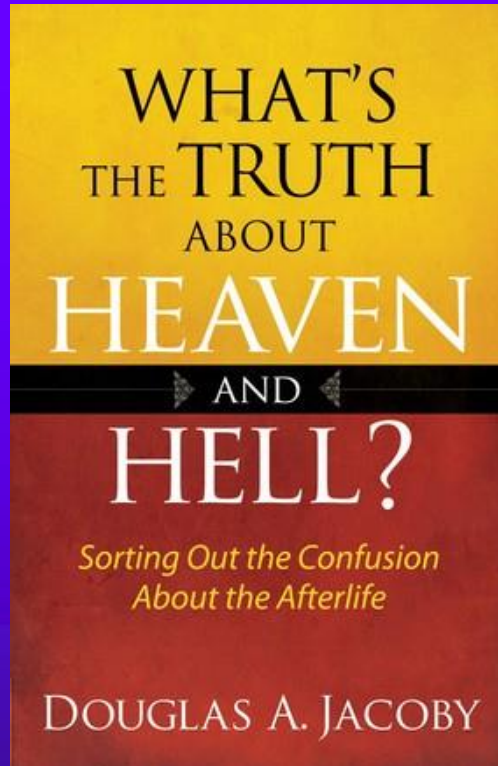


Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

The Simple Truth / UCLA

Douglas A. Jacoby

21 October 2012



*What's the Truth about
Heaven and Hell? (2013)*





Hadrian's Wall 122 AD



Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

12 Questions

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

12 Questions
+ Q&A

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

1. What kind of experience is heaven?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Boring?

Nothing to do?

Omniscient?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Relational

Home > House

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

The extremes of a purely God-centered view of Heaven as endless contemplation of the Divine and a purely man-centered view of Heaven as unending theme park adventure with our earthly family and friends must both be rejected. In its place we must develop a Christ-centered view of eternal life in the New Heavens and New Earth, in which God dwells with the redeemed human race, in which a new extended divine ‘family’ of God enjoys God and each other forever.

– Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Sense and Nonsense about Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 168-169.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

2. Does everyone receive the same reward?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Matthew 19:21

Mark 10:21

Luke 12:33, 18:22

“Treasure in heaven”

- Treasure *is* heaven
- Treasure *in* heaven

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

3. Does Revelation describe heaven?

What about the “streets of gold” (21:21)? In John’s vision it’s not only the streets that are gold, but entire city (21:18). Does this tell us anything about heaven?

Directly, no; indirectly, perhaps.

The vision is allusive. That is, without giving us any direct information, it tantalizes us, piques the imagination, prods us to envision what being in the presence of God might be like. If heaven were a literal city with golden streets, of course that would be beautiful. There is no need to literalize this detail in order to be faithful to the text, any more than we need to literalize other details of the Apocalypse. Let us consider a few..

- ◆ Names on foreheads indicates possession (7:3, 22:4; Ezek 9:4; Deut 11:18).
- ◆ The star that fell to earth, part of an image of judgment against those who preferred death to repentance (9:1-6), is not a literal star, otherwise the earth would have been annihilated. (Nor will it do to claim it's really a meteor. Rigid literalism rules out flexible interpretation ["the passage simply 'means what it says'"]).
- ◆ The vanquishing of the sea connects with the biblical theme of the raging waters of the primeval chaos, which, like the enemies of God's people, threatens to drag them back into a spiritual wilderness (21:4; see Gen 6:1-10; Isaiah 17:12).
- ◆ We cannot literalize the images of those faithful to the covenant to the point of death in Revelation 7 and 14, otherwise only virgin Jewish males would reach heaven.
- ◆ The souls of the martyrs are depicted as being beneath the altar, which is before the heavenly throne (6:9, 8:5). They cry out for justice, in the same way the blood of Abel, slain for his righteousness, continue to cry out (Hebrews 11:4, 12:24).
- ◆ There is no necessity of taking any of these images literally.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

4. Are the saved there already?

John 3:13

The souls of the godly remain in a better place, while those of the unjust and wicked are in a worse place, waiting for the time of judgment. — *Justin Martyr, c.160 (1.197)*

“Let no one imagine that souls are immediately judged after death. For all are detained in one and a common place of confinement—until the arrival of the time [of] the great Judge...” — *Lactantius 304-313 (7.217)*

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

5. Is heaven on earth?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Isaiah 65:17

Revelation 21:1-3

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, **the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

6. Do we send ourselves to hell?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘*Thy* will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.”

