

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2019

Week 12: March 17-23

Heaven and Hell: A Traveler's Guide

Read: Genesis 1:1,8,14; 3:8; 5:21-24; 11:4; 36:15,37; Exodus 34:9; Numbers 16:14; Deuteronomy 26:1; 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Kings 2:9-12; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 30:27; 33:6; Job 26:6; 28:22; Psalm 9:17; 16:10; 30:3; 78:23; 111:16; 123:1; 148:13; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20; Isaiah 57:15; 65:17-25; 66:1,24; Jeremiah 7:31; 20:11; 32:35; Ezekiel 47:1; Amos 9:13; Jonah 2:7; Nahum 1:8; Matthew 5:12,29,48; 6:1; 7:13,23; 8:12; 10:28; 11:23; 13:42,50; 18:8-9,34; 19:16,29; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30,41,46; Mark 9:48; Luke 6:23; 10:25; 13:28; John 3:16; 6:37,40; 15:6; Acts 1:9; 2:31; 7:42; Romans 3:23; 6:22-23; 11:5-6; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 12:2; Ephesians 5:5; Philippians 3:8,20; Colossians 1:12; 2:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; 2:16; Titus 3:5-7; Hebrews 1:3; 5:9; 6:2; 8:5; 9:12,15; James 3:6; 1 Peter 1:4-5; 3:22; 2 Peter 1:11; 2:4; 3:10; 2 John 8; Jude 6-7,13,21; Revelation 4:2-6; 5:11,13; 6:9; 9:11; 14:11; 20:12,15; 21:2-4,9-23; 22:1-2. Read Ezekiel 40-48 completely.

Back in High School, I was introduced to Dante Alighieri's classic poem, *Divine Comedy*. Dante accounts a kind of tourist trip through the afterlife, guided by the Roman poet Virgil. He describes the various layers and degrees of Hell, Heaven, and the state of Limbo found in between. Dante's work, written in the 14th Century AD, is filled with medieval imagery of the eternal places, though it certainly stands as an interesting social commentary as to the people's perception of the church and its leaders. It is also a reminder to us that heaven and hell are very much real and are not simply metaphors for something else.

But what does the Bible say about these places? You might be surprised at just how much they talk about what the locales are like and who will fill them. So, in the spirit of Dante, we'll take a bit of a tour of heaven and hell this week, but without all of the medieval symbolism and speculation. But, in the spirit of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, we will start with Hell and work our way to a discussion of heaven.

Hell:

While our culture sometimes likes to describe hell as a place of eternal night-clubs and drunken revelry, the Biblical description is nothing of the sort. In fact, the description that the Bible gives of Hell is something that ought to make any person shudder. It is a place of horrors and of fear, punctuated only by endless suffering.

There are three aspects to Hell that are set before us in the Scriptures. First, it is a place of *positive retribution*. That is a technical way of saying that the sufferings of Hell are an earned punishment for sin committed here on earth and for the guilt of sin we have inherited from our forefathers. God demands that we be perfect as He is perfect and we all fall short, thus deserving punishment for our actions. And, as our sin is against God in his infinite glory, the punishment for sin is infinite in its intensity and duration.

Secondly, Hell is a place of *eternal privation*. Sometimes people speak of Hell as a place where they are absent from the presence of God. Yet, God is omnipresent. Hell is instead described as a place where you are absent from the goodness of God and only experience him in the context of his wrath. Even the common grace that the wicked enjoy on this earth will be gone utterly removed. Thus it is described as a place of gloom and darkness where nothing good, right, or wholesome can be found or even hoped for. It is a place of utter despair.

Finally, Hell is described as a place of *eternal destruction*. Understand, destruction does not mean the same thing as "annihilation." Some groups of people teach that in Hell one is annihilated and ceases to exist. From the very earliest days of the church, this view has consistently been shown to be in error. Hell is a place where you never cease to exist, but instead is a place where you are eternally in the process of being destroyed...just that destruction never comes to an end. The very notion of this should be horrifying.

The Bible also uses several different terms to describe Hell. The first is the Greek word, *Hades*. It is the parallel to the Hebrew word, *Sheol*. Both of these terms sometimes refer to the grave (the place of the dead) and sometimes refer to a place of judgment and condemnation. The context of the passage is the key to understanding the meaning.

