

**Body and Soul**  
A History of Heaven  
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Slide 1

1. This is the final presentation on the history of Christian beliefs about life and death and especially about life after death.
2. Today we will talk about heaven, a subject that remains important to Christians even if they reject the traditional ideas about hell we talked about two weeks ago.
3. At least 80 percent of all Christians today say they believe that when they die their souls will leave their earthly bodies and travel instantly to heaven, where they will join the souls of other Christians and live forever in the presence of God.
4. We are so sure of the truth of this that we assure our children that “Grandma has gone to heaven to be with Jesus.”

Slide 2

1. But some people have long argued that the popular picture of heaven as a place where the souls of the righteous go at death is inconsistent with what the Bible says.
2. For example, two evangelical Christian authors of a contemporary book write: **“Our Christian hope is firmly based on the resurrection of the dead, through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and not on the pagan teaching of the immortality of the soul. It cannot be over emphasized that the teaching of the immortality of the soul is a lie, and an outright deception from Satan.”** Sulem, *God’s Plan for All* ch. 23 at <https://godsplanforall.com/free-online-book/part-iii/chapter-23-do-we-have-an-immortal-soul/>
3. This is a serious charge—in teaching our children that our souls go to heaven when we die, we are being deceived by Satan.
4. As we will see, the Bible does talk, and talk a lot, about bodily resurrection, but it **also** teaches the immortality of the soul and life forever with God in heaven.

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1. Early Jewish cosmologists divided their known universe into three discrete segments, each with its own unique inhabitants.
2. The first segment, called “*shamayim*,” which is literally translated as “heavens,” described the area above the surface of the earth and included the sun, the moon, the clouds, water for rain and snow and everything they could see in the night sky.

3. The second segment of the Jewish universe, called “*erets*,” included the surface of the earth and has been rendered “earth” in English translations.
4. So, in *Genesis* 1:1, God created “the heavens” and “the earth.”
5. *Sheol*, the third segment of the ancient Jewish universe, included everything beneath the surface of the earth, down to the bottom of the deepest caves.

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1. The Psalmist wrote: “**The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.**” *Psalms* 115:16.
2. When heavenly beings and weather came to earth, the heavens had to be opened.
3. For example, when God “**rained down manna,**” he “**opened the doors of the heavens.**” *Psalms* 78:23.
4. During the baptism of Jesus, “**he saw the heavens dividing, and the Spirit as a dove coming down upon him.**” *Mark* 1:10 (Young’s Literal Translation).

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1. According to *2 Kings*, “**Elijah goeth up in a whirlwind, to the heavens.**” *2 Kings* 2:11 (Young’s Literal Translation).
2. This is often taken as proof that Elijah went to be with God while still alive.
3. However, although perhaps implied, there is no statement that Elijah actually got into the heavens and people at the time believed God may have “**picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley.**” *2 Kings* 2:16.
4. Whatever the meaning, this is as close as the Hebrew Scriptures written before the exile got to a claim that anyone, dead or alive, went into the heavens to join God.
5. All the Jewish dead resided in *sheol*, just as all living people resided on the earth and God and heavenly beings resided in the heavens.
6. As Jesus said: “[N]o one hath gone up to the heaven, except he who out of the heaven came down -- the Son of Man who is in the heaven.” *John* 3:12 (Young’s Literal Translation).

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1. Most scholars believe chapters 24 to 27 of the *Book of Isaiah* were added to the original writings of the Prophet Isaiah after the exile of the Jews to Babylon in 587 B.C. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* at 561.

2. Chapter 25 describes a day in the future when God will “**swallow up death forever**” and “**wipe away the tears from all faces.**” *Isaiah 25:8.*
3. On that day, the people of Judah will sing about the righteous dead in *sheol*: “**But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning.**” *Isaiah 26:19.*
4. Many scholars believe that these teachings were based on the beliefs of Zoroastrianism, which the Jewish exiles had learned about from the Persians.
5. Zoroastrianism teaches that at the end of time, the “**dead will rise in their lifeless bodies.**” Segal, *Life after Death* at 183.
6. “**Then the cosmos w[ill] be restored to its original perfection.**” Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* at 12.