– C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 66-67. Originally published 1946.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

... the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power... (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 NAS).

Hell is portrayed as a place of **privation, punishment, and perishing.**

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10:28).

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

7. Is the fire literal?



Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

If we allow golden streets and pearly gates to serve as a sign, something pointing to the beauty and magnificence of heaven, then why couldn't we allow the lake of fire to serve as a sign of hell? Many go wrong in the discussion of symbolism. If hell isn't a lake of fire (literally), it is surely something worse; if heaven is not a celestial city with streets of gold, it is something better. The sign is, in a sense, less substantial than that to which it points.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

8. What about gnashing of teeth?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Matthew 8:12, 13:42,50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Mark 9:18;
Luke 13:28—an uncontrollable reaction, born of the
agony of the flames?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

Matthew 8:12, 13:42,50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Mark 9:18; Luke 13:28—an uncontrollable reaction, born of the agony of the flames?

Gnashing is an indication of **anger** (Job 16:9; Psalm 35:16, 37:12, 112:10; Lamentations 2:16; Acts 7:54), and in the case of hell, of a stubborn refusal to back down and admit God is in the right.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

9. How long does it last?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ♦ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul
- ◆ Hebrews 12:29 – consuming fire

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul
- ◆ Hebrews 12:29 – consuming fire
- ◆ Revelation 2:11 – second death

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul
- ◆ Hebrews 12:29 – consuming fire
- ◆ Revelation 2:11 – second death
- ◆ Revelation 14:11 – eternal smoke
 - Revelation 19:3
 - Isaiah 34:10
 - Jude 7

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul
- ◆ Hebrews 12:29 – consuming fire
- ◆ Revelation 2:11 – second death
- ◆ Revelation 14:11 – eternal smoke
 - Revelation 19:3
 - Isaiah 34:10
 - Jude 7

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul
- ◆ Hebrews 12:29 – consuming fire
- ◆ Revelation 2:11 – second death
- ◆ Revelation 14:11 – eternal smoke

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48 – destruction
- ◆ Matthew 10:28 – killing the soul
- ◆ Hebrews 12:29 – consuming fire
- ◆ Revelation 2:11 – second death
- ◆ Revelation 14:11 – eternal smoke
 - Revelation 19:3
 - Isaiah 34:10
 - Jude 7

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. – Jude 7

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ There are three basic positions on hell: infinite torment, eventual annihilation, and universalism.
- ◆ All three were present in the early church; one's position was not made a test of fellowship (until the sixth century).
- ◆ Infinite torment has the support of 1600 years of tradition.
- ◆ Annihilation has biblical support, and has become much more prominent in the last few decades.
- ◆ Universalism is the most difficult of the three positions to support.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

10. Doesn't eternal mean infinite?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

- ◆ Exodus 21:6—The man or woman would become one's servant “forever”
- ◆ Leviticus 25:34—Perpetual possession of fields
- ◆ Deuteronomy 23:3—“Forever” is synonymous with ten generations; in 1 Chronicles 16:5 and Psalm 105:8 it is equivalent to 1000 generations.
- ◆ Psalm 24:7—“Ancient” doors, like the “ancient” boundary stone of Proverbs 22:28
- ◆ Jonah 2:6—The prophet was confined in (the fish) “forever”
- ◆ Mark 3:29—the “eternal” sin is not committed over and over; rather, its *consequence* is eternal.

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

11. Isn't the soul immortal?

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

1 Timothy 6:16

Romans 6:23

1 Corinthians 15:42

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

1500s:

Luther, Tyndale, Anabaptists << Calvin

Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

**12. Should we emphasize hell's horrors
to scare people into the kingdom?**

Did the apostles attempt to frighten people into becoming Christians? In the book of Acts, which covers about 30 years of church history, the word hell never even shows up. Judgment is mentioned in 10:42, 17:31, and 24:25, never in connection with the flames of perdition.

