

I've started a short thread describing the academic monograph I've started writing, [Guided Tours of Heaven and Hell: Otherworldly Journeys in the Early Christian Tradition](#). In my last post I describe two of the most important forerunners of the tradition, the Greek Homer (Odyssey 11) and Roman Virgil (Aeneid 6) — flat out fascinating texts that I've become obsessed with. The Christian versions are similar in ways but also profoundly different.

Here is what I say about them in these reflections on my book-in-progress, written to help me clarify to myself where it's heading, how it will be structured, and why I think it matters.

I start here by repeating the very end of the previous post to stir up your memory!

The account of the underworld in Virgil does more philosophical work than its predecessor, Homer's *Odyssey*, showing not merely that life should be prolonged, but that it must be lived properly (ethically and/or philosophically). Virgil's account is often read as potentially hopeful - there is the chance of eternal reward for upright behavior, for example; but in fact it is entirely gloomy. The vast majority of people have nothing to look forward to but purgatorial cleansing, before returning to the body, dying, and repeating the cycle over and again.

The Christians had a very different view, as embodied most succinctly in the two Near Death Experiences of the Acts of Thomas, one involving a trip to observe the glories of heaven and the other the grisly torments of hell. Together the accounts convey a single point, rather graphically: the realities of death show that there are two options, eternal bliss or eternal torture, and it is a matter of personal choice. Either a person believes in Christ and follows his teachings, to inherit paradise forever, or rejects Christ and lives in sin, leading to pure hell.

The theme is elaborated in different ways in

Want to know more about heaven and hell? Keep reading. But to do so you will need to belong to the blog. On the other hand, belonging to the blog is pure heaven. And the small membership fee you pay goes entirely to the charities helping those in need.

You need to be logged in to see this part of the content. Please [Login](#) to access.



[The Case Against Miracles](#)

[Guided Tours of Heaven and Hell: My Scholarly Book](#)