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1. Post-exilic Jews then found earlier prophecies in *Isaiah* that they believed also supported their hope for a future characterized by peace and harmony.
2. *Isaiah 11:6* foresees a time when “[t]he **wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together.**”
3. *Isaiah 2:4* looks to a time when people “**will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.**”
4. From these and similar references came the Jewish expectation of an “age to come,” in which the righteous dead will be resurrected to live forever in a perfect world.
5. The age to come was sometimes described as being like the Garden of Eden before the fall or as a “paradise,” a Persian word meaning a fenced garden.
6. As Rob Bell notes, all these earthly images point to an age to come that was “**literally**” “**heaven on earth.**” Bell, *Love Wins* at 33.

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1. Eventually the Jewish hope for an age to come merged with the expectation of a Messiah, who would walk down the Mount of Olives toward the eastern wall of the Temple and resurrect the dead, who would walk out of their graves.
2. As a result, for more than 2000 years, Jews have buried their dead on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, hoping to have ring side seat for the Messiah’s arrival.

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1. Gospel writers adopted the Jewish expectation of eternal life in the age to come.

2. For example, *Luke* quotes Jesus as promising that everyone who sacrifices to follow him will “**receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.**” *Luke* 18:30.

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1. Most scholars believe Jesus had the age to come in mind when he warned: “**The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**” *Mark* 1:15.
2. In *Matthew*, the same warning refers to the coming “**kingdom of heaven**” or, literally, the “**reign of the heavens.**” *Matthew* 3:2 (Young’s Literal Translation).
3. The kingdom of God was expected to be “**on a renewed earth**” and not in the heavens, at the time the exclusive domain of God and the angels. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* at 270.
4. That is why it is the “kingdom of heaven,” not the “kingdom in heaven,” and why Jesus taught his Disciples to pray to God that “**your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**” *Matthew* 6:10.
5. Jesus was praying for the peace and joy of heaven to be established on earth, exactly as the Hebrew prophets had foreseen.
6. As one author writes: “**Every Christian who says the Lord’s prayer—‘Thy kingdom come—confirms his or her belief in God’s eventual reign on earth.’**” Moyahan, *The Faith* at 115.

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1. New Testament writers also described the expected resurrection in terms of bodies rising from *sheol* to resume life on earth.
2. For example, *Matthew* reports that at the moment Jesus died on the cross, “[t]he **tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.**” *Matthew* 27:52.
3. After Jesus’ resurrection, those resurrected bodies “**went into the holy city and appeared to many people.**” *Matthew* 27:53.

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1. *Revelation* states: “**The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.**” *Revelation* 20:13.
2. The righteous would then live forever on the “**new earth.**” *Revelation* 21:1.

3. Any suggestion that the new earth would be in heaven is inconsistent with the very next verse: **“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, dressed for her husband.”** *Revelation 21:2.*
4. The new earth came down from heaven, but was not in it.

#### Slide 13

1. Because of the focus of New Testament writers on the expected age to come, ushered in by the coming of the Messiah, many of the passages used today in connection with eternal life in heaven likely originally described a perfected earth in the age to come.
2. For example, the often-quoted statement of Jesus that he was going to prepare a place in his Father’s house for his Disciples indicates that the place will be available when **“I will come back.”** *John 14:1-4.33.*
3. Another passage makes an express connection between the **“eternal life”** promised by Jesus in *John 3:16* and his return, when the dead will come out of their graves: **“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”** *John 6:40.*