This is not to deny that judgment was a fundamental of the faith... But we are talking about hell. Even in the most intense of the apostolic encounters, they did not raise the specter of hell to frighten their opponents (5:1-11, 6:6-12).

Notice Peter's emphasis on the first day of the church, Pentecost 30 AD, in Acts 2:40-41.

The truly frightening reality, from which the audience is urged to save themselves, is their corrupt generation. We all know the corrupting influence of materialism, narcissism, and spiritual apathy. Why didn't Peter plead, "Save yourselves from hell"? Surely that would not have been an unbiblical warning, but to truly help his listeners—to wake them from spiritual torpor—it was more effective to focus on the peril at hand than a distant threat on the far horizon. Besides, there are other motivations for repentance.

In a comprehensive study of preaching themes through the centuries, Larsen has shown that hell was especially emphasized from the 3rd to the 20th centuries, with a brief gap around the beginning of the Enlightenment.

– David L. Larsen, "Heaven and Hell in the Preaching of the Gospel: A Historical Survey," *Trinity Journal* 22 (Deerfield, Illinois: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001), 237-259.

Hell should humble us. It should disturb us. Bible believers respond in a variety of ways to the doctrine of hell.

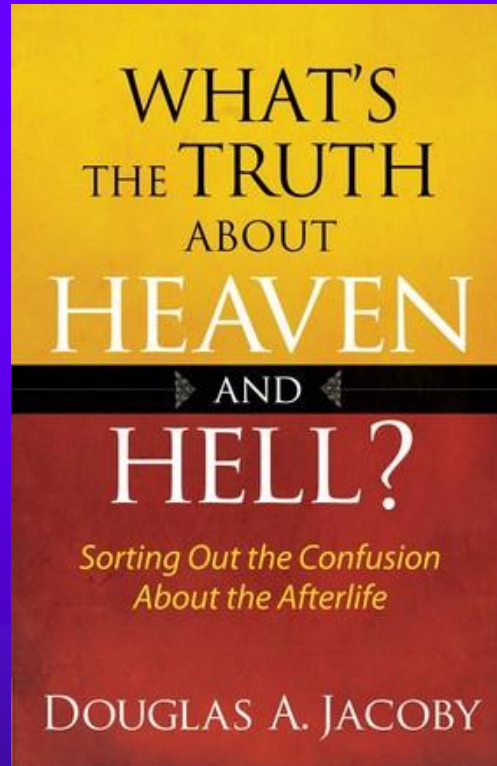
Brian Jones writes, “Apocalyptic urgency is not about saving your friend from hell. It’s about saving your friend *from God*... Until you understand how violent and inhumane God really is... you’ll never feel the urgency to help your non-Christian friends escape His detestable clutches.” But this makes it sound as if God is some monster, or somehow unjustified in his judging.

-- Brian Jones, *Hell is Real* (But I Hate to Admit It!) (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011), 132

Peter Lombard (c.1100) wrote, “Therefore the elect shall go forth... to see the torments of the impious, seeing which they will not be grieved, but will be satiated with joy at the sight of the unutterable calamity of the impious.” To me, this sounds even worse.

“If [a Christian] loves God, he must love hell, too. If God decrees it, it must be good and for God’s glory, and the evangelical knows that he will sing God’s praises eternally as the smoke ascends from the burning pit. AMEN!... When Christ asks, ‘Do you love me?’, he is also asking, ‘Do you love hell?’... Even *now* while the evangelical is singing the praises of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he knows that multitudes are suffering the torments of the damned... The true Christian, aware of this, is happily, exuberantly, gladly praising the Judge of the Last Day, Jesus Christ, who has sentenced to such merited damnation millions of souls.”

– John Gerstner, *Repent or Perish* (Ligonier, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gratia, 1990), 64.



*What's the Truth about
Heaven and Hell? (2013)*

Dialogue with historian of science
and skeptic Michael Shermer
UCLA, 20 Oct 2012



Heaven, Hell & the Afterlife

The Simple Truth / UCLA

Douglas A. Jacoby

21 October 2012