

## Heaven and hell: Part One

Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible, and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at [bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com). With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

Okay, this is going to be the first of a four-part series on the biblical ideas, or topics, of Heaven and hell. [Tim laughs] So very simple—nothing controversial here, folks. The reason I did the series—this was actually quite a number of years ago, but I still feel good about most everything I said and how I framed it—I would probably tweak a few things differently—but in my years of local church pastoral ministry and in my own, just, personal journey of growing as a follower of Jesus, the ideas of Heaven and hell—I didn't come with a blank slate when I was a new Christian, in my twenties, to these concepts. I had already been provided, through media and—Christian religious media and non-religious media—with images and ideas about Heaven and hell in the Bible. Most of them were ridiculous, but I didn't know it at the time, because they were all passed off as "this is what Christians believe" or "this is what the Bible teaches."

So personally, I had a long journey of trying to sort this out, because these popular ideas of Heaven as, like, "the golden city in the clouds" and "pearly gates," and hell as a subterranean "torture chamber" for bad people after death, and so on. These ideas are very hard to get out of our imaginations, if they're there in the first place.

And if you just read the Bible and track with the words "Heaven" and "hell," first of all, you'll learn that "Heaven" and "hell" are actually never used anywhere in the same sentence in the Bible. The opposite of "Heaven" in the Bible is not "hell;" it's "Earth." And

that's why one of the first BibleProject videos that we made in 2014 was on exploring the biblical vision of what "the heavens" are. It was called the Heaven and Earth video.

And so in this video, I'm just going after a practical question that I had—that many, many followers of Jesus have—and that many people who don't follow Jesus, but are trying to figure out what on earth Christians believe and why. The concepts of Heaven and hell are extremely convoluted and blurry in our cultural setting. So this is really just an effort to clear the ground and help people rebuild these concepts.

It was a teaching that I did—it went from, like, eight p.m. until—I don't know—midnight or something. So there's four lectures that are forty-five to fifty minutes each. And most of it is just reading biblical texts aloud, starting on page one of the Bible and working all the way through, and understanding the concepts of "death" and "the grave" and "eternal life" and "eternal death," and all this.

And I'll just say this: prepare to be surprised. I was surprised as I dug into this and brought it all together for myself. And I find that people are both surprised, and, also, have their imaginations ignited when they encounter what the Bible is actually trying to tell us about these concepts. So that's my preface for the series as a whole.

This first episode, we actually just tackle pages one through three of the Bible. What I found was: half of the misunderstandings about the concepts of final judgment or "Heaven and hell," and so on, start *not* with the teachings of Jesus or the book of Revelation—actually, they all start in deep misunderstandings about pages one through three of the Bible.

The very concepts of "life" and "death" are explored and developed deep—in depth—on pages one through three of the Bible. And if we get those pages wrong, we will misunderstand what the rest of the biblical story is going to be about. And so this first lecture is about the concepts of "life" and "death" and "human existence" on pages one through three of the Bible, which will lay the groundwork for our understanding of "eternal life" and "eternal death" throughout the rest of the Bible. So let's dive in, and hopefully this is helpful for you.

[Musical break (4:50—4:58)]

I think when most of us think about the issues of Heaven and hell, a lot of our images, our ideas about Heaven and hell, have been supplied to us by a whole host of different sources—by whatever kinds of images you were subjected to growing up—like, if you grew up in and around church, or hearing stories or watching crazy movies.

So I think I watched the 1970s *Left Behind* movies. I think I was, maybe, in fifth grade—totally frightened, you know what I mean? Like disturbed me for years. If you don't know what I'm talking about—if you've never seen them—you're fortunate. Don't ever watch them. It's a waste of your time and it'll freak you out. And so for some people, it's inspired by medieval art, or whatever.

But for better or worse, the images, the ideas that come to our minds when we think about "Heaven" and when we think about "hell," *some* of them come to us from the Bible. But in our cultural setting, many, many, many ideas that we have about Heaven and hell are just straight up wrong. They're just wrong.