#### Slide 14

1. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he said to the thief dying beside him: **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”** *Luke 23:43.*
2. One recent author called that statement an **“anomalous reference to the afterlife”** because it is inconsistent with the Gospel teachings that the dead would reside in *sheol* until their bodily resurrection at the end of time. Segal, *Life after Death* at 467.
3. But many scholars have pointed out several problems reading Jesus’ statement to indicate that he and the thief would spend the day of their deaths in heaven.
4. In the first place, whatever is the time period of the promise, the place is not heaven, but **“paradise,”** a Persian word originally describing an **“earthly garden”** and not a heavenly realm. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* at 570.
5. More important, on the day of his resurrection, Jesus told Mary Magdalene: **“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”** *John 20:17.*
6. Instead, as we saw two weeks ago, Jesus said he would spend the time between his death and resurrection **“in the heart of the earth,”** in *sheol*. *Matthew 12:40.*
7. In addition, after his resurrection, Jesus said: **“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”** *John 3:13.*

8. So, according to all other Gospel evidence, neither the thief nor Jesus was in heaven on the day of their deaths on the crosses.

9. How then can we explain these famous words of Jesus to the thief?

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1. Although rarely mentioned, the statement of Jesus came in response to a plea of the thief: **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** *Luke* 23:42.

2. An alternative translation noted by the New International Version is **“Jesus, remember me when you come with your kingly power.”**

3. Either way, the plea was almost certainly a request that Jesus remember the thief when Jesus returns to usher in the earthly kingdom of God **“at a future date in time.”** Bell, *Love Wins* at 13.

4. There are no commas in the original Greek of the *Gospel of Luke*. See <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2013/06/the-significance-of-a-comma:-an-analysis-of-luke-23:43>

5. So let’s now look at both the plea and the response, moving the comma one word to the right, where it is in some early translations.

6. The thief says: **“Jesus, remember me when you come with your kingly power.”** *Luke* 23:42.

7. Jesus replies: **“Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise.”** *Luke* 23:43.

8. In other words, today, before you and I both die on these crosses, I assure you that you will be with me when I return and usher in the kingdom of God on a perfected earth.

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1. That reading explains *Luke’s* use of the word “paradise” rather than “heaven.”

2. For the writers of *Luke* and the other Gospels, Jesus would return to usher in the **“age to come,”** seen as a perfect earthly garden, as reflected in this view of paradise on the floor of an ancient church in Syria. *Luke* 18:30.

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1. So, we can confirm the first part of the criticism of the traditional Christian view that the souls of the dead go immediately to heaven—the Bible certainly teaches the resurrection of dead bodies at the end of time, to live forever on a perfected earth.

2. But it would be a mistake to stop with that conclusion, as it is with many conclusions that the Bible always contains a single message.
3. As one author correctly noted: **“There is no one statement that can describe the ‘position’ of the Hebrew Bible on . . . the question of divine punishment and justice.”** Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell* at 176.
4. So, here is the rest of the story.

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1. As we have seen earlier, many scholars believe that *Psalm* 49 was written soon after the exile and sets out perhaps the earliest Jewish belief about life after death.
2. Reporting the fate of the righteous, the Psalmist writes: **“Only, God doth ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He doth receive me.”** *Psalm* 49:15 (Young’s Literal Translation).
3. The Hebrew word translated as “soul” can also be translated as “life.”
4. So here is a suggestion that God would rescue the souls of the righteous from *sheol*, to be with him.
5. Those who claim the Bible says nothing about an immortal soul going to be with God have to ignore the teachings of *Psalm* 49.

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1. A clearer teaching of a soul going to be with God entered the Hebrew Scriptures after the conquest of the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., leading to **“another phase in Hebrew thought.”** Segal, *Life after Death* at 253.
2. From the time of Homer, the ancient Greeks believed that their most righteous or heroic dead would reside forever in Elysium or Elysian Fields, where **“death and disease have no dominion and no one lacks anything.”** Russell, *A History of Heaven* at 21.
3. The destination of the most virtuous dead was also described as the Blessed Isles.
4. Before the time of Plato, exactly where Elysian Fields or the Blessed Isles were located was never entirely clear, but they were assumed to exist on or under the earth.
5. Although Elysian Fields and Blessed Isles resemble the Jewish age to come, there was one important difference—the dead went there immediately after death.

