

ReGroup 1/15/23

Eternity: Fallen Stars

Across the next few weeks, we will be talking all about Eternity. We will get into deep studies and discussions on both Heaven and Hell. We're probably already familiar that when this life is over, we will live forever in one of those two places. But the subject of Eternity wasn't originally associated with the Afterlife. God's original plan didn't feature an *afterlife*. In the beginning, there was just *life* and the plan was for there to only ever be life.

Time Vs Eternity

God is Eternal. He has always existed. It's impossible for our finite minds to truly comprehend this, so don't feel bad if this is difficult for you to grasp. We have a beginning, which means that before a specific point in time, *we didn't exist*. This should be the first sign to us that there is a difference between **Eternal Life** and **Limited Life**. Eternal Life is boundless, unlimited and unending, while Limited Life has a timed duration and takes place within clear boundaries.

We make the distinction between these two types of life because they reflect two different realities: ***Eternity and Time***. God dwells in Eternity and we dwell in time. Eternity is everlasting in both the past and present, while with time there is a clear beginning and will be a definite end. **Before moving on, take time to discuss these concepts and talk through any potential questions your group may have.**

Originally, God created the physical universe to exist *within* His Eternal realm. While it had a beginning, it wouldn't have an end. Once He spoke our world into existence, it would forever be in His presence and sustain by His Eternal Life.

But then *the Fall* happened. Our world spiritually fell from God's presence and out of fellowship with Him. In the Fall, death entered into creation and everyone and everything became fragile and temporary creatures. In essence, this is when **time as we know it began**. *Suddenly*, everything had an expiration date.

There are several Bible passages that help us understand how things were originally set up to function and how the Fall sent everything spiraling. So we all have a clear understanding of God's original plans and how the Fall altered everything, here are some key texts to bookmark and study:

- **Genesis 2:4-17** - Here we find a description of the Paradise version of Earth that was given to Adam and Eve to enjoy. What stands out is the Tree of Life that was placed in the Garden, which shared the Eternal nature of God with humans.
- **Genesis 3:17-24** - This *is* the Fall. Adam is told about the consequences for sinning against God. Death has entered into creation and spread to all creatures. We see in verse 24 that God had to drive man out of the Garden and would prevent us from ever have access to it again during our earthly lives. **Earth literally falls from God's Eternal presence.** In this moment, there is a separation of our realm and God's realm. In this instance, Eternity and Time become two distinct realities.

Take a few moments to talk this through. **Do the differences between Eternity and Time make some sense to you? Does this help you understand how there was a much more fundamental transition between Genesis 3 and 4.**

Below is a visual and further descriptions of how things looked according to God's original plan and how the Fall effected everything:

Before Genesis 3:

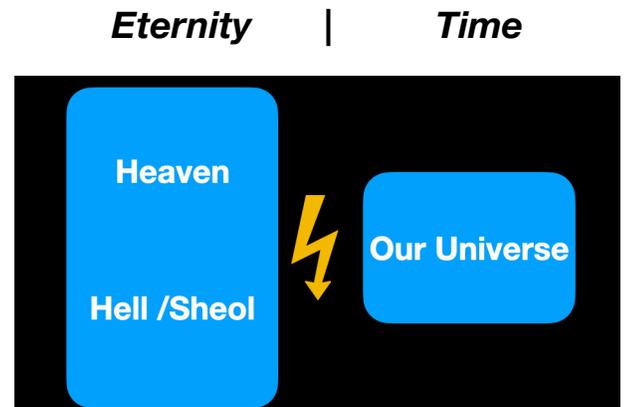
- Our universe existed in step with Eternity. There was no death. Hell only existed for the devil and his angels, so it *must* predate Earth and Creation as we know it. See **Matthew 25:41 and 2 Peter 2:4.**
- God's presence was as felt in our universe as it was in Heaven. There was no dying in order to go to Heaven, because Heaven was *literally on earth.* See **Genesis 3:8-10**, which suggests God often walked in their midst.

Eternity



After Genesis 3:

Our universe was severed from God's Eternal realm. **Romans 5:12-14** teaches us how this effected humanity and left a grave impact on us all. Now, instead of having constant communication and connection with God, our world is naturally devoid of God's presence. We also now *age* and grow *weak* with time, and eventually *die*. One of the saddest verses in all the Bible is **Genesis 5:5** because it was never supposed to happened.



You'll notice the amendment to Hell in this diagram. Whereas before the Fall, Hell was only for fallen angels, after the Fall it began receiving people who died apart from God's righteousness. However, even those who were credited God's righteousness through faith, were *not fully* pardoned for their sin. They simply were *credited* with a right standing, with true **salvation pending**. While they awaited true forgiveness, they would go to a place adjacent to Hell called *Sheol*. This is the Hebrew name for Paradise or Abraham's Bosom.

Heaven only began receiving people once Jesus came and paid for our sins. This can explain why upon His resurrection, other saved Jews rose again too. When He ascended to Heaven, He would take them to their Heavenly Home **for the first time**.

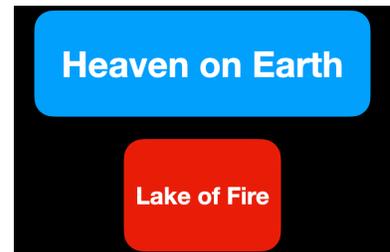
Check out these passages for more on that subject:

- **Luke 16:22-23** - We see that the dwelling place of the dead including both Hell and Paradise, adjacent to one another, yet representing two distinct categories of people: Lost and Saved.
- **Matthew 27:51-53** - The veil in the Temple tore to symbolize that sins were fully forgiven and to denote that Heaven could finally be entered into by non-Spiritual creatures.
- **Ephesians 4:7-10** - Those who trusted in God's future salvation were waiting in Paradise for Jesus to descend to gather them and ascend to set them free from captivity and provide them full salvation.

Eternal Future

A picture to help us understand the Fall can actually be found in Revelation, where the restoration of all things is discussed. Read **Revelation 21:1-4 and 22:1-5** and **compare** the future state of creation with the previous, Edenic state. This is literally describing an undoing or **reversal of the Fall**, taking Earth back to where it was originally. Time as we know it ends, when it once again merges with Eternity.

Hell also is emptied into a final, separate place of torment called the Lake of Fire. It is also referred to as the *Abyss* or *Bottomless Pit*. Instead of facing mere punishment for sins, the Lake of Fire will be a place of **endless, reoccurring death**. Read **Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:8**.



We will get much more into all of these topics and more, but this is only meant to introduce us to the subject of Eternity, Heaven and Hell. Our main takeaway from today is that dying was never part of God's original plan. **The Fall changed everything, right down the very makeup of our universe.** We were made to be Eternal, but the Fall put us on a time limit. One day Time will end, and we will step into Eternity and either into Heaven or Hell.

Jesus is **the only way** to Eternal Life. We don't have to wait to receive this Eternal Life when we die, but we can experience it right here, right now. Of course, physically we remain on temporary creatures, but spiritually we can start enjoying full and better life.

From now on, when you read Jesus talk about Eternal Life you can think of how in contrast to regular life it truly is. No longer bound by the limits of this world, we can begin setting our minds on spiritual things now and prepare for the full and final version of it in the days to come.

- **John 5:24** - Jesus says if we are saved, we have already stepped into true, Eternal Life. While we are still held back in part by our flesh, we can begin experience His goodness here and now.
- **John 10:10** - In Christ we can take hold of the life we were always meant to have.