They may be purported to be coming from the Bible, but when you actually go to those passages and read them in context, like we'll do tonight—you, "Oh, that says something different than what I thought it was saying." There's one thing—this is just [a] caveat for the night here: if you are *comfortable* with what you believe and with your worldview right now, this is not the night for you. So the Bible will mess up all of your theology and what you believe, right? And so if you're ready to submit to the Scriptures and to submit to what God is saying here tonight, prepare to be surprised. I'm sure there'll be surprises. I'm perpetually surprised as I dig in deeper and study these issues.

So the traditional view, as I, at least, would represent it on a diagram [Referring to visual aid]. This is the view that I grew up with as a little kid, or whatever. And it goes something like this: Here we are, cruising along in our earthly life. You know, it's this physical world—it's not the worst place in the world. It's corrupted by sin. And it's mostly bad. And we're all going to die.

And then we're going to come to a "password moment." And that "password moment" depends on whether or not you did a set of "key" rituals at some point in your life—like saying a certain prayer in the form of, some of you know it as, like, "the sinner's prayer," something like that. Or for some people, depending on your background, there's a "password moment" that depends on baptism—if you ever come from, like, a Catholic background or perhaps a Lutheran background.

Some kind of ritual, whatever it is—and everything that hinges after that—your life after death—*hinges* on the "password moment." *Did you undergo the ritual of some kind?* And then from there, you are ushered, immediately, into life after death. And that life after death is some sort of otherworldly non-physical place of either eternal bliss—singing songs on a cloud forever or something like that—or in some sort of non-physical, yet still physical—because fire, [a] place of torture, eternal torment, and so on.

And I think that's basically the outline that most people have in their heads—with a broad brush, adjusting little details here and there. Nods of affirmation? This is kind of our basic outline. So here's what I would say about this outline. There are parts and

pieces of it that come from the Bible. But it is completely inadequate to everything that the Scriptures do have to say about Heaven and hell.

And what I find is, among peers of people that I knew—people who've totally walked away from their Christian faith, specifically because of objections they have to the idea of hell—and as I talk to different friends and begin to probe a little deeper, I find the objections that they have are objections to misunderstandings about Heaven and hell—and there is plenty to object to. And it's difficult—about what the Bible is actually saying about hell—but I think it's important to remove all the obstacles that we can.

And so what I'm going to present to you tonight, best as I can discern it—this may seem presumptuous, but there you go—is what I'm going to call not the “traditional” view, but the “biblical” view. And essentially—let me, kind of, wrap it up all in a summary here, and then what we're going to do is take it piece by piece and look at biblical passages.

And instead of just putting the references [to] biblical passages, the reason why this handout is twelve pages long is because I've actually included the text of all of the relevant biblical passages in the boxes. So there you go. And we're just going to read them and talk about them together.

So here's the basic outline, here, of what I think is the biblical view of what's happening, here. So human beings are made in the image of God—representations of the Creator to the world. And the way that humans truly fulfill that vocation is by intimacy—close relationship, trust, obedience—to the Creator. It's what we're *made* for. And how well does all this go over? Okay, right, so not so well. About a page and a half in, humanity takes a terrible turn. And everything hinges on the choice of sin and selfishness.

And the Bible links, very closely, the sin of humanity with the death—our experience of death. Now again—we're going to get into this—this is truly important because the word “death,” in the Bible, is much broader than what we think of “death” just as, simply, “biological death.” There is relational, spiritual, and physical death. The Bible sees all of this wrapped up into one.

And so all of humanity is set on this trajectory, here—can you guys see my little cursor up there?—it's set on this trajectory, here, of what you call the “living dead.” We're zombies, right? So physical death—the fear, the pain, the sense that, yes, biological death is built into our world. We have a sense [that], for humans, there ought to be something more. This is not how things ought to end. And the biblical view is that death, for humans, is an invader and an enemy in God's good world. It's a frustration of God's ultimate plan for human beings.

And so, basically, Jesus comes onto the scene—through taking on sinful humanity, dying in our place, and resurrecting from the dead, there opens up a whole new way of being human—salvation. And essentially, the choice after Jesus that lies before all of us

is: do we want to continue on in our state of “living death,” or do we want to enter into eternal life?

One of the most important things I want to highlight here tonight is in the Bible: hell and eternal life are *not* only future realities, they are *present* realities that go on into the future. In other words, hell is not some “surprise twist” at the end of the game. Hell is the end trajectory of your entire life. And if the shape of your life is “away from God’s grace”—away from God’s love and his goodness—then you’re going to get precisely what you want. And death is simply another step as you go along that trajectory.

On the flip side, eternal life is something that begins now, and Jesus makes this very clear. And so whatever Heaven is, it’s a future continuation of something we are supposed to have access to and experience right now. So that’s what I’m doing with these two lines right here.

And this all happens before we die. Whether we live in “living death” or whether we live in eternal life—this happens before we die. We have physical death and then, kind of, the theological term for what comes after, “life after death”—and what’s funny is—what’s called the “intermediate state”—what’s funny about this is that this, for the most part, is—that was all very interesting. So it seems like I understand how my computer works, but I actually don’t, and so that’ll be evident tonight.

So what’s called “the intermediate state”—there’s actually very, very few passages in the Bible that address what happens after death, immediately after death. For believers, there’s just a small handful—perhaps about three or four passages. They don’t give any detail at all except to say that “if I belong to Christ, after death, I am immediately ushered into the presence of Christ. I am ‘with Christ.’” That’s all that the Bible says. And it says that’s a *temporary* state. That is not the endgame.

Same thing goes for people who have rejected Christ, or rejected what God reveals about himself to them: that they go to the grave—or the Greek word is *hades*. And about what happens to unbelievers after death, before the next stage? There is actually *zero* detail in the Bible. We’re just told they go to “the grave.” We’ll unpack those passages later.

What the Bible is mostly interested in is not life after death. It’s life *after* “life after death,” as one theologian puts it. Did you guys catch that? The Bible is *mostly* interested in life *after* “life after death.” And life *after* “life after death” is what happens upon Jesus’s return, and upon bringing final judgment and setting all things right in our world, and the final resurrection—the final resurrection.

And the Scriptures—it is pretty clear that resurrection is not a fate *only* for believers in the future, but literally every human will meet their reembodyed—be reembodyed in some sort of transformed, physical existence. And if that sounds like sci-fi to you, you

know—this is one of those “truth is stranger than fiction” kind of moments. Because our whole faith is built on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead in a transformed, physical experience as a precursor to what all of humanity is destined for.

And essentially, what happens is that—based on the trajectory of your life before you die, after you die, your fate—in the age to come, in the new creation—is determined by your life trajectory before then. And so in God’s new creation—in a renewed, restored Heaven and Earth—we’re told about two different kinds of people, two different fates, two different stories: those who reign and rule with God in exploring and flourishing in this new world, and then those who exist in a state of . . . and fill in the image.

Because the Bible uses lots of images to talk about these people who are on this trajectory, right here: images of fire, images of darkness, images of remorse, sadness, and separation from the relationship with God. There’s a whole host of images—and we’ll explore those as they come along when we get to that point. So that is the biblical view.

Now you might say: “The traditional view, is it wrong?” Well, it’s not so much that it’s wrong; it’s just that it’s not enough. And what the Bible is telling us is actually a much more profound, nuanced way of thinking about the human story and about our human stories as individuals.

So that’s the big picture—my goal is just to lay out the whole map. So what we’re going to do is take each part of the moments of the story, read key biblical passages, unpack them, and there you go. How you guys doing? Okay, great, me too, me too. All right, let’s begin at the beginning, shall we? We shall.

Genesis chapter 1: the life of the image bearers. To understand the future destiny of human beings, you *have* to understand the constitution—the makeup—of human beings. What are we, and what are we made for? And here we need to address a huge misunderstanding that *most* people have about what the Bible teaches about human beings. And that’ll come up in the course of—as we’re reading these passages.

Okay, Genesis, chapter 1. Genesis, chapter 1, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man’”—and let’s take a vote here. For how many in the room does the English word “man” mean “mankind” or “humanity”? Okay. For how many does the English word “man” mean a “male human being”? *Interesting*. Oh, really?

Now, not everyone raised their hand. Not everyone raised their hand. Okay, well, I’m the first to raise my hand for the second one. I hear the English word “man,” and I think “a male human being.” Really? You guys, really? *Wow*. Okay—all right. So I was teaching a freshman class at UW about three years ago, and I asked that question, and *everybody* raised their hand—that “man” means “male human being.” So a generational thing—I’m not sure. Anyway, I don’t know.

So “humanity”—I prefer the word “humanity.” “‘Let us make humanity in our image, in our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created”—actually, what are we doing? Come on, some of you guys know the Hebrew word. Yeah, exactly right, *’adam*. *Adam*. “God created *’adam* in his own image, in the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created . . . them.”

The reason why this is important is: are only male human beings reflectors of the divine image? *No*. This is fascinating: male and female—*one* species, but diverse in identity. Somehow, the diversity in unity is a reflection of the creator, God. You could say this is the “seedbed” out of which the idea of the Trinity—God is one, but yet he images himself in two different ways in humanity, in male and female. Both reflect something unique about the creator God.

“God created *’adam* in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the air, over every living thing that moves along the ground.’”

A couple of things here. So the Hebrew word “image” is the Hebrew word—do you see it on your handout? Anyone want to take a crack at pronouncing that? *Tselem*. *Tselem*. *Tselem* is the word there. *Tselem* is—[referring to visual aid] actually, that’s a statue of an Assyrian king. He lived during the kind of later-kingdom period of the kingdom of Judah. And that is his *tselem*. That’s his *tselem*. It’s a statue—an image. In Hebrew, this is the word also for the word [for] “idol.”

Were the ancient Israelites supposed to make *tselem* to represent the God of Israel? No, that’s the first commandment: “Don’t make *any* image to represent God.” But can God make images of himself? Sure—humans can’t make images of God, but God can make images of God.

And what are the images of God? So this is really profound. This is: God puts representatives—images of himself—in the world. And what, exactly, that means, you know . . . theologians have been debating that for a long time. But there’s something repeated twice here in this passage, here, about the vocation of human beings. Do you spot it? It’s repeated twice.

What are we supposed to do? What are we here for? “To rule.” Okay—so it’s the idea that human beings have a unique capacity and vocation. Just as the creator, throughout Genesis, chapter 1, is bringing order and purpose and beauty to the world, “he’s ruling.” He’s bringing flourishing into a place of darkness and chaos. It was formless and void at the beginning of chapter 1—he makes a garden by the end of chapter 1.

He creates images—representative beings who will represent him and what the creator is all about. And what is the creator all about? Well, the creator's all about doing the kinds of things that he's doing in Genesis chapter 1.

So this is the metaphor: ruling. They're *royal* representatives of the creator. And so this is the image given of human beings right from the very first chapter of the Bible. And so this is why the stakes are high—this is why the stakes are high for what happens with human beings.

Human beings are unique—different from animals. We obviously share a lot with animals, and you look in Genesis chapter 1—and we come from the dirt, and we go back to the dirt, just like the animals. God blessed the animals, just like he blesses human beings. But this is a unique trait that human beings have: this vocation to steward, to manage, to rule over all of creation.

And so what happens if this goes wrong? What happens if the image-bearers abandon their vocation and reject the wisdom of the creator? Well then the whole—all of creation—is going to be thrown “off-kilter.” The stakes are really, really, really high.

So the story of Heaven and hell actually begins right here. This choice—it's this question before the humans: are you going to live according to your design and purpose? Or are you going to live completely contrary to your design and purpose? And that is really the two trajectories right there.

And what does it mean to *live* in a way that *negates* your very purpose and existence as a human being? Well, that would be a great definition of hell: an existence that is completely against and separated from what you were actually made for. So that's Genesis 1's way of getting at the issue here.

Genesis chapter 2 has a different way of talking about the role and makeup of human beings. And this one has a special relevance to thinking about Heaven and hell. So this is the text here: Genesis 2:7-8, “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. Now, the Lord God had planted a garden at Eden, and there he put the man that he had formed.”

Okay, so let's pause real quick here. Genesis chapter 1 didn't tell us anything about *how* or what human beings are made of, or anything like that. We're just told they're “image bearers.” Genesis 2 gives us another take on the makeup of human beings. And here it's a very “earthy” image. [Tim laughs] Well, that was a pun, but I didn't intend it to be a pun. Did you guys catch that? You caught it before I did. There you go.

