscious while being punished “*for ever and ever*” (since the only other passage to mention a judgement of sentient beings for that particular “duration” in the KJV was referring to the

¹³⁹ And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. — Revelation 16:1-11

¹⁴⁰ And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. — Revelation 19:1-3

punishment of spiritual beings, not humans, and we now know from the other relevant studies that even those particular beings will have to be set free in order to be reconciled to God the way Paul said they will be, so there's no reason to assume the "*for ever and ever*" in this passage in the KJV is any more literal than the one that talks about how long *their* punishment will last, not to mention any longer than the limited number of years the "*for ever and ever*" mentioned in the judgement of the nations we looked at in Isaiah 34:8-10¹⁴¹ will last in the future; and unless one decides to read their theological assumptions into the text, in order to apply it to more people than are actually mentioned in it, this passage can really *only* be applied to humans who worship the beast and take his mark anyway, which is an extremely small percentage of every non-believer to ever live, so it doesn't help support the idea that anyone else who doesn't choose to get saved will suffer without end either), and this is quite problematic for the popular doctrine of never-ending torment in hell, because *that's it*. No other passage I'm aware of that one might think is talking about the "hell" known as the lake of fire implies that they'll actually be alive and suffering while in said location, so they don't actually help defend the commonly held doctrine (although please correct me if I'm wrong and missed one, but please also first consider whether anything I wrote in this study would apply to it as well), and to interpret this extremely figurative reference to the judgement that a very specific — and relatively small — group of people will experience as referring to suffering consciously in the lake of fire makes no sense either.

¹⁴¹ For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever. — Isaiah 34:8-10

In fact, prior to reading this single passage in John's book describing his vision on Patmos, nobody would have ever had any scriptural reason to interpret *any* of the other passages we've looked at as meaning that any humans would be conscious in the lake of fire — especially in light of what Isaiah wrote about carcasses — or even that their corpse could never be resurrected from their second death and be quickened (and hence saved) after burning up in it, since no passage which mentioned either “hell” or the lake of fire by name in the KJV said anything of the sort. And so, somebody studying the Bible carefully from beginning to end who had never actually heard of the doctrine of never-ending torment in hell for non-believers couldn't possibly come to the conclusion that any humans would be conscious or suffering while in the lake of fire, at least not before reaching this particular passage more than halfway through the final book in the Bible. And if they're being honest with themselves and taking the rest of Scripture into consideration when they get to this passage, they'd realize it would make no sense to think it was referring to that either, since no other passage we've looked at even hinted at such a fate, and because it would contradict everything else they'd already learned as well, which means that to use this one extremely figurative passage located near the very end of the Bible to reinterpret all the references to judgement that came before it in Scripture into meaning all unbelievers (or really anyone at all) will be suffering without end in hell ignores basically every hermeneutical principle I'm aware of, and would contradict too many other things in Scripture we've already looked at as well, so there's just no good scriptural excuse for doing that (especially because nobody prior to the writing of the book of Revelation could have ever understood *any* of the other judgement passages to *actually* mean that anyone would be tormented without end, based on what we've now learned). And so, even though some people will miss out on “everlasting life,” and might even end up in “everlasting” hell fire (or perhaps simply end up experiencing some other form of judgement, figuratively spoken of using the

word “fire,” as often happened in the Bible), we now know that they, and everyone, will eventually *leave* hell (whichever hell or hells they might end up in) and experience salvation, thanks to God and Christ.

But the fact that not everyone gets to enjoy “everlasting life” is also something that should concern my readers, because there are certain qualifications for getting to do so. There are, of course, various types of “everlasting life” available to be experienced, depending on when one lives, anyway. You might get to enjoy the “everlasting life” that involves living in Israel after Jesus returns if you happen to live through the Tribulation and take care of Israelites who are persecuted during the second half of it. This isn’t in an immortal body, however, although I think it stands to reason that whoever does get to enjoy this sort of “everlasting life” will likely be given access to the tree of life and will never die. The members of the Israel of God will also be given “everlasting life” after Jesus returns (and will get to reign over the rest of the world from Israel), and those of them who died prior to — and are resurrected 75 days after — Jesus’ Second Coming will even get to enjoy their “everlasting life” in immortal bodies upon their resurrection (while those who “endure to the end” of the Tribulation will get to remain alive thanks to the tree of life, although they, as well as those who helped persecuted Jews during the Tribulation, will eventually be made truly immortal too, along with everyone else, at the end of the ages, when Christ destroys death).

However, there’s a final group of people who also get to experience “everlasting life,” and this entire group *will* get to enjoy it in immortal bodies (and these bodies will be even more glorious¹⁴² than the immortal bodies of those in the

¹⁴² There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. — 1 Corinthians 15:40-41

Israel of God). These people, of course, are the members of the body of Christ. This is an extremely small group of people, though, and technically only those relatively few people who have been ordained to “eternal life,”¹⁴³ meaning those to whom God has elected to give the understanding of what it means and the faith to believe that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, will actually be immersed into His body, because faith in what Christ accomplished is a gift from God¹⁴⁴ (it isn’t only, or even primarily, the salvation and grace that are referred to as being a gift in that verse, but the faith clearly is as well,¹⁴⁵ especially since there’s no way anyone could think the salvation or grace could possibly be “of yourselves,” considering the definition of grace and the fact that nobody can save themselves, not to mention the fact that receiving salvation — be it the special “eternal life” form of salvation Paul was writing about here in Ephesians 2:8-9, or even the general salvation he wrote about in 1 Corinthians 15:22 and elsewhere — would be a transaction rather than a gift if we had to produce faith on our own in order to receive said salvation anyway, so the reference to the gift *has* to include the faith; besides, if it didn’t, we could then glory in producing our own faith¹⁴⁶ rather than simply being thankful for having received it from God as a gift), and even having to choose to believe all this in order to be saved would be a work we had to accomplish on our own, and would then make us our own (at least partial) saviours since, if we aren’t guaranteed salvation because of what

¹⁴³ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. — Acts 13:48

¹⁴⁴ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. — Ephesians 2:8-9

¹⁴⁵ For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. — Romans 12:3

¹⁴⁶ For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? — 1 Corinthians 4:7

Christ accomplished *prior* to having faith, it would mean Christ accomplished absolutely nothing that benefited anyone until they performed the final step of their salvation themselves, through their intelligent or wise or righteous or humble choice to believe the right thing, whichever option or options it is that you think is the source of peoples' will to choose to believe the specific thing(s) that causes them to finally get saved (instead of their will to believe the good news of their already guaranteed salvation because of what Christ accomplished coming from the Source that Scripture says it *actually* comes from¹⁴⁷). However, while whether we experience this sort of “everlasting life” or not isn't something we ultimately get to decide for ourselves (nobody chooses what they believe — they either hear or read something and believe it, or they hear or read it and don't believe it, and nobody can choose to force themselves to believe something that they think isn't true, at least not without some serious self-induced brainwashing, likely requiring powerful drugs; although, if they didn't think it was true, they'd have no reason to try to force themselves to believe it in the first place, so we couldn't really blame them for not believing it anyway), at some point in their life, anyone included in this group *will* have believed (which first requires actually understanding) all the elements of what it is Paul said that members of the body of Christ believe when they're saved, which means God *will* have given them an understanding of, and belief in, the following facts before they die or before Christ comes for His body: 1) That “*Christ died for our sins*” means that sin has now been dealt with for everyone, and so nobody's sins are being held against them at all anymore

¹⁴⁷ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. — Philippians 2:13

(the good and evil works¹⁴⁸ of non-believers will still be judged at the Great White Throne,¹⁴⁹ of course, but sin and evil are two entirely different concepts, as I've already mentioned, and should never be confused as being the same thing, although it is true that a lot of evil actions are indeed sinful), and everyone will eventually experience salvation because of this, and entirely apart from anything they do on their own at that, including even believing this good news. 2) That "*He was buried*" means He literally ceased to exist as a conscious being when He died (just as He did for a few hours every time He went to sleep at night), and He Himself was placed in the tomb (and not just His body while He Himself went somewhere else). And 3) that "*He rose again the third day*" means, after spending three days truly dead, God resurrected Him into a physical (albeit "spiritual") body, not that He simply now exists as a glorified ghost in another dimension (this final point was the whole reason Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15, after all). And so, if you've come to truly understand and believe the details I've just explained, then you can rest assured that you are indeed among the elect and have joined the body of Christ.

If you've made it this far and disagree with basically everything I've written, however, I'm sorry to say that there's a good chance you'll have to wait until the end of the ages to experience your own salvation, since you likely aren't among

¹⁴⁸ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God. — Romans 2:6-11

¹⁴⁹ And I saw a great white throne, and him that 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, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. — Revelation 20:11-13

those whom God has elected for membership in the body of Christ. But, just like everyone else, even you will get to enjoy salvation at that time (and if you happen to be alive at the time the Tribulation begins, maybe you'll actually be among those who get to experience "life eternal" by being a member of the Israel of God, or perhaps even by helping the least of Jesus' brethren at that time, instead). This also means that, if you want those of us who have come to understand and believe what I've written in this study to change our minds and believe what you do about the topics I've covered in these studies instead, you're going to have to do a good job of breaking down exactly where I went wrong in my scriptural interpretations in these studies. You can't just expect those of us who have come to believe the doctrines I've covered in these studies to take your word for it that they're wrong simply because you say they are, so you'll have to actually do the work of explaining how we've misinterpreted all of the passages of Scripture that I've exegeted in these studies in order to prove us wrong if you want us to change our minds and believe what you believe instead. So the ball's in your court, but I'm not going to hold my breath, because, as I've mentioned already, thus far literally nobody has ever even *attempted* to refute the arguments I've laid out in these studies (although a few people I've shared these interpretations with have been given the faith to believe the truth and are now in the body of Christ, and I pray that now includes you too).

But why did God seem to hide all this truth from so many, as seems to be the case when we consider the fact that so few people appear to be able to see much of it at all when they read their Bibles? To that I simply repeat Proverbs 25:2, in which we are told, "*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter,*" and then suggest that perhaps God did this to reveal the true nature of our hearts to us when we're finally judged, so that we'll be able to see just how evil our preferences for how others end up spending

eternity can be (although it's also true that those who aren't among the elect *can't* believe most of what I've written anyway, because their minds have been blinded,¹⁵⁰ and only God can get them to believe the truth, which won't happen for most people until they're standing before the Great White Throne). And your reaction to everything I've written above almost certainly will be used to reveal the truth about the state of your own heart during your years as a mortal here on earth to you at that time.

¹⁵⁰ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. — 2 Corinthians 4:4