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1. As we have seen before, Plato’s *Phaedo* became one of the most popular books in the Greek-speaking world in the fourth century B.C. and became extraordinarily important to the Greek understanding of the afterlife.

2. Using a variety of arguments, Plato concluded that the human body is animated by an immortal soul.
3. Plato taught that this immortal soul escapes the body at death and is free **“to dwell with the good and wise God,”** where it might **“be born again.”** Cope, *Plato’s Phaedo* at 39, 45.
4. The most virtuous souls are allowed to live forever **“without bodies”** in a **“pure dwelling place above.”** *Id.* at 102.
5. **“After Plato, the Greek world took the notion that the isles of the blessed are in the sky seriously. If the soul is immortal, it must return to the immortal realm.”** Segal, *Life after Death* at 234.

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1. The *Book of Ecclesiastes*, which most scholars believe was written after the conquest by the Greeks, says that at the end of earthly life, **“man goes to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets.”** *Ecclesiastes* 12:5.
2. **“[T]he dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”** *Ecclesiastes* 12:7.
3. Another passage refers to **“the spirit of the sons of man that is going up on high.”** *Ecclesiastes* 3:21 (Young’s Literal Translation).
4. Here in the Hebrew Scriptures, written long before Jesus, is the claim that an animating spirit leaves the body at death and returns to God, exactly as taught by Plato.

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1. Christians who claim that the Bible says nothing about an immortal soul that returns to God usually simply ignore the claims of *Ecclesiastes*, perhaps because of the overall negative tone of the writings or perhaps because of the obvious Greek influence.
2. Interestingly, although some Christians ignore or reject the teachings of *Ecclesiastes*, some Jews today cite *Ecclesiastes* as the basis for their beliefs.
3. For example, in a popular book about Jewish beliefs, the authors state: **“The soul comes from God, and it precedes the existence of the human body. As for where the soul is headed after this life, we are told in Ecclesiastes that the soul returns to God.”** Bank, *101 Things Everyone Should Know about Judaism* at 62.
4. Influential Rabbi Harold Kushner agrees: **“[W]hen a righteous person dies, his reward is that his soul is freed from its earthly body and gets to spend eternity in the presence of God.”** Kushner, *To Life!* at 154.



5. This is the idea some Christians today describe as pagan and inspired by Satan.

Slide 23

1. With the idea of the righteous dead going to the heavens to be with God came a new Jewish understanding of a cryptic passage in *Genesis*, in which God **“hath taken [Enoch]”** and **“he is not.”** *Genesis* 5:24 (Young’s Literal Translation).
2. Although the passage may originally have meant only that Enoch died, some Jewish authors concluded that Enoch had gone to the heavens while alive and began writing detailed descriptions of the heavens, using reports claimed to come from Enoch.
3. *I Enoch* was written by a series of Jewish authors beginning in 300 B.C.
4. In a section of *I Enoch* called “Parables,” Enoch describes a whirlwind that took him off the earth and set him **“down at the end of the heavens.”** *I Enoch* 39:3.
5. While in the heavens, Enoch was shown secrets of the universe, including **“the secrets of the lightning and the thunder, and the secrets of the winds, how they are divided to blow over the earth, and the secrets of the clouds and dew.”** *I Enoch* 41:3.
6. Most important, Enoch reported that he had seen the **“dwelling places of the holy and the resting-places of the righteous.”** *I Enoch* 39:4.
7. Having seen the heavens, Enoch reported: **“There I wished to dwell and my spirit longed for that dwelling place.”** *I Enoch* 39:8.
8. Here is another Jewish writing teaching that the spirit or soul longs to be with God in a place in the heavens reserved for the righteous.

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1. *The Wisdom of Solomon*, usually called simply *Wisdom*, was written by a Jewish author sometime in the second or first centuries B.C.
2. *Wisdom* is part of the Old Testament of both Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians, but part of the Apocrypha for most Protestants.
3. *Wisdom* expressly adopts the view of *Ecclesiastes* that the soul of the righteous leaves the body at the time of death to spend eternity with God.
4. Upon death, the **“unrighteous” “will suffer anguish.”** *Wisdom* 4:16–19.
5. **“But the righteous will live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them.”** *Wisdom* 5:15.
6. This statement **“is one of the first intimations of heaven as the abode of the godly.”** Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* at 74.

## Slide 25

1. Another Pseudepigraphic book, variously called *2 Enoch*, the *Slavonic Enoch* or the *Secrets of Enoch*, was written by a Jewish author before the middle of the first century and therefore before any of the books of the New Testament.
2. *2 Enoch* purports to describe an exploratory trip that Enoch made to the heavens under the guidance of two angels when he was 365 years old, the year that the Bible says he was taken by God.
3. On the trip, the angels take Enoch to 10 heavens, one heaven at a time.
4. In the first heaven, Enoch saw the clouds and the angel's storehouses of snow and dew that would could be dumped on earth. *2 Enoch* 5:1-6:1.
5. In the second heaven, Enoch saw disobedient angels. *2 Enoch* 7:1-5.

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1. Enoch then visited the third heaven, **“prepared for the righteous.”** *2 Enoch* 9:1.
2. As he reports: **“And those men took me thence, and led me up on to the third heaven, and placed me there; and I looked downwards, and saw the produce of these places, such as has never been known for goodness. \* \* \* And in the midst of the trees that of life, in that place whereon the Lord rests, when he goes up into paradise; and this tree is of ineffable goodness and fragrance, and adorned more than every existing thing; and on all sides in form gold-looking and vermilion and fire-like and covers all, and it has produce from all fruits. \* \* \* And paradise is between corruptibility and incorruptibility.”** *2 Enoch* 8:1–10.
3. In *2 Enoch*, the renewed Garden of Eden of the age to come has been relocated to the third heaven, accessible to God, who resides in the tenth heaven. *2 Enoch* 22:1.
4. This description of the third heaven in *2 Enoch* may have been the basis for this statement in *Revelation*: **“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”** *Revelation* 2:7.
5. Enoch reported that the third heaven also includes the **“terrible place”** where sinners are punished, allowing the virtuous to watch the evil suffer. *2 Enoch* 10:1-6.

## Slide 27

1. None of the Gospel writers recited any communications with Jesus after he **“left them and was taken up into heaven.”** *Luke* 24:51.
2. Instead, they based their teachings on what Jesus had said and done on earth.

3. On the other hand, Paul, who never met Jesus before his crucifixion, reported that the risen Jesus “**appeared to me**” on the road to Damascus. *1 Corinthians* 15:8.
4. As a result, Paul wrote: “**I did not receive [the good news that I preached] from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.**” *Galatians* 1:12.

Slide 28

1. In *1 Thessalonians*, probably Paul’s earliest letter, he writes that both the living and the dead “**will be caught up together . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air [to] be with the Lord forever.**” *1 Thessalonians* 4:17.
2. This statement is the basis for ideas about the so-called “rapture.”
3. Although rarely noted, Paul’s idea of the resurrection is fundamentally different from that of the Gospel writers, all of whom wrote later.
4. For Paul, the resurrected dead would not be on a perfected earth, but “**in the clouds,**” which were considered part of the heavens. *2 Enoch* 5:2; *Revelation* 11:12.
5. And Paul’s subsequent letters made clear that his idea of the afterlife existence was also fundamentally different from that of the Gospel writers, who described the risen Jesus as having flesh and bones. *Luke* 24:39.

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1. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul used the term “**spiritual body**” to explain “**how the dead are raised.**” *1 Corinthians* 15:44.
2. This was the beginning of Paul’s efforts to draw a distinction between a physical body that could reside on earth and a spirit that could reside in the heavens with God.
3. His teachings reflected Greek ideas of an immortal soul that returns to God.

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1. We know that Paul was familiar with Greek philosophy because he used that knowledge in trying to find converts among the Greeks in Athens. *Acts* 17:22–28.
2. As we saw earlier, *The Wisdom of Solomon* or *Wisdom*, considered part of the Old Testament by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians, articulates the Greek view of an immortal soul advanced by Plato: “**For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind.**” *Wisdom* 9:14–15.
3. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses a nearly identical image of an earthly body weighing down an immortal soul: “**For we know that if the**

**earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. For while we are still in this tent, we groan and are burdened . . . . Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.”** *2 Corinthians* 5:1, 4, 6.

4. The Greek phrase translated as “**earthly tent**” in both *Wisdom* and *2 Corinthians* is not found elsewhere in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, or the New Testament, leading one authority to conclude that Paul “**had at one time made a close study of [Wisdom].**” Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* at 163.

5. Look carefully at Paul’s words—as long as we are in the physical body, “**we are away from the Lord,**” exactly as Plato taught.

6. The “**eternal house**” of the soul, after the body is “**destroyed,**” is with God “**in heaven,**” exactly as taught by Plato and as reflected in *Ecclesiastes* and *Wisdom*.

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1. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul discloses “**revelations from the Lord,**” using the same Greek word he used in describing the basis for all his teachings. *2 Corinthians* 12:1; *Galatians* 1:12.

2. He writes: “**I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.**” *2 Corinthians* 12:2-4.

3. Many scholars believe the “**man in Christ**” was Paul himself, who did not want to “**boast about myself.**” *2 Corinthians* 12:5.

4. Paul’s description of the “**third heaven,**” which includes “**paradise**” and “**inexpressible things,**” matches the description of the third heaven in *2 Enoch*, which became popular among Greek speakers shortly before Paul began writing.

5. And look at Paul’s uncertainty about the afterlife—he admits that only “**God knows,**” which should humble Christians today who profess certainty in this area.

#### Slide 32

1. Although Paul says in *2 Corinthians* that he did not know if the visit to the third heaven was “**in the body or apart from the body,**” he seems later to have concluded that it was apart from the body.

2. In his letter to the Philippians, written while he was “**in chains**” awaiting execution in Rome, Paul wrote: “**If I am to go on living in this body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between**

**the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”** *Philippians 1:13, 22-24.*

3. Here is direct evidence from Paul, written before any of the Gospels, that the soul **“depart[s]”** the body immediately at death, to **“be with Christ,”** who is in heaven.

4. And yet, one prominent minister recently wrote: **“The Bible never even mentions an immortal soul or life outside the body, yet many Christians now believe in an immortal soul that continues living after our body dies.”**

<https://www.unlearnthelies.com/do-we-have-an-immortal-soul.html>

5. Why do Christians claim that the Bible contains no teachings that the soul goes to heaven at death, to be with God, when Paul clearly taught precisely that in his letters that are now part of the New Testament?

6. At least part of the answer lies in the politics of the early Church, which discounted, if not outright rejected, Paul’s teachings because they were being asserted by other writers claimed to be heretics, including Valentinus and Marcion.

#### Slide 33

1. Valentinus was born in about 100 A.D. and educated in Alexandria, Egypt, where he learned of both Christian teachings and the teachings of the Greek philosophers.

2. Because of **“his charismatic presence and rhetorical power, he acquired a large following among Christians [in Rome].”** Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* at 127.

3. Both his disciples and Clement of Alexandria said Valentinus had learned about Christian teachings from Theudas, a student of Paul.

4. Either Valentinus or his followers wrote the *Gospel of Truth*, which reflects the Greek idea, affirmed by Paul, that the soul leaves the body at death to be with God.

5. In describing the death of Jesus, it says: **“Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take from him.”** *Gospel of Truth 20* in *The Nag Hammadi Library* at 42.

6. That statement may have been based on Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: **“I declare to you brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”** *1 Corinthians 15:50.*

#### Slide 34

1. Marcion was **“by all counts one of the most significant Christian thinkers and writers of the early centuries.”** Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* at 103.

2. His rejected all Christian writings other than a shortened version of *Luke* and 10 letters of Paul, including those in which Paul talked about the soul going to heaven.

3. Like Valentinus, Marcion rejected bodily resurrection as impossible and asserted a spiritual interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus.

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1. The views of Valentinus and Marcion were vigorously opposed by the early Church Fathers, who asserted that the idea of an immortal soul that went to heaven at death was “**subversive of the very essence of Christianity**” because it denied the unique saving power of Jesus. McConnell, *The Evolution of Immortality* at 48.
2. Justin Martyr argued that Christians “**expect to receive our own bodies again, even though they may be dead and buried in the earth.**” *First Apology* ch. 18, 19 in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 52.
3. Tertullian rejected immortality of the soul as an idea that “**even almost all heretics accept,**” arguing “**that anyone who denies the resurrection of the flesh is a heretic, not a Christian.**” Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at 4, 5.
4. Because of Paul’s associations with Marcion and Valentinus and the similarity of their views about an immortal soul, Tertullian labelled Paul “**the apostle of the heretics.**” Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* at 63.

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1. In opposing the claimed heresies of Marcion and Valentinus, the organized church began downplaying Paul in favor Jesus’s original Disciples, who they believed had either written or contributed to the Gospels.
2. Because the Gospels supported the idea of bodily resurrection, that became the favored view of the early church as a way of connecting itself to the Disciples and disassociating itself from the claimed heretics aligned with the teachings of Paul.
3. As Elaine Pagels writes: “**From the second century, the doctrine [of bodily resurrection] has served to validate the apostolic succession of bishops, the basis of papal authority to this day.**” Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at 7.
4. As a result, Peter, who had probably never been to Rome, was declared the first bishop of Rome because of his presumed contributions to the *Gospel of Mark*.

Slide 37

1. Paul’s role in the early church was ignored and his teachings discounted.
2. Christians began to associate this cave in Antioch, where Paul may have preached to the people first called “Christians,” exclusively with Peter.

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1. Early in the third century, Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, wrote a statement of belief directed against various heresies, affirming **“the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord.”** *Against Heresies* 1, 10, 1 in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 84-85.
2. That statement, directed at Marcion and Valentinus, is the basis of the statement in the Apostles’ Creed, affirming belief in the **“resurrection of the body,”** but saying nothing about anyone other than Jesus going to heaven.
3. For Christians then, and those now who view the Apostles’ Creed as a complete statement of Christian beliefs, the failure to mention souls going to heaven precludes that possibility despite the letters of Paul and *Ecclesiastes*.

Slide 39

1. However, despite the efforts of the early Church, Paul’s teachings that the souls of the righteous leave the body at death and ascend to the third heaven did not die.
2. As one author writes: **“If the end is not just around the corner, if the end has not arrived in centuries, then it is no longer enough to think that God will punish the sinners at the end and reward the righteous there. Reward and punishment needs to be closer to the events of earthly existence.”** Segal, *Life after Death* at 488.
3. As a result, unknown Christian authors began writing about souls going to heaven immediately at death, explicitly relying on Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians.

Slide 40

1. In 300 A.D., the *Apocalypse of Paul*, claiming to be written by Paul, described his visit to the **“third heaven.”** *Apocalypse of Paul* 3 in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* at 289.
2. While in heaven, Paul reportedly watched as **“the holy angels took possession of [a man’s] soul, guiding it till it went out of the body”** and then escorting the soul to the heavens. *Apocalypse of Paul* 14.
3. The author claiming to be Paul then describes **“the places of the just”** in the third heaven: **“I saw that the door was of gold, and two columns of gold above it full of gold letters.”** *Apocalypse of Paul* 19.
4. The **“places of the just”** included **“a river flowing with milk and honey, and there were trees planted by the bank of that river, full of fruit.”** *Apocalypse of Paul* 22.
5. Also in this region were the **“souls of the married and those who kept the chastity of their nuptials, controlling themselves.”** *Id.*

6. North of the city, **“there was a river of wine, and there I saw Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, Lot and Job and other saints.”** *Apocalypse of Paul* 27.
7. Here we have a description close to the heaven many Christians imagine today: golden gates, rivers flowing with wine and recognizable souls of the dead.
8. As Bart Ehrman notes, the *Apocalypse of Paul* **“was responsible for propagating many of the wide-spread notions of heaven . . . that have come down even till today.”** Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* at 288.

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1. The *Ascension of Isaiah* purports to be an account of the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, who was allowed to escape his body to take a tour of the seven heavens. *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:5 in [www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ascension.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ascension.html)
2. In this tour, the seventh heaven was at the pinnacle, which is the basis for our saying that someone is in “seventh heaven.”
3. In the seventh heaven, Isaiah was shown the souls of **“the holy Abel and all the righteous.”** *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:7.
4. The angels in the seventh heaven then told the soul of Isaiah about the future, explaining that Jesus would be sent to earth, where **“they will crucify Him on a tree, and will slay Him not knowing who He is.”** *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:14.
5. Jesus would then overcome death and ascend to heaven, at which time **“many of the righteous will ascend with Him, whose spirits do not receive their garments till the Lord Christ ascend and they ascend with Him.”** *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:18.
6. Here again we see the image of souls ascending to heaven to be with God in an early Christian writing, consistent with the teachings of Paul.

Slide 42

1. The growing acceptance of Paul’s view of the soul going directly to be with God at death did not supplant the view of an eventual resurrection of a physical body—the support for that view in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels was simply too strong.
2. So, as we have noted before, Christian theologians simply combined the ideas.
3. In his famous book, *The City of God*, Augustine wrote: **“Souls are judged when they depart from the body, before they come to that judgment which must be passed on them when united to the body and are tormented or glorified in that same flesh which they were inhabited.”** Turner, *The History of Hell* at 74.



4. Said another way: **“Immortality of the soul now; resurrection of the body at the last trumpet.”** Segal, *Life after Death* at 583.

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1. Augustine suggested that the judgment of the soul at death and the judgment of the body at the time of the resurrection might be different.

2. But Jerome, his contemporary who translated much of the Bible into Latin, claimed that the judgment of the soul at death was **“eternal and unalterable.”** Russell, *A History of Heaven* at 80.

3. He also taught that the souls in heaven **“would meet those whom we loved on earth, along with Mary and all those who love God.”** *Id.*

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1. Both then and now, this is all most Christians needed to know.

2. Going to heaven is what matters; whether there is a later resurrection of the body at the end of time is essentially irrelevant, if not undesirable.

3. After all, who wants to give up life in heaven with God and the angels to return to life in a body on earth, no matter how perfect the body or the earth?

4. As one recent author, a retired minister, writes: **“I now believe at the end of this earthly life, Christians are immediately brought into eternity with God. It was not that way in Old Testament days.”** Hill, *Christianity’s Great Dilemma* at 80.

Slide 45

1. So, as we have now seen, the idea of souls going to heaven at death is unquestionably based on Biblical teachings, including the very writings of Paul that are essential to so many Christian and especially Protestant beliefs.

2. And Paul claimed to have gotten his information from communications with Jesus in heaven, something no other New Testament writer claimed.

3. But how can Christians take seriously the promise of eternal life with God if not even Christians can agree about how or when that promise will be realized?

4. Perhaps the best that we can do is look back on the words of Paul as he contemplated whether to try to continue living or to give in to the forces of Rome that were trying to kill him.

5. In writing to the Philippians that death might be preferable to life, he hoped that upon his death he would **“be with Christ.”** *Philippians* 1:23.

6. In the words of one author, Paul was “**more concerned with the company than the place.**” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* at 270.

7. As we end this series, I leave you with that thought.

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