So it's a very—and by “earthy,” what I mean is: does God actually have hands? How many of you have ever seen a children's Bible depicting this narrative right here, this

moment in the story right here? What's the image? Yeah, it's of, like, two huge hands floating, like, that are disconnected, like, forming dirt. Has anybody seen that children's Bible? That's the one. [Tim laughs] Okay, well, that's the one that I had as a little kid, and it freaked me out. I was like, "What is that all about?" So what's going on here?

So this is a common feature in biblical narratives. It's called *anthropomorphism*. It's way too many syllables, but it's a great way to impress people at a party. [Sounding out while writing] *An-thro-po-morph-ism*, right? *Anthropomorphism*. So "anthro-" comes from *anthropos*, "human." "Morphism" means "in the shape of." This is a way of describing language in the Bible that describes God in the shape of human features.

So Moses has this strange experience on Mount Sinai of seeing God's back. His *back*—because if you see God's face—*toast*. So does God actually have a face? Does God actually have a back? No, this is human beings doing our best with language to describe God.

So Ezekiel sees "the divine glory," and what does he see? Not a face or a back. He sees, like, a lion and an ox and a human, and a wheel full of eyes and wings, and a chariot and a throne and a—right? So you're like, "Holy cow." So we're at the limits of language. And so the biblical authors often use imagery that's very "earthy." It's *anthropomorphic*—it's *human-like*. And I think the author just takes it for granted; like, he doesn't actually have floating hands, getting down here in the dirt.

Okay, so "the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground." What's the core idea here? Human beings come from and return to—*where*? Yeah, this is the idea. We go back to dirt, and dissolve, and so on, when we die—we're deeply connected to the earth. We are "earthlings," *literally*.

But we are not simply earthlings. There is a divine "spark," as it were. And what's the divine spark? It's the breath. It's the breath: "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." And so here's the idea—here's the makeup of humanity from Genesis, chapter 2. We are "dirt and divine breath." That's the idea: dirt and divine breath.

Now, when I say, in modern English, when I say "human beings have spirits"—"every human being has a spirit"—or even more so, [the] King James translation of these verses right here? I'll throw this up in my Bible program: the King James of Genesis 2:7, "The Lord God formed the man of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living . . ."? What is a "soul," in contemporary English? When I say, "You have a soul." Or after death, what goes on to exist—at least in the common view? Your soul or your spirit.

So this is huge. This is huge—especially for how you think about Heaven and hell. The idea that humans have a non-physical, some sort of existence—some sort of part to us, it's our non-physical part—that is meant to live forever, and you call this a "spirit" or a

“soul,” this is an idea that’s completely *foreign* to the Bible. Let me unpack what I mean here.

So humans are dirt and spirit—it’s God’s spirit. So this is God’s “breath”—this is his animating “life energy.” And you can go to different passages in the Bible—we’ll see them in a minute, here, when we talk about death—it’s God’s spirit that animates all living things. The psalmist—Psalm 104—he says, “When a deer is out giving birth in a field, and there’s new life coming into the world, that’s God’s *ruakh* breathing new life into the world.” Animals have God’s *ruakh* animating them. It’s sort of—it’s the energy—it’s the *hum* and the *buzz* of all creation.

That’s what’s going on here. There’s a divine energy that sustains human beings. We are “dirt and divine breath.” Now the King James translates it as “living soul.” The word they translate [as] “soul,” this word right here, is *nephesh*. Won’t you say it with me? *Nephesh. Nephesh*, okay. This often gets translated as “soul” in our English Bibles. And then we usually import a Greek philosophical idea of the “immortal, non-physical part” of human beings that lives on forever—and we import that idea into the Bible whenever we see the word “soul.”

But look at something like—and I reference it right here—Psalm 42, verse 1. I’ll just put it up here on the screen, here. So we’ll read it in the NIV here: “For the director of music, a *maskil* of the sons of Korah. [Singing, with a laugh in voice] As the deer *panteth* for the water—” you know that one? “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my *soul* pants for you, O God.”

So is he saying, “Well, my . . . physical part isn’t necessarily thirsty, but my non-physical, immortal part *is* panting for you”? That doesn’t make any sense. What does he mean here? It’s poetry—what’s he mean here? “My soul pants for you.” What does he mean here? “In the deepest core of my identity—my being—who I am, in my guts, I long for God’s presence.” That’s *nephesh*.

*Nephesh*—actually, the literal meaning of *nephesh* is “throat,” because it’s where you breathe, it’s where you drink—everything that keeps you alive as a human being comes in and out of your *nephesh*.

It’s an idea—I have a quote here from an Old Testament theologian: “A soul is the living individual, not in the sense of a separate, indestructible, spiritual substance, but in the sense of a concrete, needy, physical life.” And so the best way to sum this up—I didn’t coin this phrase, but I wish I would have because it’s clever—in the Bible, human beings do not *have* souls; human beings *are* souls. We are “dirt and divine breath.”

All right, now the Bible *does* talk about that human beings do have a material and immaterial makeup, and that after our physical death, our *immaterial*—we do still exist in some sort of immaterial, non-material state. But is that the way humans were made to

exist? Answer? What are humans made to exist as? Dirt and divine breath. We're made to be physical—we're made to have bodies. Humans are *not* made to exist apart from our bodies.

And so it's *death* that introduces this unnatural schism between the material and the immaterial. And that's a schism that is remedied—that's changed—at the resurrection. And so it's this temporary state of separation—of our material and immaterial, for a temporary time—brought back together again. That's the biblical view.

Human beings were never made to exist apart from our bodies, and we don't have some sort of immaterial, immortal "goes-on-living-forever" part of us. That's not what the Bible says. It says "we're dirt and divine breath." And there is a part of us that exists after death, but that's unnatural—that's not the way God meant it to be. He meant us to be embodied physical beings.

All right, how many did I just . . . ? [Tim laughs] I kind of spun your brain a little bit right there, right? Okay, but that's—I mean, we'll see this. That's what Genesis 2 is saying: "dirt and divine breath." Okay, so let's dive back into this next point, and we'll unpack this a little more.

Genesis, chapter 2, verse 15 and 17—15 through 17, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden"—to do what?—"work and to take care of it." Is work a result of the curse in the fall? No, it's not. You might feel like it. It's been a Friday night, and you're like, "Man, that was a horrible week," whatever—"that was absolutely a curse." So I can understand that.

This is Genesis 2's way of talking about the ruling of Genesis 1. What does it mean for human beings to "rule" and steward over God's good world? To work—to show up on Monday morning, and to do your duty and to fulfill your role in society and whatever. And you know—this text was written a long time ago by people who were mostly agricultural farmers—so, farming is the idea here, in Genesis chapter 2, "to work and to take care of it."

"And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You're free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely? You will surely die.'" Okay, now there's a lot of things going on here that we don't have time to unpack, but not all of it's relevant to the idea of Heaven and hell.

Whatever the tree is—whatever it represents—is it symbolic? [Tim laughs] Is it "magical fruit"? Whatever's involved here—it's a decision of trust. A decision of trust: "Will the human beings *trust* that the creator has the authority and wisdom to define what is right and wrong? And the human beings, are they going to go out and work and take care of

the earth according to the creator's definition of right and wrong? Or are they going to seize the opportunity to define right and wrong for themselves?"

This is about humanity's moral choice—it's before all humanity: Trust the creator's definitions of right and wrong, and adjust my views of right and wrong to the creator's, or I'm going to ask God to adjust to my view of right and wrong. That's the choice here.

And look at what God says here: if human beings take into their own responsibility the authority to define right and wrong and live accordingly, what will that result in? It will surely result in death.

So again, what is? Death—human death, at least at this point—is a foreign element to the human story. Human beings are also given access to the tree of *life*—which is the original intended destiny of human beings, right? It's for life. But we can choose death if we want to. This is the first statement of the choice given to humanity here: disobedience, rebellion, and mistrust result in death.

Now, human beings—chapter 3—eat, right? The woman takes it [and] gives it to the husband—eat the fruit. What *doesn't* happen on the day that they eat it? Do they end up, like, in a grave, "six feet under," in the story? No, Adam goes on, and he lives a long, full life, and then he dies—and the same with Eve.

So unless the author is inept and has, like—didn't think about, "Oh yeah, Adam's actually going to live a long time in the story," so I should . . . Or the word "death" here is something larger, deeper—has more facets to it than merely biological death. And if you pay careful attention to the story, you see that death has more facets to it than just biological death. So I think there's three components of death that are at work here in the biblical storyline.

The first thing that happens—and actually I didn't tell you this. If you have your Bibles open now, turn to Genesis chapter 3 with me. How you guys doing? All right, Genesis 3. So chapter 3 is the story of the human being—Genesis 3 is the story of the human beings seizing the opportunity, the authority, to define right and wrong.

And look at the woman. "The serpent said to the woman"—serpent's crafty. What is the serpent? We don't have time to talk about that. "He said to the woman, 'Did God really say you must not eat from any tree of the garden?'" Did God actually say that? "Don't eat from any tree of the garden"? No, he said, "Don't eat from *one* tree," right? So the serpent—the deceiver—he's twisting God's words.

The woman said, "No. No, we can eat fruit from the trees in the garden. But God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not touch it or you will . . .'"—she repeats God's words.

“No, you won’t die, you won’t die,’ the serpent says. ‘For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.’” So there’s a tragic irony in what the serpent says here. What’s the tragedy? Genesis chapter 1—what are human beings? They’re already like God. They were made to image and reflect God into the world.

But you will be “like God” in taking his authority to know good and evil. “The woman saw the fruit . . . the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eye, desirable for gaining wisdom . . . took some, ate it, gave it to her husband with her . . . he ate it.”

What’s the first result of sin, selfishness and rebellion in humanity? The first result? First casualty? Is it relationship with God, that we’re told? No—not what happened here. They, both of them: “the eyes of both of them were open . . . they realized they’re naked.” They were naked and not ashamed—full relational openness and intimacy—images of the creator God—who is himself a community of love in the Trinity—and the humans mirrored that in that relational intimacy.

But then sin and rebellion enter in—what’s the first casualty? What you call “relational death” is what I call it here. This is an isolation—a death in the intimacy and openness that we’re made to experience with other people. This is a form of death. “And so they sowed fig leaves together for themselves. They made coverings for themselves.” Why? The implication is: there’s shame. There’s a death in the relationship.

And this is Genesis 3’s way of getting at what every single one of us longs for, more than anything else: to be known, *fully known by other people*—fully accepted and loved and cared for, and—no secrets, no dark “closets” that have “skeletons” in them.

That’s what each of us longs for, even if we’ve forgotten it or suppressed that longing. And that longing that almost never gets realized—and I think never does get realized this side of Jesus’s return—is because of what Genesis 3 is getting here: it’s a result of sin. It’s relational death, spiritual death.

So the most important thing to pay attention to in the story is that they don’t *physically* die on the day that they eat it, but keep on reading here. Verse 8, “The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. They hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you? Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was . . . I was afraid’—there’s fear.

So there is also another aspect of relational death, but it’s death in relationship to the creator. There’s now an isolation [between] the image-reflecting creature and the creator. And so—give it whatever name you want. In, kind of, modern theology, it’s called “spiritual death.” There’s some sort of death here, that we’re “dead to God”—not in, like, some “*Godfather* way,” that God says, “You’re dead to me.” [Tim laughs] It’s not

like that. It's like there's a genuine chasm—schism in the relationship—that's irreparable.

And so Paul the Apostle's way of getting this is in Ephesians chapter 2, and he says, "And you all were dead in your trespasses and sins." Does he mean physical death here—can he possibly mean physical death? No, because he said "you're dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked"—or, this is Paul's metaphor for "life as a journey" or "life as a journey on the path." "In which you *lived*" would also be a good English translation. "In which you lived"—you're in "living death." You're in "living death."

That's what I was trying to get at with this picture, right here, is that sin and rebellion put human beings on a trajectory of "you're physically alive, but you're spiritually dead." This is a core claim that the Bible makes about our whole world, is that apart from God doing something about this, we're the living—we're zombies. That's what we are, right?

So, you know, we would appear—we would all get cameos in *I Am Legend* or something—*Zombies in New York*, or something. Did you guys see *I Am Legend*? [Tim laughs] Okay, it wasn't that great, but anyhow, so—it's the living dead.

Who's behind the cause of "living death" in the world? "You were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked" or "lived, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air." This is Paul's kind of mysterious reference to the personal form of evil that's behind all of the evil that we experience in our world. It's a spirit of evil that is now working in those who are disobedient. So it's a spiritual death—a *spiritual* death that's taking place in Genesis 3.

But then also, physical death is in the mix here. And the classic one is: later on, in Genesis 3—you have it on your handout here—"By the sweat of your face," God says to the man, "you will eat bread until you return to"—where?—"to the ground." Why? Because Genesis 2, "From the dirt you were taken. You are dust, and to dust you will return."

So does that mean that human beings, who are "dirt and divine breath," does that mean that our existence is over? Done? Annihilated? *No, no*. There is an immaterial part to us. It was never *meant* to exist apart from our body, but God sustains it until it is re-embodied.

And this is talked about in just a handful of biblical passages. So Ecclesiastes chapter 12 says, "Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before your back gives out, before your eyes lose focus, before your hearing goes, before your knees hurt"—whatever—"before the days of trouble come, before the dust returns to the ground it came from . . ." What passages does the author Ecclesiastes have in mind here? He's got Genesis 3 on the brain, right? He's probably reading it the night before—right?—

when he went to bed. “. . . Before the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the *ruakh* returns to the God who gave it.”

So this is the author of Ecclesiastes’s way of saying “the physical death of humanity, it’s not good. It’s part of the days of trouble. It’s not what we’re made for. But it’s not the end. The *ruakh*—that identity of who you are—is sustained by God’s Spirit, and somehow it’s reconnected to God’s presence.” That’s all he says. This is a hint—little hints here.

Job chapter 34 says, “If God were to take back his *ruakh* and withdraw his *ruakh*, all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to”—Job has also been reading Genesis chapter 3. So again, it’s this idea: is the *ruakh* our *ruakh*, our spirit? Is that what Job is talking about here? No, it’s God’s *ruakh* that sustains and animates that immaterial part of us that was never meant to exist apart from our bodies. God has a future—despite sin and rebellion and the curse of death—God has a future, and it’s sustained by his *ruakh*. There’s some sort of immaterial part of us. That’s all we’re told. That’s all we’re told in the Hebrew Bible.

Key implications: Are humans, in and of themselves, made to live forever, based on Genesis 1, 2, and 3? Answer—in and of ourselves, are we inherently immortal? Answer, *No*.

So eternal life, immortality, is a *gift* from God. In the world of Genesis 1 through 3, that’s embodied in the tree of life—right? So you go to Genesis, chapter 3:24—God has a conversation with himself—you can do that if you’re the Trinity. “The Lord God said”—actually, here I want to read King James—take that away. “The Lord God said, ‘Look, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. And now he might stretch out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever.’”

Is this good for humanity to live forever in a state of spiritual, relational death? Answer: *No*. So he’s cast out from the garden, from the divine presence. In other words, banishment from God’s presence—from the possibility of immortality—is a gift—it’s a grace, because God doesn’t want us to exist eternally in our sin.

So humans are not inherently immortal. It’s a gift. It’s a gift. And the human soul—whatever that immaterial part of us is—is not immortal in and of itself. It’s only immortal inasmuch as God’s *ruakh* is bound to it and sustains it—keeps it, preserves it for a future re-embodiment.

So death brings this unnatural “schism” between our material and immaterial—it’s not part of God’s plan. It’s not—being apart from our body is not a desirable state. And even Paul says it’s “to be with Christ,” but he knows that there’s something better coming after that.

According to Genesis chapters 2 and 3, human immortality is a gift from God that we forfeited through sin, and the rest of the story is: how is God going to return that gift? How is God going to fulfill the original design-plan for humanity despite our sin and rebellion? The current state of the story, then, is: all humanity exists in a state of “living death” because of our sin. And that’s the problem that has to be solved.

So, unanswered, after reading Genesis 1 through 3, is: what is that immaterial part? Where does it go? What exactly is it? How is God going to reverse this problem? How is God going to get people back into bodies again, in a creation that’s not ruined by sin? That’s what the whole rest of the storyline is about.

[EMSB theme fades in]

All right, I hope that was helpful for you. From here, the rest of the three lectures on Heaven and hell are going to move into the ideas of “death” and “the grave” in the Old Testament, then on into the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament.

So onward and upward, you guys. Thanks for listening to “Exploring My Strange Bible” podcast. Feel free to spread the word and share the love. Cheers. See you next time.

[EMSB theme fades out]