The other term is *Gehenna*. This is originally a reference to the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, a place where Molech was worshipped

and where children were burned on that wicked altar (sadly, some of the Israelite kings even participated in this). When the altars were torn down, there was a stigma that remained with the valley and Jewish Rabbis believed that this would be the place where God would judge the wicked. By Jesus' day, the valley became a place where refuse was burned and thus the worm (probably a maggot) did not die and the fires did not cease. Thus, it became fit imagery for Jesus to use to describe Hell.

Heaven:

Heaven is used in several ways in the scriptures. The heavens refers to the sky (the domain of the birds), it refers to what we would call "outer space" (the domain of the stars), and it refers to Heaven proper (the throne room of God). As with so many things in the Bible, context gives us the key to understand which of the three heavens is being spoken of.

For our discussion here, we are more interested in the idea of the place where God dwells — or "the third heaven" as the Apostle Paul describes it. This is the place where God has his throne, where Jesus too is enthroned, and where the angels dwell. It is a place that is both spiritual and physical, for Enoch, Elijah, and Jesus are all physically present in heaven. It is the place where the inheritance of God's people is being held so that it won't be defiled and contains at least the form, if not the structure, of the New Jerusalem. It is described as a place of worship and comfort and it is a place where the 24 Elders sit in judgment and the martyrs cry out to God from under his altar.

Heaven is a symbol of eternal life that is given to believers as a sign of God's glory, it stands for eternal salvation, eternal redemption, and eternal comfort for God's own. It is called the eternal inheritance of believers and is the place where the things that a believer values are stored. It is also described as the eternal kingdom of God.

It should be noted that while the scriptures talk of a new earth, they also talk of a new heavens. This ought not be seen, though, as a recreation of God's throne room as such, but instead as a reference to the first two heavens — the sky and outer space that will be remade along with the earth — in each case, free from the effects of sin.

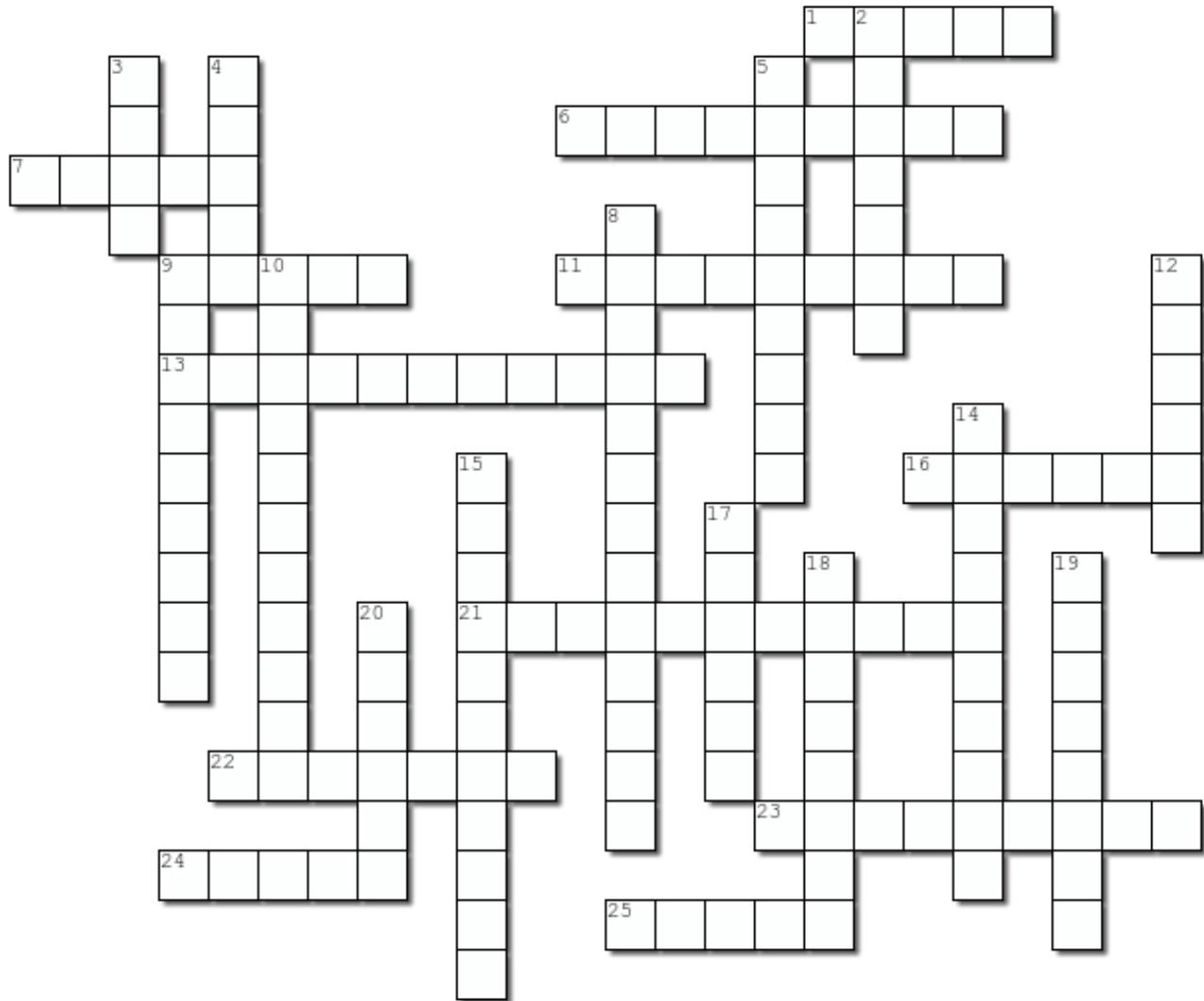
Mythological Notions:

It should be noted, as we complete our little "roadtrip" through heaven and hell, that people (even within the church) have often adopted notions of heaven and Hell that are based more on mythology than on the Bible. A few of these notions are

- Purgatory: a place where people are purged of remaining sin-guilt prior to going to heaven. Is Christ not sufficient?
- Limbo: a place where "good" people from pagan lands go, who never heard the gospel. Yet, there are none good but God.
- Soul-Sleep: Some people suggest that at death the soul goes to sleep and only then wakes up at judgment. Yet, does not John's vision of heaven in Revelation speak of many believers present? Does not Paul write that if we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord?
- Building Your Own Castle: Some people think that the good works they do on this world will earn them a better standing in heaven. Yet, if salvation is by grace and the good works we do are done in us by the Holy Spirit, then what do we bring to the table?

Week 12: Heaven and Hell

Complete the crossword below



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

1. This Greek word refers either to the grave or to Hell.
6. Jesus says that this city will be brought down to Hades in the judgment.
7. How many kinds of 'Heaven' does the Bible describe?
9. This Hebrew word refers either to the grave or to Hell.
11. If Heaven is God's throne, earth is this.
13. This is the place reserved for the demons and followers of Satan. (2 words)
16. Where is at least the form of the New Jerusalem held?
21. Heaven is sometimes referred to as the eternal _____ of God's people.
22. The Valley of the Sons of Hinnom.
23. 'In the _____, God created the heavens and the earth.'
24. This man was the first human to bodily enter heaven without dying.
25. In heaven, God will wipe these from the eyes of believers; in Hell, these will fill the eyes of the wicked.

Down

2. This is another word that refers to Hell (think Job, Proverbs & Revelation).
3. This shall not die in Hell.
4. In hell, inhabitants will gnash this part of their bodies.
5. We are to store this up in heaven.
8. Psalm 78 refers to the skies as this (3 words).
9. In the new creation, the mountains will drip with this (2 words)
10. 'It is the will of my Father that everyone who looks at the Son and believes in him will have _____.' (2 words)
12. The fallen angels were committed to this in 'gloomy darkness'.
14. God will create this along with a new earth after the final judgment.
15. In heaven is where this lies for the believer (hint: think of your passport).
17. He was the second human to bodily enter heaven without dying.
18. This is another descriptive term for Hell.
19. There will be no fear of this in the new creation.
20. Babies were sacrificed to this pagan god in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom.