

## Scripture Compilation List from pre-20th century Universalism Docs (and from private study)

Is God the Father of the unmerciful? Yes, or Jesus would not have said at the Great Sermon, "Become then merciful as your Father in the heavens is merciful." And in the same sermon, "Beware of doing your justice (fair-togetherness) in front of people to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father in the heavens." And again in the same sermon, "For if you pardon people their offenses, your Father in the heavens will be also pardoning you. But if you will not pardon people their offenses, neither will your Father pardon you of your offenses." And later in rebuking His own apostles with the warning that unless they repent they shall by no means be entering the kingdom, and instead may be going into Gehenna, "Thus it is not the will before your Father in the heavens, that even one of these little ones shall be dying!" And again on the road, "whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in the heavens may also forgive you your transgressions." In the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), Moses complains that his foolish and unwise people will repay YHWH, their Father Who has bought them, made them, and established them, with corruption, thus becoming not His children because of their defect, crookedness, and perversity. (But later in the Song God promises to save them once He has punished them down to where none remain either slave or free, i.e. to death.) There are many other places in the OT where God refers to rebel

Israel as sons and daughters even though He is going to punish them, thus implying His fatherhood even to them.

Genesis 3; (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists appeal to the sons of the woman and the sons of the serpent being two utterly distinct categories of people, only one of whom are children of God and who will be saved. But the serpent (who was the Devil) was a rebellious child of God, thus his descendents are also children of God in that sense; and the same "bronze serpent" (same term from Gen 3:15) shows up eating dust and playing with children on the Holy Mountain of God, as revealed through Isaiah (64:25), along with other ravening animals who attacked God's people, so he and/or his offspring end up reconciled to God and to other persons later. Perhaps more to the point, the sons of the serpent are also sons of the woman; and both sets of children are sinners; and in any case what makes either set of children persons at all are their spirits which come only from God the Father of spirits, not from the devil.

Genesis 3:4; (counter-evidence against universalism): occasionally non-universalists charge that to believe that God shall eventually lead all unrighteous persons to righteousness, saving them from their sins, is the doctrine preached by Satan to Eve: "And the serpent [later identified as Satan] said to the woman, surely you shall not die!" When put like this the objection can be clearly seen to be worthless, since Satan is most certainly not tempting Eve with the idea that God shall lead all unrighteous

persons (Satan included) back to loyal righteousness, ceasing their rebellion! Nor does the doctrine state that people shall not die. But if it is pressed that Satan meant that surely Eve (and Adam) shall not be annihilated or suffer eternal conscious torment or some other hopeless punishment or fate; then such objectors must concede that Satan was in fact correct, for no one anywhere thinks God abandons Adam and Eve to a hopeless fate and that they shall be annihilated or suffer ECT! Personally I would rather not interpret Satan so that Satan was in fact entirely correct in his temptation; but non-universalists will have to make up their own minds about whether they want to side with what they think Satan tempted here. Whereas on the other hand, if we agree Satan tempted them with something other than a mere assurance that they would not suffer a hopeless fate for their rebellion, then this verse is no evidence that Christian universalists are "tempting" people along the same line. For our first ancestors died morally upon rebellion; but no one thinks St. Paul preaches the temptation of Satan when he says God can and does bring to life those who are dead in their sins (as for example Eph 2:1 among many other verses). And our first ancestors began to die physically upon rebellion, and continued until their bodies died; but no one thinks any scriptural author (up to and including Jesus by Gospel report) takes the side of Satan by teaching the resurrection of the body, and even of the wicked as well as the good. And since I affirm all this, and even that some (among whom I would even include rebel angels) shall die the second death for their continuing impenitence,

how am I tempting with Satan in saying that those who sin shall not die?? Whether or not I am wrong about God saving from sin even those who go into the second kind of death, that is certainly not what Satan tempts; much less could I be tempting with Satan to say with St. Paul (as in 1 Cor 15) that God shall in Christ destroy the final enemy, death. Non-universalists who make this charge simply aren't paying attention, or have mistaken those like me (from not paying sufficient attention) for those who say God does not ever act in any way to inconvenience sinners for their sins -- though even Christian ultra-universalists who deny any coming punishment from God after the death of Christ, still tend to affirm active inconvenience, death, and even punishment to some degree!

Genesis 4; (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists appeal to Cain and Abel as being two separate people, one elected to salvation from sin and the other not. But the text doesn't say Cain was not chosen by God to be saved from his sins. It does say both are the offspring of the woman, and both thus the offspring of God; and it does say Cain is cared for and provided for and protected by God against the hatred from descendants of the other side of the family. Not the best examples for two separate people in the sense required. (Aside from the question of who exactly Cain married and had children with east of Eden! -- but whoever they were, they were part of the Adamic family one way or another, if only by virtue of relation to Cain. If they had rational spirits, and so were actual persons, they got those from God the

Father of Spirits or else supernaturalistic theism isn't true, thus neither is Calvinist Christianity per se.)

Genesis 5; (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists appeal to this chapter as showing two separate people, the godly line of Seth chosen to be saved from their sins, and the ungodly line of Cain not chosen to be saved from their sins. But Genesis 5 has exactly nothing to do with the line of Cain, unless the Enoch/Methuselah/Lamech/Noah line refers to intermarriage back into the line of Cain from Genesis 4:16-24 somehow! One way or another Genesis 5 doesn't support two separate people in the sense required.

Genesis 6; (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists appeal to this chapter as showing two separate people, those who are sons of God, thus chosen for salvation from sin, namely Noah and his family, and those who are not sons of God, thus not chosen by God for salvation from sin. But the line of Cain is not explicitly mentioned in this chapter, while "sons of God" causing trouble certainly are! -- it is these sons of God and their descendants who are slain in the Flood. So, since "sons of God" are being punished, this is not a good example of people who are not "sons of God" being hopelessly punished. (Not even counting whether 1 Peter discusses their post-mortem evangelization and salvation after all.) Trouble certainly came from Noah's sons, too; still not two separate people in the sense required.

Genesis 16-17; (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists appeal to this chapter by means of Galatians 4, as showing two separate people, those who are chosen for salvation from sin and those who are not. See notes for Galatians 4.

Gen 13:15; (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): "for all the land which you [Abram] see, I [YHWH] will give it to you and to your seed forever." Seed cannot be exclusively the Messiah, as verse 16 goes on to talk about the seed in extreme plurality of persons. The inclusiveness and extreme plurality of the promise tends to hint at post-mortem salvation of rebel Israel (at the least).

Gen 17:7-8; (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): either the covenant is that originally established and so was not everlasting; or God is looking forward to a covenant He will make with Israel after their deaths (which would involve post-mortem salvation); or God refuses to break the covenant on His side even if they break it on theirs (which would also tend to imply post-mortem salvation). All the land of Canaan must in any case be considered an "everlasting possession" in this larger divine sense, because Jacob lost possession of the land migrating to Egypt and Israel has often lost possession of the land (and had it restored) since then. The "seed" cannot refer exclusively to Christ here (although He must be included in the seed) as the phrase reads "and your seed after you in their generations".

Gen 17:13; (everlasting not everlasting): the covenant of circumcision was broken and was superceded, so cannot be "everlasting" in any simple way. See verses 17:7-8.

Gen 48:3-4; (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): the "seed" appears to be Jacob's descendents plural (not the Messiah exclusively), but they have not possessed the land everlastingly in any simple way, or else the inclusiveness of the "seed" would imply post-mortem salvation.

Gen 49:26; (everlasting not everlasting): the hills of the earth are called "everlasting".

Exod 21:6; (everlasting not everlasting): a freed slave who chooses to stay with his master out of love (for his master or wife or children) shall serve that master "forever". But the slave does not thus become immortal! -- much less the master of the slave! Nor is it expected that the slave shall serve the master as a slave in the day of the Lord to come. In fact, the slave may still be set free every jubilee of jubilees (49 years).

Exod 28:43; (everlasting not everlasting): the clothing of Aaron and his descendents as priests are assigned as a law "forever" to him and his descendents. But God revokes the priestly status of Aaron's descendents.

Exod 29:9; (everlasting not everlasting): Aaron and his sons are promised the priesthood as a

"perpetual statute", but God takes this statute away later.

Exod 29:28; (everlasting not everlasting): Aaron and his sons are granted a portion from the heave offering "forever", but God takes this right away from his descendents eventually.

Exod 30:21; (everlasting not everlasting): another "perpetual" statute for Aaron and his descendents throughout the generation while doing their priestly duties, which God eventually annuls.

Exod 31:16-17; (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): the Sabbath is instituted as a "perpetual" covenant throughout the generations of Israel, but Israel breaks the covenant. If the covenant nevertheless holds forever by the grace of God and/or if a new covenant is made with the Israelites who broke the old covenant, that would imply post-mortem salvation.

Exod 32:13; (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): Moses pleads with God to remember the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel, that they and their descendents should inherit the land forever and become as numerous as the stars of heaven. YHWH changes His mind therefore about destroying them completely. Nevertheless, they are thrown off the land at least twice in their history afterward, so the everlasting inheritance cannot be simply forever in an unbroken continuity. The inclusive



extensive nature of God's promise tends to hint at post-mortem salvation for at least rebel Israel.

Exod 40:15; (everlasting not everlasting): Moses is instructed to anoint Aaron's sons "for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations". But the priesthood was taken away from the descendents of Aaron (e.g. Heb 7:12-18) -- only the Messiah (even if He has some of Aaron's blood by incidental ancestral descent, not accounted for in the reckoning of the Hebraist) shall be the priest in the day of the Lord to come. (In another sense, all people shall be priests and kings, not Aaron's and Judah's descendents alone or together.)

Lev 3:17; (everlasting not everlasting): the peace offering is instituted with "perpetual" statutes, but eventually these shall be done away with in the day of the Lord to come (when peace offerings will no longer be necessary).

Lev 6:13, 18, 22; (everlasting not everlasting): the sin offering is instituted with "perpetual" ordinances and a tithe from it is granted to Aaron and his descendents "forever", but God takes the right to this tithe eventually and in the day of YHWH to come the sin offering will no longer occur (because everyone will be righteous).

Lev 7:34, 36; (everlasting not everlasting): Aaron and his sons are granted a portion of the

burnt offering "forever", but this right is later taken away from them due to their sins. Also, the type of offering being given here will cease in the Day of the Lord to come (because no longer necessary).

Lev 10; (everlasting not everlasting): two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, forfeit the "perpetual" priesthood granted to them by God and are slain for their refusal to follow the ordinances. Various things are promised and required of Aaron and the descendants of his two remaining sons "forever", but will be taken away from them by God eventually (either due to sin or in order to be superceded and fulfilled in the Messiah.)

Lev 16:29-31; (everlasting not everlasting): "perpetual" statutes for the Day of Atonement are set up, but the Day of Atonement shall be abolished someday.

Lev 16:34; (everlasting not everlasting): the Day of Atonement for the children of Israel, once a year, is established as an everlasting statute. But the atonement sacrifice has ceased several times, most recently in the final overthrow of the Temple (and rabbis afterward hinted that even before then God no longer accepted their atonement sacrifice); and even non-Christians Jews typically expect (from scriptural indications) that in the day of the Lord to come there shall only be thanksgiving sacrifices, not atonement sacrifices (which will no longer be needed as all people will be righteous.)

Lev 26:34-35; (punishment not hopeless): here God explicitly reveals that however strongly He smites the land with imagery of perdition thanks to the rebellion of His people (of which this chapter also features such descriptions), in fact the land will be resting in its sabbaths while the people are gone, being given the sabbath rests which they would not give it, and thus will be prepared for the restoration when God brings back the people to inherit it again.

Numb 25:11-13; (everlasting not everlasting): Phineas the grandson of Aaron is granted the covenant of an "everlasting" priesthood, and his descendents after him. But this was taken away within four hundred years when the sons of Eli profaned the covenant.

Many other such legalities are set up as perpetual ordinances or as promises forever in the Torah, but all are annulled or superceded eventually.

Deut 29-30; (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless): sometimes Deut 29:20 is quoted to the effect that YHWH shall never be willing to forgive a particular kind of man, and so the anger and jealousy of YHWH will burn against him and every curse written in Deuteronomy will lie down on him and YHWH will blot out his name from under heaven and single him out for evil from all the tribes of Israel according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in the Torah, and the

man's descendants and foreigners will look at the brimstone and salt of the land as a burning waste, unsown and unproductive with not even grass growing on it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zebolim, which YHWH overthrew in His anger and in His wrath, burning against that land to bring upon it every curse written in the Torah, uprooting such people from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, casting them into another land -- and that this punishment, being so great, will be hopeless. In fact this punishment shall happen to all of Israel not only to a few, so that only a few shall remain alive; but they shall learn better from the punishment and repent and the land will be restored and they shall be restored to the land (and those foreigners who punished them shall be punished with the same curses instead). St. Paul, in Romans 10:6-8, references 30:11-14 directly, with Christ (also called the Logos) being the commandment which is far away from no one, and does not have to be brought down from heaven or up from the abyss (== from across the sea in Deut 30:13), which is a poetic reference to death, essentially meaning that God Himself is His own greatest evangelist. See also the final Song of Moses soon afterward in Deut 32.

Deut 32:34-43; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): this is part of the final song of Moses, which was given to Moses by God and written down and taught to Joshua and his heirs precisely because God (and Moses) knew that however much they had rebelled while Moses was still alive they would rebel even worse after he

died. (In this Song, rebels are expressly called the sons and daughters of God, and He is called their Father, even though they make themselves not His children by their perversity.) Vengeance and retribution is laid up in store with God, sealed in His treasuries, for the day of calamity to come when their foot will slip (vv 34-35). Yet after talking about how He shall greatly kill them, with a fire kindled in His anger which sets on fire the foundations of the mountains and shall burn to the lowest parts of Sheol (v.22), once God sees their strength is gone and that no one remains either slave or free (v.36, a poetic way of saying they have been destroyed to uttermost death), then God shall have compassion on His people and shall vindicate them (also v.36). Note that He is not here vindicating His righteous servants, but His rebellious ones whom He has slain to the uttermost extent! Per verses 37-42, the destruction wrought on them is explicitly intended to teach them not only that He shall in fact punish His impenitent adversaries, especially for idolatry, but also to teach them that false gods cannot save them but only "I AM, I AM HE, beside Whom there is no other god, He Who heals after He has wounded, and Who gives life after putting to death". The nations are expected to rejoice with His people, not only for God avenging the blood of His righteous servants and rendering vengeance on His adversaries, but also for reconciling His land and His rebel people (v.43). These verses have much relevance to the proper interpretation of Hebrews 10, where the Hebraist cites this Song in warning to Christians who go on sinning impenitently after receiving the knowledge of the

truth, trampling underfoot the Son of God and regarding as unclean the blood of the (Abrahamic) covenant by which they have been sanctified, thus insulting the Spirit of grace, that they shall thus also run foul of a fire that will consume God's adversaries, and God shall judge His people. But while "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31), the God Who is I AM I AM HE, YHWH heals after wounding, and brings to life after killing, and when He judges His people He thus vindicates even His rebel people by having compassion on them once He sees that they have been destroyed down to where they are neither slave nor free.

Deut 33:15; (everlasting not everlasting): Moses blesses the tribe of Joseph with the choice things of the "everlasting" hills, in a context where he must mean the earthly land which is not after all everlasting.

Josh 14:7; (everlasting not everlasting): Caleb reminds Joshua of YHWH's promise through Moses that he and his descendents would inherit forever the area he helped scout out 40 years previously.

1 Sam 2:12-17, 27ff; (everlasting not everlasting) (hated but blessed): Eli's sons abuse their position and so the "everlasting" covenant of priesthood given to Aaron and his grandson Phinehas and their descendents is broken and dissolved in God's punishment against them. (v.30, YHWH declares "I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk

before Me forever... [now] far be [their house] from Me, for those who honor Me I shall honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.") Notably, provision is made for Eli's descendents through his grandson to still have priestly offices, just not by everlasting right to it. They have to beg for it in order not to starve. (1 Sam 2:36) Specifically, they'll have to beg Samuel for it; but in the long run whom they have to beg for it is Christ (God the Son), the true high priest of God being the 2nd Person of God Himself, greater than Samuel (duh), Who was truly sinless and Whose house is truly enduring. Eli certainly isn't expecting this (2:25): "If a man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against YHWH, who can intercede for him?!" Good point! -- but Saul of Tarsus, who sinned rather more against God than Eli and his sons, was given the answer.

1 Sam 3:11-14; (everlasting not everlasting): continues the story of the fallout of Eli's grandsons dissolving the "everlasting" covenant of priesthood due to their sins. Notably, God says He shall judge the house of Eli "forever" (v.13) and that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering "forever" (v.14).

1 Sam 4:16-22; (everlasting not everlasting): Eli is told of the death of his sons and the capture of the Ark of the covenant by the Philistines. He dies in shock; the wife of his son Phinehas gives birth and dies in shock, naming her son Ichabod (for the glory departed from Israel). Thus the

"everlasting" covenant with Aaron's descendents for the priesthood came to a practical end.

1 Sam 22:19; (everlasting not everlasting): almost all remaining descendents of Aaron acting as priests (having begged Samuel for the position, not as part of the broken "everlasting" covenant) are slain by Doeg the Edomite on the orders of King Saul. Only Abiathar remains of the descendants of Phinehas.

1 Kings 8:43; (scope of salvation?)

1 Kings 2:27; (everlasting not everlasting): when Solomon ascends the throne, he deposes Abiathar from priesthood, the last remaining descendent of Phinehas son of Eli, specifically so that the word of YHWH against the house of Eli would be fulfilled. From this time forward the house of Ithamar (from Aaron) had the priesthood. But it would be abolished, too, eventually (in the Messiah if not sooner!)

2 Kings 22:17; (everlasting not everlasting): the righteous young king Josiah, at age 18, sends chief priests to the prophetess Hilkiah when he learns that the forsaken scriptures have been found and recovered, to see if YHWH's warnings against Jerusalem can be avoided. God says through Hilkiah that His wrath burns against Jerusalem and it shall not be quenched. However, at the same time God (in effect) promises to temporarily quench His wrath against Jerusalem thanks to the faithfulness of Josiah, who goes on



to put many reforms in effect. (But he dies young, and his various sons return to injustice and idolatry quickly, until God sends the nation of Judah away into captivity under the reign of the final son of Josiah's wife Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah -- not to be confused with the prophet Jeremiah.)

Job 1-2; (salvation of rebel angels): Satan, although rebellious, is allowed into the presence of YHWH, and YHWH wants him to "set his heart" to Job -- a phrase that not only involves regarding in order to learn something, but actually involves conforming one's self with that which is being regarded. Satan refuses to do so, and jealously tries to destroy Job, not only personally, but in God's judgment of Job. This is the hidden factor setting up Job's suffering: it's intended by God to help Satan learn to be like Job! (Job doesn't know this, and agrees with his friends that God intends to simply destroy the evil Leviathan.)

Job 8:13; (counter-evidence against universalism): why Bildad the Shuhite (of all people) should be cited as decisive inspired evidence on any point, I have no idea; but some people consider this and following verses to be testimony that overthrows any idea of universal salvation, though they would seem to overthrow any idea of saving sinners from their sins at all! "[As the papyrus withers without water, more quickly than any other plant], so are the paths of all who forget God, and the hope of the godless will perish, whose confidence is fragile

and whose trust a spider's house. He trusts in his house, but it does not stand; he holds fast to it, but it does not endure," and so on. Of course in context Bildad thinks Job has secretly sinned somehow and is advising him to repent and return to God; so obviously even Bildad's context does not forbid repentance and salvation of someone being punished harshly by God. Moreover, even the immediate context shows clearly that the hope of the sinner being criticized here is not hope for salvation from sin, but hope based in trusting his possessions will stand and protect him -- doubtless a further criticism of Job who was once the richest man of the East and has now been totally ruined.

Job 10; (better that he should not be born): despite Job's frequent assurances of his salvation and even resurrection in God, he still calls out for pity on himself by declaring, in various ways, that it would have been better for him had he not been born.

Job 11:20; (counter-evidence against universalism): Zophar the Naamanite thinks Job is boasting about his righteousness over against the just judgment of God, and warns Job that the eyes of the wicked will fail and there will be no escape for them, their only hope being to breathe their last. Job's sarcastic answer to this, immediately afterward, is, "Truly, then, you are the people, and with you wisdom will die!" Nevertheless, some people take Zophar's testimony here, which isn't even talking about the hope of sinners after death, to mean that sinners have no

hope after death and so will surely not be saved from their sins by God.

Job 18:14; (counter-evidence against universalism): more declarations from Bildad the Shuhite about how the unjust can expect to be wiped out by God, who may be called "the king of terrors" in verse 14. As usual, he is hurling these words against Job; as usual the gist (which Job generally agrees with) is that the impenitent sinner will not escape punitive destruction from God. As usual nothing at all is said against the prospect of the punished man repenting or being saved from his sins by God. On the contrary, Bildad is trying to get Job, a man already punished in just the way Bildad is talking about, to repent of whatever secret sin Job insists on being impenitent about, though Bildad has moved along to rejoicing that God is punishing the impenitent Job who refuses to admit he has done some secret sin (Bildad thinks).

Job 20:7; (counter-evidence against universalism): why exactly anyone would appeal to Zophar the Naamathite for decisive evidence against God's salvation of sinners from sin?! I have no idea, but sometimes people will cite this verse where though the loftiness of the unjust person goes up to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he perishes forever (netsach, the bright object at a distance traveled toward) like his trash; those who have seen him ask "Where is he?" and they cannot find him for he flies away like a dream, even chased away like a vision of the night. The immediate context indicates Zophar is talking about the impenitent

wicked, and means that God shall surely punish them even to death no matter how wealthy and powerful they are. The local context is even more instructive, because Zophar feels insulted that Job is complaining about (what seems to be) God's judgment against him and yet Job has just declared, in one of the most famous portions of the book, that he knows YHWH his Redeemer lives and that even if Job dies and his skin is destroyed God will raise him up and Job shall see God and no other with his eyes. In effect Zohar is saying, "No way will God save you, you impenitent rebel who trusts in his riches and refuses to acknowledge whatever secret sin you've done! -- you may think to fool us, but you aren't fooling God!" Do Christians really want to take Zohar's side against Job on this topic??

Job 22:5; (counter-evidence against universalism): sometimes this verse is brought forth by proponents of hopeless punishment, as evidence that sins are infinitely great and therefore require infinite punishment and therefore shall receive infinite punishment -- except for where God voids the infinite punishment, especially in favor of the proponents of infinite punishment, which instantly gives away any weight supposedly counting against universal salvation (since if God can save one sinner at all from infinite sin, or even merely from infinite punishment -- for it is a much greater thing to save a person from sin than from any punishment -- God can save any number of sinners at all.) But regardless of all obvious and subtle metaphysical objections, the verse is of no use for this defense anyway: first because

Eliphaz makes it clear (a couple of verses earlier) that he does not regard human goodness to be infinite, since that would put humanity on par with God, thus neither could human evil be infinite; and second, perhaps more importantly, if I tried to adduce evidence in favor of universal salvation from one of Job's three friends as though they, of all people, were inspired inerrant prophets making certain declarations on the topic, I would surely be laughed out of hearing! Why should I believe Eliphaz on this topic (which amounts to metaphysical nonsense at best, and which if true would either be adamant against any salvation at all or else is routinely overcome by God after all), a man who shall be judged by God at the end of the poem to have sinned and said things grievously untrue about God?? But in fact he is only trying to say, with typical Eastern exaggeration, that Job is wickedly setting himself up for certain punishment, his sins going to the limit and beyond: which Eliphaz immediately goes on to illustrate by inferring that Job, a man he once knew to be righteous, must have done a list of abominable uncharities and hid them from his friends though not from God! ("Is not your wickedness great, and your injustices without end? For without cause you have required your brothers to swear oaths, and have stripped off the clothing of the naked; to the weary you have given no water to drink, and from the hungry you have withheld bread. For the earth belongs to the strong man, though the righteous dwell in it! You have sent widows away empty, and you have crushed the strength of the orphans. Therefore snares surround you, and

sudden dread terrifies you! Is not God in the heaven, even beyond the stars you see so high above? And you think He doesn't see you and cannot judge you through the darkness!")

In the worst possible case -- even if he seriously meant to say Job's sins are infinite, and even if he was entirely correct to say so, which he was not -- he is still not saying that Job's sins are infinite, therefore Job must and shall be infinitely punished; that is a metaphysical inference beyond the stated evidence, and stands or falls on its own merits, not least of which is the evidence of what in fact happens to Job in the end. (!!!Story spoiler, look away now!!! -- Job is reconciled to God, his few faults forgiven, restored in his wealth and provided new children, and offers sacrifices on God's instruction for the sake of his three treacherous friends who should have believed him innocent or at least should have been merciful to him in his apparent punishment. He certainly isn't infinitely punished for infinite sins; in Daniel's day he is regarded later as one of the three most righteous men in history. Nor by the way are his satanic accusers infinitely punished for their ostensibly infinite sins. Even Leviathan, i.e. Satan, on whose account and for whose sake and by whom Job and his family were actually struck down, can be tamed by God and made a safe ally for his little daughter!)

If Eliphaz can be quoted on this topic, then I can quote Elihu (though I'd rather not, as he is ignored by literally everyone else in the poem

and clearly takes the side of Job's three treacherous and slanderous little satan/accuser friends): if Job sins, what does he do to God, even if his transgressions be multiplied? Or if Job is righteous, what does God receive from Job's hand? Job's wickedness may hurt a man like Job, or his goodness may profit a son of man. (Job 35:6-8) So much for even infinite sin (could such a thing exist) being of any specially important account to God, any more than the righteousness of a creature.

Job 27:8-10; (counter-evidence against universalism): Job has lost all patience with his three friends and, while agreeing with them that God shall certainly punish the wicked, declares that they're the ones lining up to be zorched for being Godlessly unjust! The special point of contention here is, "What is the hope of the godless when he is cut off (or possibly when he gains), when God requires his life (or soul)? Will God hear his cry when distress comes upon him? Will he (the sinner) take delight in the Almighty, will he call on God at all times?" The context still indicates that Job is talking about God killing the impenitent wicked and refusing to save them from being killed because the wicked, even if they pray to God to be saved from death, are still refusing to repent. Job may not know, and admittedly doesn't tell, any more of the story beyond that, but other places in scripture do. Maybe more to the point, Job is condemning his friends as being just this kind of impenitently unjust evildoer, because they refuse to have mercy on him.

Job 36:18-21; (counter-evidence against universalism): Elihu warns Job, whom he thinks is speaking like an evil man deserving the harshest judgment (as in chapter 34), that he had better not pray for death instead of affliction, for once he has died "then a great ransom cannot deliver you from death and the grave, from being cut off by the hand [and by the wrath] of heaven, justly provoked by riches." Elihu, however, knows nothing of the hope Job has in his Redeemer, and goes on clearly to talk about the kinds of ransoms provided by wealthy men and kings (which Job once was) which might be worth something on earth but which are totally disregarded by God. (On the other hand, even Elihu acknowledges back in Job 33 that the ransom-payment God is looking for in chastising sinners is repentance from sin. Sometimes verses in that chapter are referenced as evidence of post-mortem repentance and salvation; but although they fit the theme in principle, contextually Elihu is clearly talking about God leading people to repentance and saving them from sheol thereby before they die, not after.) So this obscure reference is of no use other than in testifying (if Elihu is even to be specially attended to beyond a common sense understanding, which is somewhat doubtful seeing as how literally everyone else in the poem ignores him) that if God chooses not to save someone from death and the grave, that person won't be saved. Whether God chooses not to save some persons from the grave is the key point; and at the very least Christians (and many Jews) typically agree God raises the wicked as well as the good from the grave.



Job 41; (salvation of rebel angels): Leviathan, the "king over all the sons of pride", cannot be tamed by man; but no one can stand before YHWH Who made Leviathan. God's rebuke to Job totally requires comparing what Job has not and cannot do, with what God accomplishes. God's analogy would fail if He created Leviathan but could not do what is impossible for Job: tame Leviathan.

Psalms 8; (punishment not hopeless) (salvation of rebel angels): in the day of YHWH to come, YHWH shall make satans and enemies and those who seek revenge "to cease", but this cannot mean that they shall be ruled by those who are their enemies seeking revenge against them! The strength against the satans and those who seek revenge, comes rather from the mouth of infants and nursing babes, the most harmless and innocent. Paul, in 1 Cor 15, uses the benevolent rulership of verses 4-9 to describe what the rulership of Psalm 110 actually involves.

Psalms 9 (counter-evidence against universalism); certainly features very strong language against the wicked and those who would perish the hope of the afflicted forever, for which David expects God to afflict them to the uttermost limit (which might be translated "forever and ever") without any mention of hope that they will repent and return -- although David expects God to hear and save him from his affliction at the gate of death! (David is not always very self-consistent about what he expects in regard to mercy and salvation from God.) Be that as it may, if this Psalm was taken as the final end in itself, then

it would at least deny the doctrine of the resurrection of the wicked (v.5-6 apparently), which we see strongly affirmed in other testimonies. The story goes on beyond this to some extent, and its language is demonstrably either hyperbolic or wrong about the cities of the enemy being perpetually ruined (since some of those cities were re-established after David's day, and others are prophesied elsewhere to be re-established after the coming Day of the Lord); consequently its testimony is limited to strong punishment coming upon those who insist on killing the hope of the afflicted forever, such as David's hope when he was afflicted in punishment by God (which this Psalm, like several others, complains about -- such people who try to kill his hope of salvation should be punished by God the way God has punished David for his sins!) Hopefully Christians are not among those who insist on killing the hope of those who have been or shall be afflicted by God for their sins.

Psalm 22; (scope of God's salvation) (assurance of God's salvation) (post-mortem salvation) (counter-evidence against annihilation): this is the famous Psalm quoted by Christ on the cross against the various priests and Pharisees standing around mocking Him. The point is that God has not abandoned the singer after all, despite appearances (thus neither has abandoned Christ on the cross, despite clumsy Christian interpretations otherwise). The end of the Psalm shows the goal expected by David in this song (even though in other songs he seems to expect something much more hopeless for sinners): all the families of the earth at all ends of the

earth will repent (and "remember", a technical term for making the past present and participating in the past during the Passover meal which became the Lord's Supper/Communion) and turn to YHWH to worship Him. That repentance and returning to loyalty explicitly includes "those who go down to the dust, even he who cannot keep his soul alive" bowing before YHWH, and telling of the righteousness/justice of YHWH to people who have not yet been born -- not, very notably, being annihilated at last. The scope is total salvation from sin, even among those who have died, and the prophecy is that this shall certainly occur! Compare with comments on Col 1, and Phil 2.

Psalms 23; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): this most famous Psalm in the world features a couple of interesting points hidden in the original Hebrew which aren't always brought out sufficiently by translations and commentaries. Specifically, verses 4 and 6, when speaking of the rod of YHWH and the pursuit by goodness and lovingkindness/mercy, are talking about remedial punishment. And strong remedial punishment, too! -- the verb at verse 6 doesn't mean to passively accompany or follow along behind, but to pursue to over-run in a military fashion, the way a king would run down a rebellious army (or a shepherd run down a rebellious sheep) to overthrow it and bring it back into loyalty to himself (or a shepherd might whack a disobedient sheep or goat upside the head with his rod, as well as save it from a pit with the crook of his staff). The comfort of this "rod" is furthermore explicitly given in relation

to why the singer shall not fear walking through the valley of the shadow of death, a poetic image for death and burial. The implication, when put together, is that death itself is one way God "comforts" rebels with the rod of discipline, and brings them back to loyalty. Compare with Rev 19, where Christ arrives in His second coming to utterly kill the rebel kings and armies (servants of the antiChrist) arrayed against Him, scattering their bodies for the birds to feed upon: in Greek He is described as "shepherding" them with His rod! (And those "kings of the earth" show up later after the descent of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21, following the light of Christ into the city where no sinner can come. The rod worked.)

Psalm 30; (punishment not hopeless): David appeals to God for salvation from punishment by two principles: that God's anger is only temporary, intended to lead sinners to repentance and reconciliation; and that God will not be satisfied with souls in Sheol who cannot properly praise Him for His faithfulness (despite their own unfaithfulness to Him, for which they are sent to Sheol).

Psalm 31:17-18; (counter-evidence against universalism): sometimes verse 17 is appealed to as evidence that those in sheol cannot repent because they must be silent, as though repentance only needs lips and repentance of the heart is of no account (though the scriptures teach otherwise: repentance of the lips is of no account with repentance of the heart!) The next verse however clarifies what the wicked in sheol

are being silent about: their lies and pride and arrogance and various wickednesses. This could not possibly be considered evidence that the wicked in sheol must be restrained in silence from repenting and doing righteousness. (How people appeal to this verse against repentance and also to the Rich Man in hades conversing with Abraham, is a mystery best left to God!)

Psalm 33:8; (scope of salvation?)

Psalm 34:15-18; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): The eyes of YHWH are toward righteous ones, and His ears are toward their cry. The faces of YHWH (an interesting plural) are in the doers of evil, to cut off the memory of those doers from the earth; crying, YHWH hears and from all their distresses rescues them! YHWH is near to ones being broken of heart and He shall save those whose spirits are crushed (i.e. contrite or repentant). "The righteous cry" is a translational guess by scholars who are trying to harmonize this psalm with non-salvation after death, which they think the scriptures teach elsewhere. But the context is clear enough: YHWH crushes, makes contrite, the doers of evil, when He cuts off their memory from the earth; so they cry and YHWH hears and rescues them from every distress, namely the distresses He Himself has punished them with.

**Psalm 41:9;** (punishment not hopeless) (warning against non-universalism): David was rather notorious about wanting God to have mercy on him the sinner who repents but not to have mercy on other sinners. He kind of leans in that direction

here, too, but the details are more explicitly (and somewhat ironically) aimed against people, even his closest friends, who abandon him to God's punishment for his sin (betraying and killing a trusting friend), expecting the punishment to be finally hopeless. David trusts that God will accept David's repentance, to which David was led by his punishment from God, and will raise David in the end to be righteous ever afterward in the presence of God. This does not seem to be a Psalm where David sees yet that he is still putting himself in the place of those he is hoping to be condemned by God; but Jesus (the sinless son of David, even the YHWH Most High to Whom David is praying here) graciously picks up this prayer as a prophecy of His own betrayal by Judas Iscariot and eventual vindication by God. See extensive comments on John 15 (with pickups back to John 13) and John 17 later.

Psalm 46:10; (scope of salvation?)

Psalm 49:19; (counter-evidence against universalism): "He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see the light." The sons of Korah, rather like David, have a habit of expecting and even requesting God not to save other people from Sheol, yet fully trust God to save themselves from Sheol after being punished there by God! -- this psalm is another specimen of that. However, the term translated "never" here, elsewhere like at Job 34:36, indicates continuation until completion, for Elihu certainly wants Job to be tried for speaking without knowledge like a wicked man and adds rebellion to his sin (in Elihu's estimate). The

root meaning in fact is a shining goal and so in that sense can have a religious connotation of perpetuity, such as when speaking of God and His intentions. Admittedly there is a negative here after the 'natzah', but so there was in Elihu's judgment against Job that he should negative-natzah be tried. Of course, one might say that Elihu wished Job to be tried forever without end (instead of never to be tried as is commonly translated, i.e. that the trial would never reach conclusion); but God had other ideas about Job, and might have other ideas about the proud after they have been humbled in Sheol -- not unlike the original sons of Korah themselves!

Psalm 62:11-12; (punishment not hopeless): the statement from 12b, that God pays every person according to their work, sometimes occurs in scenes of coming punishment from God. King David however finishes his warning against oppression, and his hope of God's refuge from treachery, with the revelation,

"One thing God has spoken;

"These two things I heard:

"That power belongs to God

"and lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord!

"For You {shawlam} a man according to his work!"

Power and lovingkindness are the same thing in God (according to the revelation), so power expressed in punishment of sin must still be lovingkindness toward the person being punished. Notably, the verb {shawlam} supports this: it's a primitive word meaning 'to make safe', related to the word for peace, and involving by metaphorical

application several actions with beneficial intentions and goals for the one being acted toward, such as fairly paying, completing, saving, being friendly, making amends, to perfect, to make good, to make prosper, to make a peace treaty.

Psalm 66; (counter-evidence against universalism): this psalm features a curious exception to testimony elsewhere in scripture, that God not only doesn't accept deceiving or feigned obedience and loyalty but will eventually bring everyone to worship and obey Him honestly. The Psalmist, when talking about how all people will eventually come to worship God as a sign of the greatness of His glory, but His enemies will do so deceitfully! Many translations ignore the relevant term here, *kachash*, altogether; others translate it as *cringing*, which could be neutral as to intention in English. All three verb forms which allow the *cringing* translation (Niphal, Piel, and Hitpa'el) also tend to stress a negative intention, especially the Piel form which is by far the most common form for this verb in scripture, and which is listed as the form for this verse. (The Qal form would only mean to become lean, which would fit very comfortably with many scriptures about the gluttonous enemies of God becoming lean through punitive discipline, including as part of their restoration process, but I don't know that the original consonants could fit the Qal form.)

Psalm 67; (scope of salvation?)



Psalm 68; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation) (repentance of rebel kings) (salvation of rebel angels): This Psalm features God freeing prisoners in the Day of the Lord to come (which Paul in Ephesians 4 compares in principle to the original descent of Christ). The Psalm starts out with hope of the day to come when YHWH shall destroy the wicked and lead out the prisoners into prosperity, leaving the rebellious to dwell in a parched land! (verses 1-6) That is the context of verse 18, where God ascends on high leading captive His captives -- which shall result (as verse 18 also says) not only in God receiving gifts among men from those who are His followers at His coming, but even also from the rebellious so that "YaH God" may dwell with them!

It would also be worth observing that in extended context (indicated elsewhere in the OT), those people who are being saved by God from imprisonment by the rebellious, were put into that situation by God in the first place as punishment for their own rebellion.

I certainly allow that the specific events in view by David are most likely the institution of the millennial reign before the general resurrection (of which the OT has a lot to talk about), and so the rebels who repent (despite being left in the parched places deprived of their prisoners) could be survivors of God's militant wrath against them (with Egypt sending envoys, although other prophecies indicate she will hold out a while due to faith in her river against punitive drought for continuing to rebel, and with Ethiopia -- pagan at the time of the

Psalm's composition of course -- quickly stretching out her hands to God, 68:31).

Even so, "God is to us a God of deliverances, and to YaH God belong escapes for death" (verse 20, difficult to interpret or even to translate). And while God shall bring back someone from Bashan (historically a land not only of super-pagans and enemies of Israel but also ruled by Og last of the Rephaim, one of the descendents of the Nephilim, at the time of its conquest and total slaughter by the armies of Israel) and from the depths of the sea -- the latter of which is certainly one of the poetic ways of describing places where rebel spirits are imprisoned, and given the ancient context of Bashan in connection with rebel spirits slain and imprisoned by God, namely the Nephilim, so would "Bashan" in this case -- in order to shatter them in blood and feed them to dogs (which must refer to a continuation of their punishment)...

...nevertheless, there are indications even in Psalm 68 (vv.15-16) that the mountain of Bashan shall become the dwelling place of God, despite Bashan being also the mountain of many peaks which is envious of the mountain of God.

(The physical territory of Bashan is somewhere in what became Gilead and eventually Samaria; which matches with Ezekiel's prophecy that in the coming millennial reign of YHWH on earth a new city and sanctuary complex will be built, along with the restoration of Jerusalem, 30 miles north of Jerusalem for YHWH to reside and for many of the sacrifices to be reinstated. In any case,

even though the territory of Bashan shall be desolated by God's wrath, especially in the Day of the Lord to come, it shall eventually be made fruitful again by God, as its name itself implies. NOTE: DOUBLE-CHECK WHETHER BASHAN IS ACTUALLY GOLAN/MOUNT HERMON REGION, OR IF THERE ARE TWO BASHANS! It doesn't make any ultimate difference to the argument, but I want to be correct on the data.)

And if the rulers of Bashan/the depths of the sea are the same rebels who were imprisoning the people God rescues from imprisonment -- where God Himself had sent them as punishment for their own sins -- then even Psalm 68 indicates that those rebels shall give gifts to God eventually in order for Him to live with them. Which may be why Psalm 68, after mentioning God bringing them back from the depths of the sea to harshly punish further, states that "they", same pronoun referent, have seen the procession of God into the sanctuary: which is at least related to (if not exactly the same as) the temple at Jerusalem for which kings will bring gifts to God (v.29). Compare with the kings of the earth entering the New Jerusalem after its descent in Rev 21!

Psalm 69; (counter-evidence against universalism): this chapter, especially verses 22-28 (verse 22 having been applied to Judas Iscariot by Peter in Acts 1:20), are sometimes appealed to as testimony that God Who is Himself essentially righteousness will grant the prayer of a man who wishes for a persecutor to never enter into the righteousness of God. Aside from the illogic of such a wish (emotionally

understandable under the circumstances), it should be noted that David himself routinely bases his own hope for salvation on God's mercy to penitent sinners, precisely because (as he says in 69:33 for example) God does not despise His prisoners! In fact, the general context of the Psalm is ironically instructive, because what David is complaining about are people who undermine his hope for salvation by claiming that God will not save David after punishing David! In other words, the people whom he prays to be hopelessly punished by God are those who insist on hopeless punishment from God instead of God saving those He punishes! David in his emotional distress is asking for God to punish those people as those people want God to punish David. David might thus be being ironic and not really mean he expects God to hopelessly punish them; or David (in his emotional distress) may not yet perceive that seriously asking for them to be punished that way puts himself under the same judgment.

This is unfortunately complicated further by David prophesying the death of the Messiah Son of David by typological comparison with himself (verse 21 particularly); so then the question is whether the sinless Son of David would seriously pray for God to punish those with the hopeless punishment they think God is punishing the Son of David with, the way the sinful King David might inconsistently pray about his own enemies.

Fortunately, the sinless Son of David wails for pity on His betrayer (Matt 26:24 and parallels); still considers Judas His friend at the moment of betrayal (Matt 26:50); certainly chooses not to

leave other traitors hopelessly excluded (all four Gospels in regard to the apostles and especially Simon Peter); and gives strong indications in His Final Discourse that He expects the apostles to love Judas despite his treachery. (See comments on John 17:1-7 and surrounding contexts.)

Moreover, when St. Paul applies this Psalm to stumbling Israel (Rom 10:9-10), he expressly goes on to deny that they have stumbled so as to fall, and teaches through the end of Rom 11 that they shall be reconciled and grafted again into the vine so that all Israel shall be saved by the deliverer out of Zion (Christ) who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Paul's description of the role of stumbling Israel here, closely matches the role of Judas Iscariot in the death of Christ.

See also comments on Psalm 68, also attributed to David, which points strongly to post-mortem salvation and to the salvation of rebel angels. One way or another, the testimony of one Psalm must be interpreted in light of the other (or both in light of a third standard).

Psalm 77; (punishment not hopeless) (everlasting not everlasting): Asaph, being punished for some sin unspecified in this psalm, comes to realize that his grief or infirmity is partly due to thinking that the right hand of the Most High has changed (v.10) and so meditates instead on how YHWH redeemed the sons of Jacob and Joseph out of bondage in Israel. The central assurance of the Psalm, in a series of rhetorical questions, is

that YHWH will not reject forever, He will be favorable again, His lovingkindness (mercy) will not cease forever (netsach, from a primitive root to glitter or shine, metaphorically referring to the distance of the sun or stars), His word does not cease from generation to generation (referring to God's promise that even if He has to punish sinners He isn't doing so hopelessly.) God does not cease to be gracious, and He does not even withdraw His compassion in His anger. (vv.7-10) This is part of the holy way and greatness of God. (v.13) Along the way, he considers the OLAM years, the eonian years, meaning no farther back than Adam certainly and probably no farther back than the Exodus out of Egypt.

Psalm 78:69; (everlasting not everlasting): God has built His sanctuary like the earth which He has founded forever. But the earth will be destroyed to be replaced by the new earth. (Yet God's sanctuary shall in fact endure forever! -- unless this means the Solomon Temple, which did not endure forever.)

Psalm 83:13-18; (punishment not hopeless) (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): in the middle of a large number of standard pleas for YHWH to punish evildoers to the death (the way previous evildoers in Jewish history had been slain), including a plea that they may be confounded and troubled with much punitive imagery "olam" (to the limit, often translated "forever"), the psalmist Asaph gives the reason "that they may seek Your name O YHWH" and "they may know that

You Whose name alone is YHWH are the Most High over all the earth." The latter might not necessarily involve repentance and salvation, but the first certainly does! -- and some translators realize this is so strongly true that they try to translate verse 18 to read "that men may know" (suggesting someone else other than the unrighteous previously spoken of as "they").

Psalm 90; (counter-evidence against universalism) (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): this interesting psalm, attributed to Moses the man of God, features the famous saying later used by Peter in his second epistle, "a thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by". Peter uses the reference to assure his readers that the day of YHWH is surely on the way, even though the Jewish patriarchs have fallen asleep, during which Day of judgment and destruction the heavens and the earth are reserved for fire against ungodly men and mockers; but YHWH is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient (using the term {makrothumiô}) toward us, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. Moses speaks in this Psalm however from the perspective of those who have already been consumed by God's anger and terrified by God's wrath, having been judged in their injustices by God and having had their secret sins exposed. Moses uses language here, especially verses 3-6, which annihilationists (whether Arm or Calv) have sometimes appealed to as evidence of annihilation; but Moses is pleading from the perspective of those already consumed by the wrath of God, and yet who are clearly are still

alive somehow -- though possibly they have already died! At any rate, Moses is pleading in solidarity with those who have been super-punished by God, with the trust and expectation that God will accept the repentance of those who have already been consumed to the uttermost by His wrath, satisfying His penitent rebel servants in the morning with His lovingkindness (or mercy), making them glad for as many days and years as they suffered under punishment for their pride and their sins, that they may sing for joy and be glad all their days, presenting to God a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 93:1; (everlasting not everlasting): the world is established by God so that it cannot be moved. (Also Psalm 96:10.) But God will destroy it eventually. Also, the world turns out to move a whole lot and never stops moving! (In fact the Earth never passes through the same portion of space twice.)

Psalm 103; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): while it is true that the second half of the Psalm constantly qualifies that God is merciful and compassionate on those who revere Him, the first half stresses that God pardons all injustices and redeems our souls from sheol, and will not always strive against us or keep His anger 'to the horizon/limit' (which by context in this case does mean 'forever'). Even in the second half, David remembers that God knows what we are made of and is mindful that we are dust, like grass or flowers in the field. If that referred to annihilation, it would then be only trivially or technically true that God does not



strive forever or is always angry with us: God's final action in annihilating us (or authoritatively allowing us to be annihilated, which would be in principle the same as doing the deed Himself) would be an act of anger and striving against us; and we would not have our injustices forgiven, nor would our souls be redeemed from sheol after all (except to throw us back into sheol after all, making the supposed redemption a trivial technicality again). It is true that some of the language resembles God's statements about the evildoers before the flood, but it also resembles prophetic promises from God elsewhere in the OT that after He has punished rebels to death He will heal, raise and restore them, having thereby led them to final repentance (not final annihilation). Note how this fits with a post-mortem interpretation of 1 Peter 3, by the way: if the language here is similar to what God says about the antediluvian sinners, 1 Peter 3 also talks about those same sinners.

Psalm 104:4(5); (everlasting not everlasting): God laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed "forever and ever". But the current earth shall be destroyed to make room for the new earth. (Also, this tends to picture the earth stationary somewhere with foundations.)

Psalm 107:10-21; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): this anonymous psalm (unattributed to David or the Sons of Korah or anyone else) is still quite famous for phrases such as "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" and for being the 'naval' psalm, "Those who go down to the sea in ships, the wonders of the Lord

behold". The whole psalm is very interesting, in repeating the theme of sinners and pagans being punished and otherwise troubled by God (apparently including the traders who go down to the sea in ships, which is probably a reference to the Syro-phoenician Canaanites, such as would have sailed out of Tarshish with Jonah -- certainly not to the Jews who at the time avoided sea travel!) But the purpose is not mere vengeance. The repeatedly stressed purpose is so that the sinners and pagans may learn to call upon YHWH and so be saved into loyal fellowship with Him. Just as God changes rivers and springs into deserts because of the wickedness of the inhabitants, He changes deserts back into springs and pools and gives the newly restored land to the hungry. But the thrust of the psalm is that the hungry are those who previously were unjustly rich! The centerpiece of the Psalm involves (verse 10) those who rebel against the words of God and who had spurned His counsel, whose hearts He humbles with labor, dwelling in darkness now and the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and iron-chains. Once they cry out to YHWH, though, He saves them from their distresses, brings them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and breaks their bands apart, shattering the gates of bronze and ripping apart the bars of iron! These were fools because of their rebellious ways, and they were afflicted by God because of their injustices, but being sick and drawing near to the gates of death they cry out to YHWH in their trouble, and He saves them out of their distress: He heals them by sending His Word, delivering them from their pits. Thus the refrain, twice repeated in this portion (and

several other times in the Psalm), "Let them give thanks to YHWH for His lovingkindness, and for His wonderful acts to the sons of men!" The imagery in this central portion is strongly similar to hades/sheol punishment, and could be post-mortem: although drawing near to the gates of death does not mean going inside necessarily, the other imagery indicates that some have gone inside! (The difference is only that some repent before they go in and others afterward.) YHWH's lovingkindness even to those whom He punishes in the pits should not be surprising, "For His lovingkindness [or mercy] is olam!" to the horizon or even forever, eonian, uniquely from God. It is this declaration specifically (His mercy is eonian) that the redeemed of the Lord are exhorted to proclaim, being redeemed from the hand of the satan, and gathered from the lands of the north and the east and the west, and even from the sea (verse 3, although this is sometimes translated "south" in English): another Jewish metaphor for the prison of rebel spirits. "Who is wise? -- let him give heed to these things, and consider the lovingkindness of the LORD," ends the Psalm. (This Psalm is also quoted elsewhere in the OT in direct conjunction of restoring punished rebels and healing lands that God has blasted to wastes, restoring them to people for habitation. For example Jeremiah 33:1-13.)

Psalm 110; (punishment not hopeless) (salvation of rebel angels): David sings of God promising that the Messiah shall shatter the kings of the earth and shatter the (single) head over men, in the day of His wrath. But He shall also rule (a term of benevolent purpose) in their midst while doing

so. Compare directly with Christ making war in 'fair-togetherness' over the kings of the earth, shepherding them with the rod of iron, shattering their bodies for the birds, at Rev 19, and the connection there to Psalm 23 (plus what happens with the kings of the earth afterward in RevJohn).

Psalm 139:8; (post-mortem salvation): it's possible that this reference to Sheol is only a spatial comparison, not a reference to the spiritual abode of the dead, but those who appeal to it for the latter purpose had better notice the context that David bases his hope in salvation from sin on the omnipresence of God in Sheol.

Psalm 141:5-6; (punishment not hopeless): David prays, with some refined irony, "Let the righteous smite me in lovingkindness and reprove me; do not let my head refuse such excellent oil; for still my prayer is against their wicked deeds! Their judges are thrown down by the sides of the rock, and they hear my words, for they are pleasant." How much more truly loving, and not wicked, must be the righteous blows and rebukes of God as excellent oil which shall not break our heads!

Psalm 145; (counter-evidence against universalism) (rebellions shall cease) (post-mortem salvation): verse 20 is sometimes cited against universal salvation, since "YHWH keeps [guards, maintains for a purpose] all who love Him; but all the unjust, He will destroy." Yet David also says earlier in the same Psalm that YHWH is

gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in lovingkindness; indeed YHWH is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works. All His works must include the wicked whom He destroys! -- similarly, when all His works shall give thanks to God, this must also include the wicked whom He destroys! Those who fall, He sustains, and He raises up those who are bowed down, which includes those whom He has Himself bowed down. Both types of declaration are easy to reconcile with God restoring the unjust once He has destroyed them; but even a doctrine of annihilation must regard "all His works" as an exaggeration, for those who are annihilated are still the work of God. If universal salvation is not true, then God shall be acting to permanently foil His own intentions here, by choosing never to bring all His works to loyally praise Him as godly ones. (Or sinners permanently foil God's intentions here! -- and which idea would be worse?!)

Psalm 148:2-3; (salvation of rebel angels): all God's angels and all His hosts and all the stars are exhorted to praise Him and to exalt only His name; but some of God's angels have rebelled and become (metaphorically) wandering stars who kept not their duties. This hints (although not certainly) either at the salvation or the ultimate annihilation of those rebel spirits, as the point of the Psalm is to exhort all existent reality to praise God.

Psalm 148:6; (everlasting not everlasting): YHWH has established the sun and moon and all the stars of light (and the waters that are above the

heavens!!) "forever and ever" (eons of the eons). But the earth and the heavens, the work of YHWH's hands, shall perish though YHWH endures. (Psalm 102:25-26 plus several other references to a new heaven and a new earth.)

Prov 1:24-32; (counter-evidence against universalism): the key counter-evidence here is that those who stubbornly refuse Wisdom (a figure for Christ and/or for the Holy Spirit), shall be refused help by Wisdom when their punishment comes upon them. "Then they will call on Me but I shall not answer, they will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of YHWH." Instead Wisdom shall mock them when their dread comes and even laugh at their calamity. One way or another this must be accounted with Christ's own promise that those who keep on seeking and knocking shall find Him and shall be let in. One fairly obvious reconciliation of the verses, is that anyone looking to Wisdom merely to be saved from punishment has the wrong attitude and won't be saved from the punishment; thus "they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be satiated with their own devices" (v.31), which is not something that would be said about people truly repentant and seeking to be saved from their sins. Similarly, seeking Wisdom merely to be saved from punishment while intending to continue in one's own way and one's own devices, is definitely not the same as turning to accept the rebuke of Wisdom, for which Wisdom promises in verse 23, "Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you!" Other

scriptures indicate that God intends to lead the impenitent to accept His rebuke, even to willingly value the justice of God's punishment.

Prov 10:28, 11:7-8, 23; (counter-evidence against universalism): "The hope of the righteous is gladness, but the expectation of the wicked perishes." "When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish. And the hope of strong men perishes. The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked enters his place." "The expectation of the wicked is wrath." This is part of the beginning of a long-running set of proverbs (from Solomon), going through several chapters, contrasting the righteous and the wicked. The basic concept in these verses is that the impenitent wicked person is certainly going to be punished, at death if not sooner, and that his hope and expectation to continue doing wickedness will be brought down with his pride sooner or later (at which everyone will and should rejoice). They don't say anything about the hope of the penitent wicked to be saved by God from their sins and reconciled to God and man -- and even if they did, any appeal to those verses would instantly invalidate any hope of any sinner to repent and be saved by God! The verses either count nothing against universal salvation from sin (though certainly against the idea that the wicked will never be punished by God); or count so much against any salvation from sin at all that any Christian would have to qualify them, whether affirming or denying universal salvation from sin, and even in much the same way either way. This is quite standard across the proverbs.

Prov 23:13-14; (post-mortem salvation): while it's possible that verse 14 only means to repeat with variant words the idea from verse 13, that the good father punishes his son with the rod in order to keep him from dying, it might also be an example of the poetic tactic of going farther in the restatement for emphasis. If so, not only does the father use the rod of punishment to keep his beloved son from dying, but also to save his son out from Sheol.

Prov 29:1; (counter-evidence against universalism): "A man who hardens his neck after much rebuke (or argument or judgment), will suddenly be broken and there is no remedy." Except for God, unless this verse is supposed to count against other testimony about God breaking the proud evildoers in order to lead them to be humble and thus leading them to reconcile and do justice instead of injustice. Even if God shatters the pot He has made beyond human repair, so that even its fragments cannot hold any water, God can and does still miraculously repair it, and intends to do so, and shall do so -- leading, not-incidentally, to much more salvation all around as a result of the witness of such a miracle! Such verses can be found elsewhere; since one set should be interpreted in light of the other, according to some overarching principle, why not at the very least interpret them according to narrative progression (where one verse stops at X, but others go on past X to Y and Z)? -- if somehow one dares not interpret them according to the principle that where sin



exceeds grace hyper-exceeds for not as the sin is the grace!

Eccles 1:4; (everlasting not everlasting): the Preacher declares that "the earth abides forever", but the present earth shall be destroyed and a new earth created.

Eccles 9:10; (counter-evidence against universalism): "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your strength, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you are going." Taken as it stands this would be evidence against any salvation from the grave at all, much less any salvation from sin at all -- which might indeed be the belief of the Preacher (traditionally regarded as Solomon picking up the pieces of his life after failing to be a wise prophet and servant of God) -- and so if adduced without further evidence would prove too much. The context however is about doing good work; in fact in verse 2 the Preacher thinks the righteous and the wicked, the good and the evil, the clean and the unclean, the one who offers sacrifice and the one who does not, the good man and the sinner, the one able to swear and the one unable, all meet the same fate! -- and that fate is an evil fate! The only advantage of the living is that they know they will die in an evil fate, while the dead know nothing, nor (such as in verses 4-6) shall they have any reward at all, now or later, whether righteous or not. Therefore (in a word) eat, drink, dress cheerfully, and love your woman as well as you can today, which are works approved by God, and

the pleasure of which is God's reward for those who work strongly at them. These, which are the Preacher's express contexts, are not typically what Christians believe to be true about life however! -- and certainly are not what proponents of hopeless punishment have in mind when citing verse 10 as evidence for the position.

Moreover, apart from the context the rationale of the verse is that there is practically no rational existence after death at all. If soul-sleep is true, then any punishment before the general resurrection is not true, and the question of hopeless punishment or universal salvation can be deferred for the general resurrection: the reference cannot be used against Christian universalism. But those who follow other scriptural evidence in favor of conscious pre-resurrection existence (to some extent) will on the other hand have to interpret this verse more expansively than for universal salvation! Generally, though, adducing this as evidence against universal salvation would be like adducing Job's statements from Job 7 against any resurrection at all.

Eccles 11:3; (counter-evidence against universalism): "And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls there it shall be." As with Eccles 9:10 this would prove too much taken by itself, though the imported implication is that those who die in one state shall never shift afterward whether for or against God. The context nearby however is quite different and sometimes even fatally pessimistic: Nature does whatever Nature

is going to do, so prepare for adversity (and prepare others by giving charitably) and don't try to guess first what Nature is going to do. If a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, and also remember the many days of darkness coming for everything that is to come will be futility. You might as well remove vexation from your heart and enjoy your body during the pleasant days of your childhood and follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes, and accept that God is going to bring you to judgment for doing all those things!

(Ecclesiastes is not a great book for adducing Christian doctrine per se; though it's a great book for looking into the mind of a fallen prophet-king struggling to pick up the pieces of his life after being driven to insanity by abusing his God-given wisdom. The Epilogue, 12:9-14, seems added on later after some time of recuperation, perhaps while collecting the Proverbs.) In the worst case, if the figure of the falling tree indicated the state of the soul at death, the analogy would only apply to the difficulty involved in harvesting the tree!

Isaiah 2-5; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless) (sinners given to righteous): St. Paul references this prophecy when talking of the whole-ruination coming to those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ at the coming of the Christ (as YHWH, also referencing a prophecy from Jeremiah directly on this (i.e. trinitarian Christology)). The whole prophetic block is of great interest, and does not proceed chronologically (which leads to confusion), but

begins with the final result: rebel Israel restored, and rebel pagans coming to Jerusalem to be taught by YHWH, everyone being at peace with one another never again to learn war. Before then, rebel Israel will be overthrown badly, but her overthrowers will also in turn be overthrown by YHWH at His glorious appearing. When that happens, Israel will repent and so will the pagans, seeking to make peace with the righteous remnant; but interestingly the righteous remnant are called the "survivors" compared to those desperately seeking peace with them (who therefore didn't survive)! The suit of the penitent non-survivors (mainly figured as pagan adulterous Israel) will be heard and accepted, and ADNY (the plural name of 'lords' used only for YHWH) shall wash away the filth of the non-surviving daughters of Zion, purging the bloodshed from their midst by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning (4:1-6, which summarizes the result following the events of the other chapters of this prophecy, thus arriving at the initial prophecy from 2:1-4.)

Isaiah 8:21-22; (counter-evidence against universalism): "[Rebel Israel after being punished by God for infidelity such as going after spiritual soothsayers rather than seeking the prophets, the law, and the testimony] shall pass through it (the land) hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry they will be enraged and curse their king and their God (or curse by their king and their God) as they look upward. Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and they will be driven away

into darkness." Sometimes statements like this are quoted to supposedly prove that no punishment can soften or humble sinners, even punishments from God; but that simply ignores many other scriptures about God's punishments including His intentions in doing so. More discreetly, sometimes statements like this are quoted to prove that some punishments from God either always fail to humble some sinners (even though that is God's intention) or that God sends punishments never intended to humble some sinners; the former is an Arminian, the latter a Calvinistic appeal (with Catholic analogues) of course. Generally the reply to this, scripturally, depends on showing that God does intend that from punishment and eventually will get it; then the two sets of evidence can be reconciled simply by interpreting the former as meaning at first the punished people won't repent. In this specific case, however, God goes on instantly afterward to the famous chapter 9, several early portions of which are applied to Jesus (with the divine names) and His evangelical mission, where "there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish," whom He treated in earlier times with contempt but later on shall make glorious, for "the people who walk in darkness shall see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them," and so rebel Israel shall be reconciled to God along with the Gentiles. Whether this means survivors or not (and the language poetically describes those as if they did not survive but went down into Sheol/Hades), it refers to the same people who were unrepentantly cursing God in rage for being punished, and who had been

stumbling over the stumbling stone as in 8:14-15. Which itself is not only a prophecy about Jesus the 'son'/'stone', though talking explicitly about YHWH of hosts (thus an important New Testament connection to trinitarian scriptural apologetics), but also as St. Paul insists about those who thus stumble: "But have they stumbled so as to fall?! MAY IT NEVER BE!!" So whether one looks forward or looks back from these verses, the people described as being impenitent shall not remain so but shall repent and be saved after all.

Isaiah 9; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): see comments above at the end of Isaiah 8 and how they connect.

Isaiah 13:9; (counter-evidence against universalism): in this prophecy, through all of (what we now call) chapter 13, nothing is ever said of God saving (from sin or otherwise) those He either slays directly in the day of YHWH to come, or authorizes slain in sooner fulfillments (at least once apparently by soldiers who themselves are rampant evildoers, raping women as they go). But just as a destruction of Babylon by sinners, on God's authority, isn't the whole story even in this chapter; and just as the coming judgment of God in the Day of YHWH isn't the whole story (nothing is said here about the resurrection of the evil, or even of the good, for example); so the lack of a mention of post-mortem salvation here does not count against testimony in favor of it elsewhere, including from Isaiah elsewhere in this collection.

Isaiah 19:22; (punishment not hopeless): the prophecy of Isaiah 19 probably refers to the time of the millennium reign, since YHWH is shown to be reigning in Israel, bringing about fear and civil war in Egypt, and a cruel master will rise to rule and oppress them and the river (on which they expected to depend so as not to have to be loyal to YHWH) will dry up. (In other similar prophecies plagues will also strike them down at this time). But the punishment isn't hopeless: eventually they will cry to YHWH for salvation and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty Hero and He will deliver them, after which they will begin to worship Him faithfully, along with their enemies the Assyrians. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria through Israel, with Egyptians going to Assyria and vice versa and worshiping YHWH together. In that day Israel will be a third with Egypt and Assyria, blessing in the middle of them because YHWH of Armies as blessed them, saying "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance." Thus (as it is written in verse 22) "YHWH will gore Egypt," (the verb there being a primitive word for violently slaying), "goring but healing, so they will return to YHWH and He will respond to them and will heal them."

Isaiah 22:14; (counter-evidence against universalism): sometimes this obscure saying is cited in favor of the notion that God may not intend to save at least some of those whom He kills in punishment, "YHWH of armies revealed Himself in my ears, 'Surely this injustice shall not be reconciled [or atoned for or cleaned or forgiven] until you die,' says ADNY YHWH of

armies." But obviously it only means some evildoers will die unforgiven, slain by God (specifically rebel Israel, as usual, though they stand for all humanity). If anything the grammar suggests they will be cleaned or purged of their injustice after they die; and other scriptures, including in Isaiah, confirm that this will happen.

Isaiah 24-26; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): YHWH saves rebel Gentiles after destroying them. Quoted in a reference to triumphal hope of the resurrection, by St. Paul at the end of 1 Cor 15.

Isaiah 24 has a bunch of verses about heavenly and earthly rebels being utterly destroyed in the coming Day of the Lord and afterward being put into prison (24:22). The earthly rebels are classified among the Gentile rebels due to the phrase "kings of the earth". Sometime after being imprisoned by YHWH, YHWH will 'pawkad' them (24:22); translations and interpretations differ on what this means (because of the multi-valent use of the word), but context could indicate whether it means "visited" in the sense of offering release, salvation and freedom (since being visited by God to punish them many days after being ultimately punished by God would seem redundant.)

The Catholic D-R: "they shall be visited".

Lamsa's Peshitta translation: "they shall be saved".



[The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon:](#) "shall go apart, shall be redeemed" (also 'to be discharged' or 'to be specified' in Samaritan Syriac.)

[Masoretic text of the JPS:](#) "shall be punished"

JPS printed Tanakh: "they shall be remembered"

NIV super-literal: "they shall be punished" (but also a small footnote "they shall be released")

Green's interlinear: "they will be visited"

Ancient Roots Translinear: "shall be counted over a pit for an abundance of days" (this one was so different I thought I should report the whole phrase)

[Online Hebrew Interlinear:](#) "and from many of days they shall be checked" (kind of similar to the ARTB)

The latter two translations, incidentally, would seem to be reckoned by the CAL project as being Samaritan dialect usage (where 'to be specified' might mean 'to be counted' or 'to be checked' i.e. watched), not the broader Christian Syriac or Common uses.

The Septuagint, interestingly, has "to be episkope". StudyLight translates that as 'investigated, inspected, visited', but of course we would know its colloquial usage as 'shepherded'.

Isaiah 24:23, where the sun and moon shall be "abashed" and "ashamed", probably indicates idols representing rebel gods. While the terms don't necessarily have to indicate repentance, they could indicate a mental and emotional state prior to repentance. Note the thematic connection of ideas to Rev 21 however! -- kings of the earth going into the New Jerusalem, walking by the light of Christ instead of by the light of the sun and the moon.

Isaiah 25:3, the prophet praises YHWH because "a strong people" and "ruthless nations" shall come to glorify and revere YHWH. These are terms which involve loyal praise; the ruthless nations are definitely the rebel Gentiles; and verse 2 immediately preceding mirrors similar statements from the previous chapter showing that these are the same rebel Gentiles God will be destroying so hard YHWH will destroy the earth in the process!

Verse 3 also shows, in close conjunction with verse 2, that the prophecies of their fortified cities and palaces being ruined never to rise again, involve them never rising again in rebellion.

Verses 4 and 5 talk about YHWH silencing the uproar of the nations (Gentiles) who have been oppressing God's loyal people; yet these same ruthless Gentiles will come to loyally praise and revere God for being a salvation and refuge from storm and heat. Back in the previous chapter it was the ruthless nations who were being overthrown by YHWH in storm and heat, and who are reduced thereby to being helpless and in

distress. The intervening verses at first suggest, and then state more explicitly that they shall eventually (after being completely ruined and imprisoned by God) come to revere and praise God.

Verses 6 through 9 indicate that YHWH will come to bless all people, not only to remove the reproach from His own people, but to wipe tears away from every face, removing the shroud (i.e. of death) stretching over all the nations.

Verses 10-12 reiterate that rebel Gentiles (exemplified as Moab) will be trodden down, overflowed and ruined by YHWH.

Isaiah 26: Much of the first half of this chapter is about God's loyal people and the expectation of their salvation from rebels, specifically the rebel Gentiles who have abused God's own favor to them in this life. Verse 10 for example complains that even though the wicked are shown favor by God they refuse to learn righteousness, insist on dealing unjustly, and do not perceive the majesty of YHWH. However, this is by contrast to verse 9 where the prophet (speaking for the righteous loyalists) longs for the day of YHWH's judgments "for when the earth has Thy judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" -- which the righteous loyalists wouldn't have to learn.

Even though 26:14 states that the dead will not live and the departed will not rise because God has punished and destroyed them, wiping out even remembrance of them, verses 16 and onward

indicate that God's own people have also been in that position and came thereby to repent of their sins, confessing God as their savior (and also that they themselves were not the saviors of the earth! -- v.18) God shall raise them to life, reversing the curse they were under parallel to the curse of verse 14 on impenitent rebels. This indicates God can do just the same thing for those in verse 14, which fits the overall picture being developed in the preceding two chapters (centered on chapter 25).

Put shortly: rebel Gentiles eventually come to give loyal worship to YHWH in Isaiah 25:3, which obviously has to happen after their overthrown and imprisonment in Isaiah 24:22; and they would be thus included in the blessing of resurrection and salvation and restoration emphatically promised to all people (not only God's chosen people Israel, but them too of course) in Isaiah 25:6-9.

Isaiah 27:4-5; (post-mortem salvation) (salvation of rebel angels) (punishment not hopeless): here in the middle of many declarations about the coming destruction of evildoers in the day of YHWH, up to and including YHWH slaying Leviathan in punishment (v.1), YHWH reveals that He has no wrath in Him; only goes out to war against those who insist on warring with Him; and only destroys their ability to make war on Him; with the goal of leading them to rely on Him for protection and be at peace with Him. These statements are made in connection to His protection of the vineyard in verses 2 and 3: YHWH protects it by such a righteous war (seeking to bring down and make

peace with even Leviathan). The offer of peace extends to Leviathan, i.e. Satan, too: the previous chapters indicate that being utterly slain and then imprisoned by YHWH is not the hopeless final end of the matter (including for heavenly rebel armies, of whom Leviathan is the chief).

JPS Tanakh: "There is no anger in Me. If one offers Me thorns and thistles, I will march to battle against him, and set all of them on fire. But if he holds fast to My refuge, he makes Me his friend, he makes Me his friend." (editors admit the meaning of the Hebrew in some places is uncertain.)

New American Standard: "I have no wrath. Should who [someone] give Me briars and thorns in battle, I would step on them, I would burn them completely. Or let him take hold of My protection, let him make peace with Me, let him make peace with Me."

The King James, followed by the New KJV, tends to agree that the Lord is fighting the thorns and briars taken up by those going to war against God.

New Living translation agrees, God is attacking and burning up the briars and thorns.

Young's Living Translation agrees the Lord is fighting and burning up the thorn or briar given to Him in battle.

Webster's Bible agrees, God would go through and burn the briers and thorns of whomever gave them to Him in battle.

Wycliff seems to agree God is going after the thorn or briar if given to Him, but goes on to say that if someone wants God to withhold His strength (instead of going after the thorn or briar?) then they'd better make peace. (Generally translations agree that God will make peace with whomever clings to Him as a refuge; Wycliff is a little unusual here.)

World English Bible, God goes to battle if He finds briars or thorns, marching on them and burning them altogether.

The 1998 ISR agrees God would go through the thornbushes and weeds of whomever (was fool enough to) give them to Him in battle.

The Orthodox Jewish Bible puts it quite colorfully, "Chemah (wrath, fury) is not in Me; but if there were briers and thorns set against Me in milchamah, I would march through it, I would burn it together. Or let him [THE ENEMY OF MY VINEYARD, THE "BRIER" OR "THORN"] take hold of My ma'oz (stronghold, protection) that he may make shalom with Me; yes, he shall make shalom with Me."

The NIV and the ESB and the RSV (and the original American Standard), as well as Darby, take the interrogative to mean that God would rather be fighting the briars and thorns than the vineyard; ditto the NET and the God's Word Translation

(though they both go on to say, along with some other similar translations that God is willing to make peace [u]with the briars and thorns[/u] if they will become His subjects.)

The International Standard Version translates it to mean God wishes the vineyard would give Him briars and thorns to fight so that He could burn the vineyard up! -- "or else let it make peace with Me, yes let it make peace with Me." Well, that's sufficiently schizo, thanks. ;)

The Holman Christian Standard take the interrogative to mean that if the vineyard produces briars and thorns God will burn the vineyard. Jerome in his Vulgate seems to think that whoever makes God a briar or thorn in battle will go through and burn up other people. The 1917 version of the JPS Tanakh has God wishing He were like flaming briars and thorns so that He could burn "it" altogether with one step (whatever "it" is -- the vineyard He's protecting...??) The LXX is a pretty free interpretation, "There is no woman that has not taken hold of her; [who will set me to watch stubble in the field? -- sometimes omitted] because of this [enemy] I have set her aside; therefore on this account the Lord has done all that he appointed. I am burnt up, they that dwell in her shall cry, Let us make peace with him, let us make peace."

Rashi's Talmudic commentary on the Hebrew explains the idea behind the 1917 JPS Tanakh: he and some previous rabbis think God is complaining that He cannot go up against the nations in wrath

because Israel is doing just as badly or worse, and so the standard of justice is blocking His way; but if Israel would repent then they themselves would be like thorns and brambles for God, allowing Him to trample over the standard of justice (!! ) to beat down even more severely on Esau/Ishamael and burn them up altogether. Rashi admits that other Sages of blessed memory think the saying means God wishes to pour out wrath on Israel but cannot due to the oath He took not to do so; otherwise God would be like thorns and brambles on the vineyard and tread it down and ignite it completely. Either way, if Israel would take hold of YHWH's fortress, the Tanahk, "then they shall grant Me peace, to calm My thoughts and My ire which trouble Me because I do not avenge Myself upon My adversaries, and I will, indeed, take revenge from them." Doing so would allow God to have peace from the standard of justice which accuses God of unfairly preferring Israel since clearly they are no different from any other nation. (The rabbis could be awfully blasphemous sometimes. :roll: )

The grammar is admittedly kind of squirrely there. The NIV super-literal interlinear reads, "anger not to-me who? he-would-give-me, brier thorn in-the-battle I-would-march against-her I-would-set-on-fire-her together or let-him-take-hold of-refuge-of-me let-him-make peace with-me peace let-him-make with-me."

The Concordant super-literal reads, "fury there-is-no to-me who? he shall-give-me buckthorn spine in-battle I-shall-stride in-her I shall-ravage-



her altogether or he-shall-hold-fast in-strength-of-me he-shall-make peace to-me peace he-shall-make to-me."

Green's literal: "Fury is not to Me. Who will give Me briars and thorns in the battle? I would step through it, I would burn it at once. Or he will take hold of Me strength that he may make peace with Me; peace let him make with Me."

Biblehub's super-literal: "fury not to who [is-]would-set the-briers thorns in-battle I-would-go-in I-would-burn-them together or let-him-take-hold on-My-protection he-may-make peace to peace he-shall-make"

All things considered, the translation I'm using is one viable option which fits, I think, the local and extended contexts of Isaiah: the vineyard goes to war against God with brambles and thorns, but God has no wrath in Him and so fights against the brambles and thorns, removing the ability of the vineyard (and the nations) to wage war against Him, expecting this to lead Israel and the nations alike to sue for peace. Relatedly, even the human super-sinners (up to the kings of the earth) and the rebel angels, a couple of chapters previously, will be pawkad' after being slain and imprisoned, which in context of someone already imprisoned must mean forgiven and released. God fights proud Leviathan to the death (as in the first verses of chapter 27), but the [u]goal[/u] is to shatter Leviathan's thorns and thistles with which Leviathan goes out to war against God; once

Leviathan is humbled, the rebel dragon will make peace and can be freed from imprisonment.

Isaiah 27:11; (counter-evidence against universalism): "For they are a people of no understanding; therefore, He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will show them no favor." This is in the same chapter where YHWH reveals He has no wrath in Him but only goes to war against those who go to war against Him, and only burns up the thorns and thistles with which they try to fight Him, the intention being that they shall drop the thorns and thistles and cling to Him instead as their friend. But the two kinds of statements, like the statement about slaying Leviathan (Satan) at the start of the chapter, are easily reconciled: after a point has passed God does not spare even His own chosen people from punishment, no more than He spares Satan who once was a loyal angel of God -- but the punishment is not hopeless, even when it is to the death, because while God does do wrath, God has no wrath in Him. God is love, not merely does love; but God is not wrath although He does wrath. Relatedly, a couple of verses earlier (Isaiah 27:9), God says that by this punishment the injustice of Jacob shall be purged, and that this is all the fruit to take away his sin. God's own lack of mercy must be temporary then, even on the limited scope of these few verses, for the intention is to clean Jacob and take away rebel Israel's sin. (The defense that Israel's sin is purged and taken away only from the survivors, not those slain, is not of much use since everyone, even non-Christian Jews, will admit the survivors

continued to sin to one extent or another; but even if that is discounted for poetic purposes, such a defense by the same proportion must apply the cited verse 11 only to the survivors, not to those slain, who may yet be shown saving mercy.)

Isaiah 30; (punishment not hopeless): this whole chapter is addressed to Israel suffering in punishment from YHWH because they insisted on allying with oppression and guile and so (from the future perspective of prophecy) have been so ruthlessly shattered like the smashing of a potter's jar that not a sherd remains large enough to scoop any water or even hold a coal from a fire (e.g. 12-14). But they shall be saved into repentance, even though they were not willing to repent even when the invading Assyrians came to overrun them (vv.15-17). Yet even so, after their ultra-punishment (shattered in such a way that no human could remake them, as a fired pot is shattered), God waits to be gracious and merciful to them, promising that they shall eventually repent and He shall eventually restore them with great blessings (possibly indicating resurrection here, or maybe only talking about the few survivors); binding up the fracture of His people and healing the bruise of His blow against them (e.g. v.26). The rest of the chapter involves YHWH smiting the invading Assyrians instead, striking them with the flame of consuming fire and the rod of punishment and burning them with brimstone and fire in the valley of Topheth, i.e. Gehenna but using the name of its days as a Moloch sacrifice area. The reference to Topheth per se is not only ironic (that the unjust shall be slain where the unjust

unjustly slayed), but the term usage itself suggests that YHWH rejects what happens there even though He does it Himself. Together with the explanation of the goal of the utter destruction of rebel Israel, this suggests God does not mean the punishment of the rebel Gentiles to be hopeless either. See also comments on Jeremiah 18 and 19, which somewhat parallels this prophecy topically, and especially Jer 19's connection as a prophecy of Judas Iscariot!

Isaiah 33:13; (counter-evidence to universalism): "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: 'Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?'" This does at least add more weight to the notion that the eonian consuming fire is God Himself. That sinners think they are going to be annihilated or else face a permanent fate worse than death is not, however, solid evidence they will do so.

Isaiah 34:9-17; (everlasting not everlasting) (punishment not hopeless): The fire burning the land of Edom/Bozrah "will not be quenched night or day; its smoke will go up forever. From generation to generation it will be desolate; none will pass through it forever and ever." Thus "its streams shall be turned to pitch, and its loose earth into brimstone, and its land shall become burning pitch." Nevertheless, despite this, birds and beasts are also said to safely inhabit and possess the area "forever".

Isaiah 35; (everlasting not everlasting) (punishment not hopeless): not only do birds and beasts safely inhabit and possess "forever" the land of Edom/Bozrah where a fire will burn "forever and ever" turning all the streams to pitch, and sending up smoke "forever", with no one passing through it "forever and ever" (as per Isaiah 34, which in itself clearly indicates "forever and ever" does not necessarily mean never-endingly); but the same wilderness of Arabah will rejoice and blossom and be glad, along with Carmel and Lebanon and Sharon; and those who have been punished by God for their deafness and blindness and dumbness (with deafness and blindness and dumbness and lameness) shall be healed and waters will break forth in the wilderness, and streams in Arabah, and the scorched land shall become a pool and the thirsty ground streams of water. And not only will this be so for the animals that live there (as per the preceding chapter 34), but the desert will become a highway for the redeemed to come to Jerusalem with joyful shouting and with everlasting joy upon their heads, to find (literally overtake) gladness and joy, with sorrow and sighing fleeing away instead. Obviously at least one of the "forevers" and "forevers and evers" and "everlastings" shall not be everlasting at all: by indications, the ones involving punishment, destruction, privation and sadness will not, even for Edom.

Isaiah 40; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and call out to her that her hard service [or

warfare] is ended, that her injustice has been removed [or paid off], that she has received from YHWH's hand double for all her sins." This is the start of a long sequence of consolation promises to rebel Israel, punished even to death by God: for all flesh is grass and all its beauty [or constancy] is like the flower of the field, the grass withers, the flower fades when the breath [or spirit] of YHWH blows upon it -- surely the people are grass! The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever!! (vv.6-8) Thus shall all flesh together see the glory of YHWH! (v.5)

This chapter also features several famous verses applied to Jesus, and to John the Baptist as the final herald of Jesus, though here it is YHWH their Elohim Himself and no one less or other Whose way should be prepared and Who is coming to save them from their sins and reconcile them to Himself! (The psalm of this prophecy goes very far in describing YHWH almighty, creator of the heavens and the earth, the everlasting Elohim, as the one alone worthy of worship Who is coming in judgment and salvation as the good shepherd Who will tenderly care for His punished flock.) Nor is this a result of sacrificial offerings, or anything that humanity could do to earn such salvation, for Lebanon itself does not have enough wood or beasts to burn for such an offering, and all nations are as nothing before Him, regarded as nothing by Him and less than nothing and void.

Isaiah 42; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation) (persistence of evangelism) (scope of

evangelism): this whole chapter of prophecy is of great interest, and portions are quoted in the Gospels applying to Jesus Christ and His ministry of evangelism, of which YHWH says that His Servant will not be disheartened or crushed until justice has been established in all the earth. While He may burn in wrath against evildoers like a warrior, going out zealously to war to prevail against His enemies, and put them into prison and pits from which none may deliver them (this is particularly promised about rebel Israel toward the end of the chapter, with the typical Isaianic complaint that they see and listen but refuse to comprehend), YHWH appoints the Messiah to open blind eyes, bring His prisoners out of the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. Moreover, His goals are ultimately peaceful: He will not cry out or raise His voice in the street, nor break a bruised reed, nor extinguish a dimly burning wick. These promises are not only given to Israel but to all the Gentiles as well. All idolaters, whether Gentiles or rebel Israel, are called to put away their idolatry, and the ironic blindness of Israel as the (rebel) servant of YHWH is especially emphasized so that they will not regard themselves as better than the pagans. The whole chapter may be summed up as a prophecy that God will eventually go to war against Jewish and Gentile rebels to imprison them in darkness where no one can free them (suggesting sheol/hades), except for God Himself Who shall heal and free them once they repent, which was His peaceful goal for them all along -- nor will He lose heart or give up short of reaching the goal of total justice on the earth.

Isaiah 45:14; (sinners belong to righteous): in the Day of the Lord to come, pagan oppressors of Israel shall come to belong to righteous Israel, bowing to them and making supplication. They are not (or not yet) annihilated, much less suffering eternal torment. Nor do they stay pagans, as the famous conclusion of this prophecy strongly professes. On the contrary, they may very well be the ones saying in verse 15, "Truly, You are a God Who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!" (Also indicated by the conclusion of the prophecy.)

Isaiah 45:18; (destruction for punishment shall be restored): God did not create the earth in vain, or as a waste, but intends it to be inhabited.

Isaiah 45:20-22; (post-mortem salvation): in the Day of the Lord to come, God shall call the pagan fugitives "who pray to a god who cannot save" to reasonably come to the conclusion that there is no other god but Elohim, a righteous God and a Savior. "Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I AM God, and there is no other." This leads into the famous conclusion of Isaiah 45.

Isaiah 45:23-24; (post-mortem salvation) (all things gathered finally under Christ): rebels shall be brought to swear loyalty to YHWH (identified as Christ in St. Paul's applications of this prophecy) and to praise Him for His salvation in the day of YHWH to come. The scope of this salvation from their sin is total. No



rebels remain, and neither are impenitent rebels annihilated out of existence. They are (eventually) converted instead. Quoted with details clarifying the scope of rebels being brought to true loyalty, by St. Paul in Philippians 2.

Isaiah 46:12-13; (scope of salvation) (assurance of salvation): God does not only call those whose hearts He has already softened, but calls and brings His righteousness and salvation even to those who are stubborn-minded (or stout-hearted) and far from righteousness. God is speaking here not only to punished Israel, but to those who despite their punishment still carry their idols with them into their punishment! -- and beyond even that, who go so far as to make new idols to worship from silver and gold! Yet of them, the house of Jacob (who strives against YHWH), God says they have been (analogically) born from His belly (like as from a mother) and carried from God's womb, and God promises to bear them even into their old age and graying years, for while they may betray and abandon Him, God remains the same "I AM HE" and shall not abandon them! "I have made, I shall carry, I shall bear, I shall deliver." "Remember this, you transgressors, and be firmly assured: I am God and there is no other [who can save, not idols even of gold and silver], declaring the end from the beginning, and from eonian times things which have not been done, saying My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure." Just as God accomplished Israel's punishment, so shall He accomplish Israel's salvation after punishment; so does He call and promise in regard to those

who carry their idols with them into punishment and even continue to make new idols.

Isaiah 49:4; (counter-argument against universalism): in this famous chapter about the Suffering Servant (who in the New Testament is the Messiah), the Servant says, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity." This is in reply to God saying to the Servant, that in Him God shall show His glory. Arminians might try to appeal to this as evidence that the goal of the Servant, to save sinners from sin, shall fail; but in the very same verse the Servant immediately goes on to trust in God's justice and God's reward. For which faithfulness, God goes on to greatly praise the Servant and gives to Him not only all Israel, including rebel Israel, but also all the tribes of the nations. Whatever this means, it is not an agreement that the Servant's sacrifice has been in vain after all (a point Calvinists would also insistently agree on: the Servant doesn't fail after all).

Isaiah 49:6-10; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): not only does God give the nations to the Servant (Messiah) as well as all Israel, but there are at least slight indications here that God raises the punished dead to be loyal to Him as well. Admittedly, this may also or instead refer to the unfairly imprisoned/slain righteous, as certainly is intended at Rev 7:14-17 in citing these verses. See also however the composite argument from St. Paul's citation of 49:8 at 2 Cor 6:1-2, and verses 14-26 next.

Isaiah 49:14-26; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): righteous Israel, upset because of being bereaved of rebel children by God (Who has slain them for their sins), will be astonished that God returns their children to them, now properly loyal, and even adds children never born to them at all (apparently a reference to salvation of the Gentiles). Compare with Jeremiah 31:15 and its contexts, which Matthew regarded as being connected (via the riddle at the end about God accomplishing the restoration of slain rebel Ephraim to righteous Rachel through doing a new thing involving a woman surrounding a man) as a reference to the Virgin Birth of Christ.

Despite God's pagan enemies choking on their own flesh and being made drunk with their own blood (as at the end of the chapter), they're still slated to repent and reconcile with Israel, in humility, with kings and princesses caring for the least of righteous Israel. God promises the captives of the mighty man and the prey of the tyrant will be rescued, which in Christian antiquity was regularly interpreted as a reference to the rescue of sinners from the domain of Satan even after death. Compare with the kings of the earth being slain by Christ's militant second coming in Rev 19 and then entering the New Jerusalem in Rev 21.

Isaiah 52; (punishment not hopeless) (scope of salvation) (post-mortem salvation): this chapter leads into the famous Isaiah 53, speaking of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant, and like much of the preceding chapters (back at least as far

as Isaiah 42) is fully about the promise that rebel Israel who has drunk the cup of the wrath of God to the dregs (in Isaiah 51, signifying to the death) shall never drink it again but now that they have been made humble and truly seeking God's salvation they shall be given it and shall come out of the prison into which YHWH has sent them. Moreover, all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of Israel's God, even though the pagans who cruelly oppressed Israel shall take their turn drinking the cup of the wrath of God (chapter 51 again, and basically for volunteering to be the ones to punish Israel to death, which they have hatefully done!) Even so, the Exalted Servant, whose appearance will astonish many for being so ruined (i.e. the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 53) will sprinkle many nations, and kings of nations will shut their mouths on account of Him, for they will see what had not been told to them, and they will understand what they had not heard: phrases which elsewhere in scripture indicate salvation. What of those who have not heard then? How can they hear without a preacher? St. Paul quotes this very chapter in Romans 10 in addressing this question, and the answer from this chapter is that in the Day of the Lord, "I AM" (YHWH) shall be speaking "Here I AM", and is described as the feet on the mountains bringing good news announcing salvation and saying to rebel Zion, punished in her sins, "Your Elohim is king!" Thus those who have not yet believed shall call upon Him and be saved; moreover, if the grammatic shift in Romans 10:15 means anything, those who hear YHWH as His own greatest evangelist shall themselves be sent by YHWH out to preach, joining

Him as being the beautiful feet on the mountains bearing the gospel (good news)!

Isaiah 53:6, 11-12; (scope of salvation): the "many" who shall be justified by the Suffering Servant (in this extremely famous Messianic prophecy), who bore the sins of "many" and made intercession for the transgressors, are called "all" earlier in verse 6, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and YHWH has laid on him the injustice of us all."

Isaiah 54; (punishment not hopeless) (persistence of evangelism): God promises the "widow" (!) rebel Israel (i.e. whose husband, God, has been slain) that He has only forsaken her for a brief moment, but with great compassion He will gather her; in an overflowing anger He hid His face from her for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness He will have compassion on her. Instead God will fight against her enemies and destroy them (but see also the scope of salvation in Isaiah 53), and she shall be blessed far beyond her original blessing.

Isaiah 55:8-9; (punishment not hopeless) (persistence of evangelism) (scope of evangelism) (warning against non-universalism) (post-mortem punishment): when proponents of hopeless punishment want to shut down criticism, they often appeal to this verse, where God's ways are higher than our ways and God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. But these verses are about God explaining why He will have compassion and will abundantly pardon those who

repent of their sins (after being eschatologically punished, as rebel Israel has been and the pagan nations will be, often discussed in surrounding chapters). Humans may have difficulty believing God intends mercy and salvation for those whom He punishes so harshly, and might naturally tend to expect hopeless punishment because that's what we would do to our enemies, but God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth's, etc. Moreover, God promises immediately afterward, in the strongest terms of assurance, that His evangelical Word will surely succeed. The first verses of Isaiah 55 are also echoed in the evangelical verses of the final chapters of Revelations, aimed at the doers of evil, fondling their sins still outside the New Jerusalem, having been punished with the lake of fire!

Isaiah 57; (counter-evidence against universalism) (evidence against annihilationism) (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): some non-universalists cite verse 21, "There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked," as evidence against universal salvation. This rather ignores the preceding context. After rebuking evil leaders in the strongest terms as spiritual adulteresses, YHWH reveals that His subsequent punishments are intended to lead people to repent, not to punish them with conscious torment forever nor to annihilate them. "For I will not contend forever, neither will I always be angry, for the spirit would grow faint before Me and the breath I have made." The whole point in that verse (v.16) is

that God refuses to do something that would result in the annihilation of sinners! It is true that God is angry with sinners because of their injustice, and that after striking them and turning away His face they still continue turning away in their hearts (v.17), and God does see this: but even so, God will heal such a sinner and lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners (those who weep because God has slain the sinner), leading the penitent sinner to praise Him instead. It is true that there is no peace for the impenitent wicked, who toss like a sea bringing up refuse and mud; but there will be peace when God finally leads them to no longer be wicked, reviving the hearts (v.15) of those whom God has made contrite or (more literally) pulverized. St. Paul quotes verse 19, "Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near" when speaking of God bringing the pagan nations into citizenship of Israel's kingdom of God (Eph 2:17 and contexts).

Isaiah 60; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): verse 10; "For in My wrath I struck you, and in My favor I have had compassion on you." verse 15; "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated with no one passing through", a condition thanks to God's own punishment, which elsewhere God described in terms suggesting final permanence such as "everlasting" and "from generation to generation", now instead God "will make you an everlasting pride, a joy from generation to generation". Also, this chapter is directly echoed at the end of Rev 21, thus confirming that the kings of the earth who are coming into the city in the latter text are the

former rebels against God and persecutors of Israel who have renounced their rebellions and are reconciling in humility.

Isaiah 61:1-3; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): in this famous set of verses, quoted by Christ in His mission of miraculous healing, it is important to keep in mind that contextually this is rebel Israel being miraculously healed, from whom God turned away for a brief time, who has been forsaken and hated by God for their idolatries and injustices, struck by God in His wrath -- these are to whom, in the Day of the Lord (i.e. long after they have died), shall be preached good tidings; whose hearts shall be bound up; whose liberty shall be proclaimed; and who shall be freed from prison. The "acceptable year of YHWH" is a reference to the Jubilee, and is topically connected to the "day of vengeance of our God"; consequently one goal must be in service to the other, as these have been slain (or at the very least punished) by God's vengeance already.

Isaiah 62:4; (punishment not hopeless): God, speaking of Israel whom He will have utterly punished, rendering her forsaken and desolate, promises that in the Day of the Lord to come she shall be raised to queenhood again (as an evangelical sign to the pagans), and become a crown of beauty and a royal diadem, and "It will no longer be said to you 'Forsaken', nor to your land will it any longer be said, 'Desolate'; but you will be called 'My delight is in her', and your land, 'Married': for YHWH delights in you and [to Him] your land will be married."



Isaiah 65:25; (salvation of rebel angels): the prophecy of the bronze-serpent (same term) from Genesis 3:15 (i.e. Satan) eating the dust of the earth is finally accomplished, but this involves him living in peace on God's holy mountain, along with other ravening animal symbols who attacked God's people (wolves and lions) now also peaceful.

Isaiah 66:24; (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): this is the famous verse (the final verse of Isaiah) appealed to so often by non-universalists, where the righteous shall go out after the coming of YHWH to look on the corpses of the people who have rebelled against YHWH, who (or whose bodies) shall be an abhorrence to the righteous. The same verses (and their immediate contexts) also strongly emphasize that all flesh shall come to bow down before YHWH, and that the unrighteous (or the bodies of the unrighteous) shall be abhorrent to all flesh. This would seem contradictory if eternal conscious torment is true, so annihilationists especially like to appeal to this as evidence of the cessation of existence of the wicked leaving "all flesh" to continue existing after them. But "their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched", seems to indicate that results will continue to be abhorrent to the righteous, and so also that the worm and the fire are continuing instead of ending; so ECT proponents make hay out of that. Annihilationists reply that the maggots and fire keep going until the task is accomplished and then go out, but that is not

what the scriptures say here, and doesn't seem to explain the continuing abhorrence to the righteous. If it's annihilation, the description indicates a slow one.

Some of the tension can be resolved by noting that this scene contextually occurs after the coming of YHWH to rescue besieged Jerusalem from her final enemies (Ezekiel 39:4-12), and so occurs before the general resurrection. However, the same rare word for "abhorrence" or "revulsion" is only used once more in the OT by Daniel 12:2, which talks about the resurrection of the evil and the good, some to olam (or in Greek eonian) life and the others to disgrace and olam (eonian) revulsion. But then what about the strongly stated "all flesh" from Isaiah?! Perhaps it means that even the wicked shall bow down to YHWH but shall be repulsed, along with the righteous, by their own bodies eaten by undying maggots and unquenchable fire? That wouldn't seem to be much of a heaven for the righteous! -- nor are things improved at all if only the righteous continue to be repulsed by the remains of the annihilated unrighteous!

This leaves over rather a riddle, which Christ solves in appealing to this verse in His warning before Mark 9:49-50: the fire (He explains in vv.49-50) is for salting, and for salting everyone, and the salting is the best of things and leads to peace with one another. (Also, prior revelations in Isaiah indicate all sinners shall eventually be saved, even though some must first be punished.)

The vision of the final verse of Isaiah, then, would be literally of the situation at the beginning of the millennial reign (when survivors at Jerusalem are required to go out to care for the dead bodies of the rebels despite their own revulsion, committing them to the natural flames and maggots of the nearby valley of Hinnom), combined perhaps with the situation after the lake of fire judgment (when the righteous of the New Jerusalem, despite their revulsion, go out to evangelize the impenitent sinners): the end result being indeed that all flesh shall bow down in spirit and in truth to worship YHWH, and shall reject in revulsion their prior sins.

This fits immediately preceding verses of Is 66 where all nations and languages will see the glory of God, and all peoples to the remotest part of the earth will see God's salvation, which is exactly why all will come to worship YHWH.

(In any case the destruction of Jerusalem by pagan armies, whether in Isaiah's day or afterward down to the year 70 of the Christian Era, definitely doesn't fit the description of God arriving to save Jerusalem from pagan siege by killing the pagans!)

Jer 6:15; (counter-evidence against universalism): sometimes the second half of this verse is quoted against the very idea of Christian universalism, "They are saying 'Peace, peace' when there is no peace!" But this is quoted utterly out of context. YHWH is complaining about greedy false religious leaders

who are oppressing the people, superficially healing their people and oppressing the foreigner, orphan and widow (e.g. 7:6), refusing to truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor. There is no peace, in other words, because these false shepherds make no peace. This is basically the opposite of a criticism that shepherds are false for seeking to make peace (for which Jesus says people shall be called sons of the living God) and expecting God to make a true peace between all persons so that all persons will truly practice justice with each other. (If anything, the denunciation might be leveled against shepherds who are supposed to be preaching peace but then prophecy final disunion between God and man!)

Jer 7:17-20; (everlasting not everlasting): God prophesies that He shall pour anger and wrath on Jerusalem that will not be quenched; but His anger and wrath on Jerusalem definitely does not last forever (even elsewhere in Jeremiah), and the literally physical fire certainly does not.

Jer 15; (everlasting not everlasting) (punishment not hopeless): God says that even if Moses and Samuel pleaded for their lives, He wouldn't spare impenitent rebel Israel from four kinds of doom (deaths by blades, dogs, birds and beasts of the earth), making them an object of horror. Even a survivor in captivity (who describes himself as righteous but whom God still calls to repentance) regards his wound as incurable, refusing to be healed, and regards his pain as *netsach*: a variation of a primary word (for glittering far away), usually applied as "ever, always,

perpetual", i.e. to the limit far away (similar to Olam and AHD). Despite this, YHWH promises "I will surely set you free for good (purposes)", and their pagan oppressors, who are also sinners, will eventually be led to repent and to appeal to Israel for salvation after the pagans have been punished by God in turn. In the LXX, 15:19 features one of the uses of {apokatastasis} in the Bible, "If you return, I will restore you". This restoration depends on a purgative/refining action of extracting the precious from the worthless.

Jer 17:4; (counter-evidence against universalism) (everlasting not everlasting): YHWH says against rebel Israel, "You have kindled a fire in My anger which will burn Olam" often translated as "forever". But not even counting all the places in Jeremiah and elsewhere that God's anger against rebel Israel shall be quenched (even against Ephraim slain in his sins by God), half a chapter earlier God promised that once He has punished rebel Israel He shall restore them as a miraculous evangelical sign so that people will no longer swear by the living YHWH Who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but by the living YHWH Who brought up the sons of Israel from everywhere He has banished them. It may be replied that here God only refers to a natural restoration of surviving descendants brought out of nations on earth, though Jeremiah expects and prays for a twofold destruction on rebel Israel for all their sins. But even if this is only a natural restoration and not a resurrection and salvation of slain

rebel Israel, it still shows that God's olam or eonian wrath does not burn never-endingly.

Jer 17:27; (everlasting not everlasting): God will kindle a fire in the gate of Jerusalem that will devour the palaces of Jerusalem as well, and will not be quenched. They did not hearken to Him, and He did kindle a fire to destroy Jerusalem (twice afterward in fact, with a third time still to come), but the fire was certainly quenched once it had done its work. This work was not the hopeless annihilation of Jerusalem (much less its eternal conscious torment), as Jerusalem is promised to be remade and restored in many other places; consequently the punishment figured here by analogy would not be expected to be hopeless either, even though the restoration is spoken of elsewhere. (As rebel Jerusalem is punished and restored, so are other rebels.) This warning also occurs more conditionally (not as a definite prophecy it will happen) at Jer 4:4; 21:12. A similar warning occurs at Amos 5:6.

Jer 18:2-6; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): much of the point to Jeremiah 18 at large is to warn about the coming total destruction of rebel Israel by God if they will not repent -- which God prophesies they will not do before they are punished, even though He begs them to reform and repent of their evil ways. However, God precedes this warning with the context of a potter whose work was spoiled, so he crushed it completely and then remade it. (St. Paul is citing this and/or one or more of three other verses at Rom 9.) In context, God knows the pottery will spoil itself despite His pleas, and

He will have to utterly destroy it: in fact, in Jer 19 God has Jeremiah buy a fired pot and take it to Gehenna (Ben-hinnom, valley of the Son(s) of Hinnom) to break it there while calling the place Topheth (the ancient pagan name for the valley during the days of Moloch worship), declaring that He shall certainly break them as a pot is broken that cannot again be repaired, and the dead of rebel Israel shall have to be buried in Topheth because nowhere else will have room for them. This warning must either be interpreted in light of Jer 18:2-6, indicating that God can restore them once they have been slain (not merely before they have been slain); or else the declaration of those earlier verses must be read in light of Jer 19, in which case the metaphor is broken because if Israel had repented there would have been no need for the potter to forcibly remake the spoiled pottery from the clay. (God would have relented of the planned calamity despite prophesying its downfall; 18:7-8 immediately after the analogy of the potter remaking the spoiled pottery.) In short the question is whether God is more competent than a human potter, or not; can God raise and restore the broken pottery as the human potter cannot do, or is God only limited to remaking the pottery while it is on the wheel as a human potter is limited to doing? Isaiah 29 and 30 which parallels this prophecy definitely answers in the affirmative: God can and will remake the pottery that He shatters!

Jer 20:11-18; (everlasting not everlasting) (better that he should not be born): the shame and confusion of the unrighteous in the

Day of the Lord to come are called "eonian", but other scriptures (Isaiah 45 being very famous, but also Ezekiel 36:31-32 in regard to rebel Israel) indicate that God shall lead them out of their confusion on that Day into loyal worship instead. Moreover, Jeremiah is complaining to God, while loyally praising God (and still expecting God's victory and his own coming salvation), that it would have been better for him never to have been born. The language is very extreme, to the point that he wishes his father had murdered his mother before he was born, and that the one who announced his birth to his father would be relentlessly overthrown the way YHWH is about to overthrow Jerusalem! The point is that such language is intended to elicit pity and salvation for the person it is spoken about; and Jeremiah despite his grief and depression still holds out hope for himself, in YHWH, beyond the current and coming grief.

Jer 22:24; (counter-evidence against universalism): a particularly hardcore Arminian (or a Catholic of the same sort) could cite this verse as evidence, among several others (Satan himself being the obvious extreme, if not Judas Iscariot one of the chosen apostles), that no matter how fully a person may actually be in communion with God, God may yet damn such a person for sin. Thus YHWH swears by His own life in this verse, "Even if Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet upon My right hand, yet I would pluck you off!" This was an anointed king of the family of David, a small messiah in effect, with whose family God had made an 'olam' covenant, but even if somehow this man



had been the right hand of God's own power (i.e. the king Messiah, or God the Son) by which God's own decrees were sealed and confirmed, God would tear him off and throw him away for his sin! But this does not mean God would punish Coniah hopelessly. He may become (and did become) like a shattered jar (v.28), but no more so than rebel Israel generally; and God elsewhere says that though He shatters Israel like a jar so that not even a fragment holds a bit of water, yet He can and will restore it; in fact God swears by His own life elsewhere in such matters as the total success of evangelism and the total scope of evangelism.

Jer 23:40; (everlasting not everlasting) (punishment not hopeless): YHWH finishes a denouncement of Jerusalem and its inhabitants by saying that He shall surely forget them and cast them away from His presence along with the city He gave them and their fathers, putting an "olam" reproach on them and an "olam" humiliation that will not be forgotten. While the people immediately in view may be the prophets falsely claiming peace is coming, all the people of the city are included by implication, as well as the city itself explicitly. Yet YHWH says elsewhere (including in Jeremiah) that He will not always forget them, and indeed still remembers them, and will restore the city and the people someday. If the city is included in the punishment of the people and the false prophets, the people (even the false prophets) are included in the restoration of the city. Similarly, back in verses 19-20, the storm of YHWH has gone forth in wrath, even like a tornado (a whirling

tempest) which shall swirl down on the head of the wicked, and the anger of YHWH will not turn back -- until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart (which God says they will clearly understand in the last days). But once the purposes of God's heart have been fulfilled, the anger will turn back, as is often testified elsewhere in the scriptures, including in Jeremiah.

Jer 28:8; (everlasting not everlasting): Jeremiah calls the prophets before himself and before Hananiah "from olam" or "from eonian", but the prophets did not eternally exist in the past with no beginning.

Jer 30; (punishment not hopeless): YHWH says to Israel that He has wounded them (or shall wound them) with cruel punishment and with an incurable wound and with incurable sorrow, with no one to plead their case. But is their punishment hopeless? Not at all! In the same chapter, and in verses surrounding this portion, God says He shall not destroy them completely though He justly punishes them with an incurable sorrow and an incurable wound; but rather that He shall restore them to health and heal them of their incurable wounds! -- once they have called upon YHWH in repentance. YHWH also says He shall completely destroy all the nations with which He has punished Israel by scattering them among them, so that all who devoured Israel shall be devoured, and every one of the adversaries of Israel shall go into captivity; but as the punishment and captivity and incurable destruction of Israel was restored and cured by

God, neither is God's punishment of the "satans" necessarily hopeless.

Jer 31:15; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): the famous prophecy with many interesting details of YHWH not only saving righteous Rachel but restoring the children of hers that He slew (for whom she is weeping and will not be consoled), typified as rebel Ephraim (i.e. the rebel son of David who died hanging from a tree with a bloody skull, speared in his side, in the forests of Ephraim outside Jericho.) In Jeremiah's prophecy, the innocent were slain with the guilty, true, but guilty Ephraim is who righteous Rachel is weeping over: and God promises the restoration of slain Ephraim will be brought about by a new thing He will do where a woman will encompass a man (which is probably why Matthew thought to connect this with the Incarnation story). Ephraim, having been slain in his sins, shall smite his thigh and repent of his sins; and it is of rebel Israel that God says (v.3) that He loves with an eonian love, and draws back to Him with lovingkindness. Compare with Hosea 11, also cited by Matthew, which isn't about God calling the Messiah (much less God's unique Son) to come to Israel from Egypt, but rather about God having brought rebel Ephraim from Egypt and being handed over to the king of Assyria to be slain for his sins -- yet in the same chapter God declares He still loves Ephraim and somehow won't kill him but will have will mercy and restore him instead. In GosJohn 6:45, Jesus connects His dragging all toward Him in resurrection, to verse 34 of Jer 31, that all people from the least to the greatest shall come

to YHWH to be taught by YHWH, even those who have been unjust, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Consequently Jesus isn't talking in John 6 about raising people who will never be given to Him, but about raising people who have not come to Him yet: but they will, and will be saved. Perhaps relatedly, Gehenna must be the "whole valley of ashes and dead bodies" included as part of the restoration of ruined Jerusalem at the end of the chapter. That's probably referring to a physical restoration, but it also includes sanctification so it can't be 'merely' physical in any case, and may stand for a symbol of what happens to the spiritual punishment symbolized by Gehenna.

Jer 32:37-42; (punishment not hopeless) (assurance of victory) (post-mortem salvation): God expressly states that under the coming new covenant with rebel Israel and rebel Judah, compared and contrasted to the old covenant and its results, He will rejoice over them to do them good instead of turning away from them to do them good -- though either way, whether He rejoices over them or turns away from them, He intends to do them good! ("Just as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them." "And I will make an olam covenant with them [by context really everlasting this time, unlike the previous olam covenant], that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good!") And in the same chapter, bringing up the question whether even God can restore rebel Israel after

they have been so terribly punished, God answers (v.27), "Behold I am YHWH the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?!" This is in affirmation of God's sign of promise to Jeremiah to buy a field in Jerusalem with all the proper legal witnesses, despite the Chaldeans having already finished their siege mounds around the city: Jeremiah himself died before he could get the field back, but the field represents Israel who is about to die. Thus God's special designation here of being the God of all flesh.

Jer 33; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): the whole chapter is about the punishment (even to death) of rebel Judah and Israel, but the Lord will cleanse them of their injustice and pardon their sins and fulfill His covenant with them despite temporarily rejecting them for their sins. The Messiah, the branch of David (he shall be called a "nazarene"), shall be instrumental in this somehow, and despite the line of earthly kings failing, as well as the Levites failing, somehow there shall always be a king over Israel from the line of David and at least one man from Levitical priests to always be offering sacrifices to God. Just as God's covenant with the day and night and seasons will not be broken, so will His covenant with the Levites and the Davidic kings not be broken, as will His covenant with Judah and with Israel: He will keep all those covenants, even though they broke them. Notably, the scriptures testify elsewhere that the sun and moon and day and night and stars will cease, so to keep the covenant they must somehow be resurrected afterward; and Christians know that the One Man Who, descended

from David, acts as priest and king forever, and Who always has done so (even when there have been no kings and priests on earth, including before this Man was born), died Himself and went to the grave, and was resurrected according to the covenant made between the Father and this Son forever. As with the greater (the Son, the only truly righteous Israel, prince of God), so with the lesser.

Jeremiah 49:7-22; (counter-evidence against universalism): while things don't look hopeful here for Edom/Esau and its capital Bozrah, their story isn't over as other scriptures testify, and even here there is a hint that God will have mercy on the widows and orphans of a population who from other descriptions seems to be totally destroyed (including down to the widows and orphans, those "whose judgment was not to drink the cup" but who had to drink it anyway.)

**Lam 3:** (scope of salvation) (punishment not hopeless) (against annihilation) (warning against non-universalism) (post-mortem salvation): the whole chapter, which features famous sayings such as in the hymn "Great is Thy faithfulness", "Thy compassions they fail not, they are new every morning", is Jeremiah's reassurance that God does not cast off forever those whom He has punished (3:31) but though He causes grief He will yet have compassion according to the abundance of his mercies (v.32) -- a declaration so important the prophet repeats it for emphasis! For God does not willingly grieve or afflict the children of men (v.33): God does it because the children of men

insist on crushing all the prisoners of the earth beneath their feet, turning aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, and subverting a man in his cause -- these are things YHWH does not approve!

A Calvinist might reply that God's purpose for the non-elect was and always will be to be hopelessly punished (by eternal conscious torment or by annihilation), therefore such a result would involve God subverting a man in his cause. But Arminians who acknowledge the active punishment of God post-mortem, must therefore be saying that God subverts His own purpose for such persons; whereas those Arms (and the occasional Calv) who disassociate sinners from God's active punishment for sin must once again work their way around yet another testimony (of hundreds) that God does in fact actively and authoritatively punish sinners.

And while the Calvinist might be able to reckon God's purpose for a person in hopeless punishment, it still remains true that any notion of God's punishment of sinners which involves such things that God says He does not approve and reckons as sin, should be rejected, which is much the point of Jeremiah's reassurance here: sinners hopelessly crush under their feet all the prisoners of the earth, and so are punished by God by being crushed as prisoners themselves for a while but not hopelessly so; sinners turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, therefore the Most High does not forever turn aside the rights He has given to men from before His face. The Calvinistic notion of God's

purposes for the non-elect thus fail those two criteria. Nor can the Calvs reply with a blunt disassociation of our notions of morality from God, or with an opaque assertion that what would be wrong for a creature would not be wrong for God -- not unless they want to oppose the prophet's whole basis for hope in salvation, which is that God will do better than what He is punishing created persons for doing. "This I will recall to mind, therefore I will have hope!"

Because of YHWH's compassions, those whom He punishes are not consumed, even though He afflicts them with the rod of His wrath and leads them into darkness and not into light, heavily chaining them and shutting off their prayers, and setting them in dark places as those who are dead into the eon! (3:1-8ff) Jeremiah isn't dead yet, but he is comparing his fate (although he is a righteous prophet) along with his people as those who are dead and in sheol for punishment ha-olam. If God so punishes people and they are not annihilated (as even annihilationists tend to admit for initial post-mortem punishment), that is because He intends them to repent and be restored, once they are humbled and have drunk of the wormwood and eaten the dust. It may be in context of this prophecy that Christ in the Sermon on the Mount commands that a person (specifically Israel being punished by having Roman occupiers) should give his cheek to the one who smites him: such a person thus enacts their penitent humility to God Who is smiting them for injustice. (3:25-30) It is true that Jeremiah qualifies this with "Why does a living man complain for the punishment of his sins?" (v.39),



but this would apply at least to the resurrection of the wicked, too, those who have transgressed and rebelled and have not been pardoned, whom God has slain (whose life has been cut off in the dungeon and a stone cast upon them v.53) and covered with anger and has not pitied nor listened to their prayers, making them the offscouring and refuse (thus an abhorrence) in the midst of the people. (3:42-47) But such people are exhorted to search and test their ways and turn again to YHWH and lift up their hearts with their hands unto God in the heavens (3:40-41), calling out to YHWH even from the crypt of nether parts. (v.55) Meanwhile, those who reproach such punished sinners and revenge against them, are besought by the prophet to be repaid by YHWH according to the work of their hands -- in blessing and reward? No, YHWH should give them sorrow of heart, and persecute and curse and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of YHWH! Apparently this is because (vv 22, 31-33) YHWH's acts of mercy and His faithful love never end and YHWH will not reject forever: even if He produces pains He will have mercy thanks to the abundance of His faithful love because He doesn't want to sadden or afflict anyone! At the very least this means those who are punished by God should not be regarded by others as hopelessly lost with an attitude of disdain and hostility, on pain of being punished the same way themselves.

Ezekiel 13:10,22; (counter-evidence against universalism): on rare occasion a non-universalist will accuse Christian universalists

of being the false prophets of this chapter, who prophesied that Jerusalem would not fall, saying Peace! when there is no peace, whitewashing defensive walls, and disheartening the righteous with falsehood, encouraging the wicked not to repent and preserving his life. Apparently, such people would be disheartened to hear that God shall lead all the unrighteous to repent into righteousness eventually! -- this being an inferior version of ultimate righteousness to them, compared to final unrighteousness! But the comparison is even more spurious than that, when applied to Christian universalists who implore the unrighteous to turn from their wicked ways and be reconciled to God; much moreso those who accept (even if with grief) the punishment to death of the unrighteous; much moreso again those of us who do not, for the sake of earning some crusts of bread, use magic armbands to divinize that the innocent should be put to death in favor of those who deserve by their cruelty to die! -- which no Christian universalist of my acquaintance does, and which I cannot even imagine one doing. Such critics must by the same tokens put Ezekiel himself in such category of false prophets, for prophecies of hope and restoration such as Ezekiel himself gives later. But this is simply a case of quoting something that sounds appropriate without any care of checking the contexts for fair judgment. (I am tempted to say such critics in effect put to death the innocent by means as trivial as magic armbands! -- but that would also be an unfairly inaccurate comparison.)

Ezek 14:9-10; (rebel prophet) (punishment not hopeless): "If the prophet is prevailed upon (or enticed or deceived) to speak a word, it is I YHWH Who have prevailed upon that prophet (or enticed or deceived), and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel, and the unjust of them will be taken hold of by the injustice of them, according to their injustice while questioning, and likewise according to the injustice it will be done to the prophet." One of several examples not only that prophets of God can rebel (like rebel angels, and similarly condemned), but that even rebel prophets operate by God's active authority, upon which God insists. But this is done so that the house of Israel will no longer stray from YHWH and no longer defile themselves with all their sins. Thus declares ADNY YHWH, "They shall be My people and I shall be their Elohim." In the four kinds of punishment God will soon be sending, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job all three were in among it, only they would be spared by their justice, not even their children; how much moreso when God sends all four punishments together! And yet sons and daughters of the unrighteous (who are being judged against here, not the righteous) will be left alive after all, to comfort the unrighteous by their conduct and actions, so that the unjust who have been punished will know that God has not done this {kolasis} (14:3 in the Greek version of this chapter) to Jerusalem in vain. (In the Greek, it is the {kolasis} itself over which the idolaters among the elders of the people are stumbling, who have set up their idols in their hearts, having put God's {kolasin} right before their faces.)

To be fair, an argument could be made that the "scene" changes at 14:12 so that the rebel priests representing the house of Israel aren't there to be told these things anymore. (God specifically told Ezekiel to tell them at verse 6.) In that case, the consolation would only be for Ezekiel. But that's part of the same judgment declaration that starts at verse 21, "For thus says ADNY YHWH", which is standard terminology (as at verse 6) for the prophet to pass along what he's being told, even though God doesn't specifically say to do that as at verse 6. But then, if the scene hasn't changed, God wouldn't have to tell Ezekiel again to pass it on.

Ezek 16:42; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): after many descriptions of super-punishment coming to rebel Israel, described in the Greek OT as {kolasis} at 14:3 by the way, God says "So I shall calm My fury against you, and my jealousy will depart from you, and I shall be pacified and angry no more." See also the rest of this prophecy through the end of the chapter.

Ezek 16:44-55; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): rebel Israel was even worse than rebel Sodom (and rebel Samaria), which God destroyed -- by comparison Sodom actually looks righteous! -- and God will send them into the same captivity of destruction that He sent Sodom (i.e. total destruction by fire). The goal of this however is for Israel to become ashamed of her sins and to become a comfort to similarly punished Sodom and Samaria. Afterward God will not only free rebel Israel from captivity but

also Sodom and Samaria, returning them to their former estate.

Ezek 16:59-63; (post-mortem salvation) (mortal enemies reconciled): after Adonai YHWH punishes rebel Israel, with the same captivity and destruction with which He destroyed Sodom, He shall establish an eonian covenant with rebel Israel, unlike the covenant they broke, and they shall be ashamed and repent and shall receive their sisters Samaria and Sodom as daughters under the new covenant. Their shame and confusion for everything they have done will be a lesson to them for remembrance after God makes peace with them. It should be sufficiently obvious from these verses, by the way, if not from any of the prior, that God is not simply talking about bequeathing the plain of Sodom back to the land promised to Abraham in the Millennium reign (which land would be still under water per Ezek 47), because sinning people who are repentant and reconciling with one another and with God are being mentioned; nor can this be only survivors, since Sodom and her daughters (i.e. cities allied to Sodom under government, most famously Gomorrah but also Admah and Zeboim) did not survive but were wiped out in their destruction. Compare also with Jer 48:47 and Jer 49:6, returning the captivity of Moab and Ammon.

Ezek 18:23; (God not glorified by death of sinners): very famous verse

Ezekiel 20; (punishment not hopeless) (everlasting not everlasting): God prophecies (vv.46-48) that the forests of Israel shall be set on fire and

never be quenched. Yet not only were they literally quenched after (later) being set on fire during the invasion; but also much of the point of the second half of the chapter (v.33ff) after God has reminded Israel of their relationship so far (and of His faithfulness and of her unfaithfulness) is that after He has scattered and destroyed them (i.e. after the forests of Israel have burned) He shall bring them back and they shall repent because of His mercy to them, and they shall abhor what they have done and never do so again. God's ultimate treatment of them is mercy for His name's sake (also as an evangelical sign for the pagans); He does not ultimately punish them according to their deeds and according to their corruptions. (Nor shall He be convinced to restore them after their repentance -- the whole point to His punishment in the first place was to get them to finally and permanently repent. He doesn't have to be convinced to restore them; that was His plan all along.)

Ezekiel 24:13-14; (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless): the first half of this chapter, though obscure, is sometimes cited as evidence that there are at least some punishments God never relents on and has no intention for cleaning. Thus, "Because I would have purged you, yet you are not clean, you will not be cleaned from your filthiness again, until I have spent My wrath on you. I, YHWH, have spoken: it is coming, and I shall act. I shall not relent, and I shall not pity, and I shall not be sorry, according to your ways, and according to your deeds I [or "they" in some manuscripts]

shall judge you, declares ADNY YHWH." Yet even verse 13 implies God will go back to cleaning them, this time successfully, after He has thrown ultimate wrath on them; and the enacted prophetic parable which God tells Ezekiel to act out more directly implies this: a great stew of choice meat is ruined by an unclean and rusty pot, after which the pot is set dry in the fire to burn until the rust and other filth is cleaned away by the glowing heat of the bronze. More importantly, God already said more clearly at Ezekiel 16:42, that once God has put out ultimate fury toward Israel He will make His fury toward them to rest, and will be quiet and no more be angry -- and not only toward Israel, and specifically not only to Israel slain in sin, for that is also the chapter prophesying that God shall raise Samaria and Sodom along with rebel Israel (all of them having been slain for their sin) to reconcile each of them to each other and all of them to Himself!

Ezek 33:11; (God not glorified by death of sinners): not only does this not please Him, and not only does He swear "As I live" that this does not please Him, but He answers in contrast by the same oath "As I live" that what pleases Him is for the wicked one to turn from his way and live. It is true that God is saying this to rebel Israel, currently complaining about rotting away in the punishment God has put them in; but God saying this to Israel doesn't mean God is only saying this about Israel. Context is, as context does. Similarly, when God makes statements to Israel about being the only creator and savior, that doesn't necessarily mean He only creates and saves the nation of Israel! God can be appealing

to Israel about a principle. Certainly that's how Peter treats the same topic later in one of his epistles.

Ezek 34; (punishment not hopeless): a judgment of the sheep and the goats by the Son of David, showing the punishment to be remedial in intention. Important for comparing to Matt 25; see commentary there.

Ezek 36:31-32; (punishment not hopeless): in the Day of the Lord to come, rebel Israel shall become very ashamed of themselves, as a preparatory to repentance and reconciliation with God.

Ezek 37:11-14; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem-salvation): After punishing Israel for her sins, in a quite typically fatal fashion, ADNY YHWH goes on to say, "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know I AM YHWH when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves and shall put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land; then shall you know that I YHWH have spoken it, and performed it." This is an example of how such sayings are often merely interpreted as pits of captivity -- although Sodom and her daughters were also taken away into such 'captivity' for sinning less than Israel, yet shall be restored and reconciled with Israel, as was also revealed to Ezekiel -- but the comparison that they shall live unlike when they were in the pits, and that this is a deed by



which they shall finally understand the greatness of YHWH, naturally tends to this being a resurrection sign. This chapter is in fact the famous Valley of the Dry Bones prophecy, which stands high in Old Testament promises of a bodily resurrection! The term for grave here, qeber or qibrah, doesn't merely mean a pit but definitely a place where bodies are buried, thus fitting prior vision. While the term is sometimes used figuratively, to stand for uncleanness, Ezekiel has been talking about very literal fatal destruction coming to Israel, and yet all the house of Israel shall be saved from the graves.

Ezek 38:8; (everlasting not everlasting)(punishment not hopeless): Ezekiel speaks of the forthcoming waste of Israel (now in the future being restored) as though it has always been that way, a "continual waste". It had become a waste in the first place thanks to God's punishment of Israel.

Ezek 39:4-12; (punishment not hopeless): this set of verses talks about the aftermath of YHWH's rescue of Jerusalem from assault by pagan armies at the very beginning of the overt Day of the Lord to come, when YHWH manifests Himself to everyone (wholly destroying rebel armies and scattering their bodies for the birds and the beasts to feed on. See also Rev 19:19.) For seven months all the people of the land will be burying these rebel armies in a vast crater or valley east of the sea (as an extension of the literal valley of Hinnom, which will be renamed Hanom Gog after the pagan army destroyed there), which will be so large that there will be no way for

pilgrims to the city to bypass it. For seven years anyone in the city who wants wood or metal can go out and get it from the remains of the armies once the areas have been cleaned of rotting bodies! But there are curious hints in this portion of Ezekiel (not even counting elsewhere in the scriptures or in Ezekiel itself) that the story isn't over for those who have died in rebellion, and what the end of that story eventually will be. For God gives the rebel pagan armies a place for burial in the promised land of Israel itself (before the general resurrection of the evil and the good); and God in this prophecy explicitly connects the rebel armies as "those who pass through" with pilgrims visiting Jerusalem ("those who pass through" but cannot avoid the giant mass grave as a witness), and also with holy men personally selected by God to go out after the mass burial and search for any overlooked bones ("constantly passing through the land burying those who were passing through"). Not only is this done to clean the land by ensuring the leftover bones are put into Hamon-Gog (vv.15-16), but the care for the bodies resembles the care enjoined by God on bodies slated for the hope of resurrection! They don't annihilate the bones with God's power, but bury all the bones together: the Jewish religious symbol of hope in God's resurrection.

Ezekiel 47:1-12; (punishment not hopeless): this whole portion of prophecy describes how the salty Dead Sea (contemporary villages along its north and south limits in Ezekiel's day being mentioned) shall be healed by the river of life flowing out of the cornerstone of the Temple, and

the water shall be made fresh and useable again not only for fish but for animals and fruit-bearing plants to drink from it, though a few portions shall remain salt as a witness and for the use of animals and people. If this happens literally it would seem to take place during the Millennium reign (since no Temple will exist after the descent of the New Jerusalem); figuratively it represents the salvation of sinners out of the punishment of which Sodom and her daughter cities (Gomorraah being usually mentioned) were an example. And in fact God shows John the Elder something very similar toward the end of the revelation (RevJohn 22) where the Bride and the Spirit evangelize those still fondling their sins outside the New Jerusalem, in the lake of fire judgment, to wash clean and slake their thirst in the river of life and so to enter the NJ and be healed by the leaves (a poetic image of being healed from burns). At any rate these verses indicate that Ezekiel 16 cannot simply refer to the land of Sodom being finally accounted into Abraham's land of the promise in the Millennium, although at the time of the promise he would have seen the plain of Sodom: for the land is still under water in this prophecy!

Daniel 12; (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): proponents of hopeless punishment often cite Dan 12:2 as evidence (whether for ECT or annihilation), because it speaks of the resurrection of the wicked to "disgrace and everlasting contempt/abhorrence"

(as the NASB puts it). Not many verses later, though, Daniel asks what will be the final end or outcome of these events (v.8). The angel (possibly the visible YHWH) replies that in regard to the end time (v.10), "Many will be purged, made white and refined, but the wicked will act wicked and none of the wicked will understand, but the instructors will understand." This language is similar to Malachi 4:1-3 (and its contexts back through Malachi 3. See exegetical comments on Matt 3:10-12.) Back in verse 3, "the instructors" are compared to those who lead the many to righteousness: they will shine brightly like the expanse of heaven and the stars AHD OLAM (which can mean forever and ever). The wicked in other words won't understand what the punishment and contempt is for, but the instructors will understand it's for purging, making white and refining the wicked, leading them to righteousness. Compare with Rev 22 where the righteous will keep doing what the righteous do even though the wicked keep doing what the wicked do: the wicked continue being filthy, but the Bride keeps going out with the Spirit to exhort those outside the NJ to slake their thirst, wash their robes and obtain permission to enter the NJ to be healed by the tree of life. Compare also with Isaiah 66:24, which doesn't yet speak of the resurrection of the rebels slain at the coming of Christ (and probably speaks of them being buried by the righteous), but where the only other OT occurrence of the term for abhorrence can be found. Jesus references this final verse of Isaiah in Mark 9 (and Matt 18) when speaking of the fire of Gehenna, and goes on to explain the purpose of the unquenchable fire

is to salt everyone so that they will have salt in their hearts and be at peace with one another. Jesus quotes Dan 12 in GosJohn 5 when talking about the authority of the Son, given by the Father, to be raising those who do the evil things to a resurrection of judgment, with the express goal that all persons (which must include them) shall be coming to actively and positively honor/value the Son (Who is the one "as a Son of Man") and the Father.

Hosea 1:6-10; (punishment not hopeless): God declares He shall have no more mercy upon the house of Israel but shall utterly take them away, for they are not His people and He shall not be their God; yet almost immediately He goes on to promise that in the place where it was said to them "You are not My people" it shall be said to them "You are the sons of the living God". See also 2:23 and chapter 2 generally.

Hosea 2; (punishment not hopeless): the whole chapter is stiff with denunciations and rejections of mercy upon Israel whose mother is an adulteress and not the wife of God and whose children thus are illegitimate children of whoredoms. And yet after pronouncing dreadful promises, God goes on (in the same chapter) to promise amazing mercy to the same rebel people after all, using the figure of a rejected wife received again after a long time (and after going back to her husband once she realizes how worthless her adultery is), and betrothed anew forever in righteousness and in justice (or in judgment) and in lovingkindness and in compassion

and in faithfulness, and God will have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion and will say to those who are not His people "you are My people", and they shall no longer call God "my Baal" but "my Husband". (St. Paul takes these promises and applies them similarly to the Gentiles.)

Hosea 11; (punishment not hopeless): very similar in theme to the latter half of Jer 31; and similarly cited by Matthew when midrashing the history of Jesus as the Messiah specially fulfilling or re-fulfilling prophecies. But the original prophecy wasn't about God calling the Messiah to Israel out of Egypt, much less about the high Christology of God calling His only-begotten Son as the Messiah from there. It isn't about Christology at all. It's about God complaining that rebel Israel, whom He regards as His own son Ephraim (probably a reference to Absalom the rebel son of David slain in the forests of Ephraim) and saved out of Egypt, is an ungrateful and treacherous oppressor and killer of innocents; therefore God promises to send Assyria in to slay Ephraim. And yet in the same chapter God also promises to have mercy on Ephraim and restore 'him' somehow after punishment. The implication of post-mortem salvation of rebel Ephraim isn't as strong as in Jeremiah 31, or even a few chapters later in Hosea, but can easily fit into this promise.

Hosea 13-14; (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): YHWH calls death and sheol to come destroy rebel Israel, who afterward repents and is restored to fellowship by YHWH. St. Paul

quotes the calling of death and sheol down on rebel Israel at the end of 1 Cor 15, obviously looking ahead to the resurrection and salvation of rebel Israel because he rephrases the quote as a taunt against death thanks to the victory of resurrection in God.

Amos 4:11; (punishment not hopeless): YHWH declares that He has already overthrown Israel "as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah", yet He still rescued them "like a firebrand snatched from a blaze". Due to their ingratitude and infidelity He is about to punish them again, but the point is that being punished the way Sodom and Gomorrah were punished isn't intrinsically hopeless.

Jonah 2:6; (everlasting not everlasting) (post-mortem salvation): "The earth with her bars were about me forever {legnolam}; yet thou hast brought up my life from corruption." He was only in the belly of the monster for three days and nights, not forever. The language indicates that Jonah's experience is an enacted metaphor for the resurrection, repentance and salvation of rebel sinners, even out of hell.

Hab 2:14; (no remaining rebels): the earth will be filled with the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea. The verb for "know" is the same as for sexual intimacy, so it's a loyal faithfulness not mere knowledge. The poetic reference to waters covering the sea may suggest

no unspoken alternate dimensions where rebels still exist.

Hab 3:6; (everlasting not everlasting): "the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow" at the coming of YHWH Whose ways are truly everlasting. (Also Isaiah 40:4, 44:10; Ezek 38:20; 1 Peter 3:7-12; Rev 16:20, 20:11; etc., indicating the mountains and hills are not everlasting, especially compared to YHWH!)

Zeph 3:8-9; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): God makes it very clear here (and elsewhere in Zeph) that when the Day of YHWH comes He will be killing the living hell (so to speak) out of both rebel Israel and the rebel nations, using imagery very similar to that which is connected elsewhere to the lake of fire (destroying the whole earth with fire for example). But verse 9 reveals the purpose and what happens afterward: the nations shall be given purified lips (as in Isaiah with the coal of fire) that all of them may call on the name of YHWH, to serve Him with one shoulder (shoulder to shoulder).

Zech 9:11; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): while the immediate context is most likely speaking of Israel's earthly captivity by pagans, this captivity was itself a punishment from God for their sins; and the waterless pit (or "cistern in which there is no water") is descriptively similar to punitive language for



sheol/hades. Because of the blood of God's covenant with rebel Israel, He shall save their prisoners from the earthly waterless pit where they were sent for their sins; how much moreso because of the blood of that same covenant of the Son with the Father to save sinners from sin (e.g. Heb 9)!

Zech 13:8-9; (punishment not hopeless): two parts of a population are slain in the coming of YHWH, repenting of their sin when they see their rebel populations saved and empowered by the One Whom they have pierced (Zech 12:10 and the 12th chapter generally) but the third part is kept alive to be refined by fire. These are certainly repenting of their sins and coming back to loyalty to the YHWH Whom they have pierced Who is pouring out a spirit (or the Spirit) of grace and supplication on them, the Shepherd Whom the false prophets wounded between the arms in the house of His friends (13:6-7). In that day to come, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to clean them (implicitly) from their sin and their impurity. But although this is talking about the penitent survivors, the two parts who are slain are not excluded from repentance necessarily; the prophecy just isn't talking about them.

Zechariah 14:16; (punishment not hopeless): the survivors of the rebel nations who went up against Jerusalem, "every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem", go up from year to year to worship YHWH of Hosts and to keep the feasts of tabernacles (which are connected to the Incarnation and also to the

atonement for sin). This is also probably what is happening in the final verse of Isaiah 66:24 ("from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another"), except that in the first seven months they will have to pass by dead bodies of the rebels which haven't yet been interred in Hammon Gog (the valley of Hinnom, now renamed for Gog (Ezekiel 39:4-12)). Regardless of what may be the fate of those people destroyed in the rescue of Jerusalem at Christ's Second Coming, this text (along with others) explicitly states that YHWH allows (and expects and encourages) repentance and true fellowship from those among the pagans who survive that debacle. It isn't post-mortem salvation (not yet, or not in this verse), but it's definitely salvation after the Second Coming. So the eschatological punishment is not hopeless to that degree at the very least!

Malachi 3-4; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): see discussion of Matt 3:10-12, which cites Mal 4:1-3. From the NASB translation: "Behold [says the God of justice], I am going to send My messenger and he will clear (or prepare) the way before Me. And the Lord (ADNY), Whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; even the messenger of the covenant in Whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord (ADNY) of hosts. "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like laundrymen's soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and

silver, so that they may present to the Lord (YHWH) offerings in righteousness. Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord (YHWH) as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien (traveler, sojourner), and do not fear Me," says the Lord (YHWH) of hosts. "For I AM THE LORD (YHWH)! I do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed (have not come to an end)." (Malachi 3:1-6) The word for messenger here is Malach, by the way, and is applied to both Jesus as the Lord coming and to JohnBapt as the messenger of the coming Lord. John alludes to Malachi 4, also, where the sun of righteousness brings healing to those who fear God and they shall trod down the wicked like ashes under their feet and the Day of YHWH is coming like a burning furnace so that every evildoer shall be set ablaze like chaff, leaving them neither root nor branch. But as the purpose of the refiner's furnace was like laundry soap to clean the rebel sons of Levi in chapter 3, so the purpose of the fire is the same here for everyone. (But this really comes out better when connected to the main Gehenna argument for Matt 18 / Mark 9.)

Matt 1:21; (assurance of salvation): the angel instructs Joseph to name the baby Jesus, "for He shall be saving His people from their sins". The Greek {Iêsou} refers to a doctor or healer, and

was one of the names Jews of the time used as an equivalent for the name Joshua (as we would say in English) or Yeshua / Yehoshua in Hebrew, which means God Saves or the Savior is God. Joshua was a very popular name in that time and place, but God instructs the angel to stress that this name was not chosen for its normality but as a sign for God's purpose: to save people from their sins. When God comes to humanity in the Incarnation, in other words, He chooses a name suitable for His purposes -- to fail in that purpose would be to fail His own chosen name! Calvinists have thus equally stressed that the name of Jesus itself is God's promise of total victory in saving whomever He intends to save from sin.

But Calvinists, thinking some people are never saved from sin at all, thus consider "His people" to be restrictive to God's choice of whom He will save from their sins. Arminians reply, as per John 1:29, that Jesus is the Lamb Who bears away the sins of the world -- and Calvinists do generally agree with that, although they then distinguish between carrying the sin of the world and taking that sin away from (and thus saving) the world. This however (as Arminians might reply) effectively denies that God saves at all, and even that God is salvation! -- which would be denying the name of Jesus! Calvinists would reply that they are affirming God actively chooses to save some people, just not all people, so they are not denying the name of Jesus in that sense - - and anyway the name doesn't exclusively mean God is salvation so if they are effectively denying that meaning there is no problem.

No nearby context lends weight one way or another, so the question of what "His people" means must be decided on extended context; but technically Calvs and Arms both agree it certainly cannot refer to people who are already loyal to God, since what they are being saved from is disloyalty to the source of all morality. What can be stressed in the local context is that God has staked His own chosen name on the success or failure of His salvific intentions, which (so far as it goes) would count against Arm soteriology and in favor of either Calv or Kath, both of which stress the original assurance of victorious salvation.

Matt 3:10-12; (counter-evidence against universalism) (post-mortem salvation): paralleled at Luke 3:9, 16-17. Jesus isn't dividing utterly separate items from each other (like sheep and goats, or wheat and weeds, might arguably be construed, though see comments there), but is removing each kernel of wheat from its own chaff by scouring with the winnowing fan. This tends to imply the salvation of a person from sin, not the separation of different kinds of person. John the Baptist, in teaching this parable, connects it to Malachi 4:1-3, which features similar imagery attributed as part of the message of the coming Elijah, including burning of the tree (per Luke 3:9 and Matt 3:10). However, God (via Malachi) says this is coming to all sinners on the Day of YHWH to come; but all sinners must include the rebel Israelites (particularly the rebel religious leaders -- whom JohnBapt is specifically admonishing in GosMatt and GosLuke)

from back in Malachi 3, who are set to be purged with fire in the same Day of YHWH to come. This is very far from hopeless for them, as God both intends to save them from their sins thereby (in refining imagery) and prophetically expects full success! This lends great strength to the interpretation of the chaff as being salvation of sinners from sin: the Synoptic saying, in its referential contexts, testifies at least to the salvation of rebel Israel in the Day of YHWH to come, with the implication that this applies to all sinners via Mal 4.

Matt 5:25-26; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): this is one of the three "final cent" sayings in the Gospels. (See comments on Matt 18 for the other one. Luke 12:54-59 parallels this one with a more particular application of making friends with their enemy Rome while they still have a chance.) As with the other sayings, the person will be let out from the prison/torment once the person has paid the final cent. The context here in the Sermon on the Mount is absolutely connected to Gehenna threats just like Matt 18 -- in fact this short parable comes right in the middle of Gehenna judgment threats similar to those in Matt 18 and Mark 9. As with the other sayings, the final cent owed is not money but reconciliation and forgiveness and mercy.

**Matt 7:13-23;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism): sometimes non-universalists will reference 7:13-14 (enter by the narrow way, the wide way leads to destruction), or 7:19-23 (every tree that does

not bear good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire, and Jesus will tell those who are false servants to depart from Him as lawbreakers), or even 7:15 (beware the false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inside are ravening wolves), as though these count not only against Christian universalism but personally against Christian universalists.

Any preacher or teacher might of course be a ravening wolf inside, even a Christian universalist. But as a matter of principle, are universalists the ones who are saying that God's tree will ultimately produce bad figs? (Matt 7:16-18) Are universalists the ones who are acting in such a way that ultimately some sinners will never come to do the will of the Father in the heavens? (Matt 7:21) Are universalists the ones who claim our Father in the heavens gives worse gifts than evil fathers on earth ever would? (Matt 7:9-11) Are universalists the ones who teach against the idea of all people coming to do unto others as they would have people do unto them? (Matt 7:12) Is it the universalists who deny that those outside who keep on asking and keep on knocking will eventually be given entrance, and so who teach that those thrown outside might as well not even bother knocking in the first place because they will never be let in? (Matt 7:7-8, 23)

Those who are ravening wolves inside are certainly merciless to others, and admittedly a Christian universalist might be this way inside; but does this describe Christian universalism in

principle, and so all Christian universalists necessarily?

Granted, not everyone who is empowered by Christ to work miracles and even exorcisms will be acknowledged by Christ as His followers, even if they know to give Him the double-Lord title reserved only for God in the Old Testament. But when Jesus withered the tree going into the city during His last week of earthly ministry, was He denouncing those who trust in God and try to cooperate with Him in bringing all the beasts of the field and of the forest into the Temple to eat? -- or those who, considering themselves the elite chosen of God, had taken over the Court of the Gentiles, preventing any fruit from growing there? (See further comments on Mark 11:11-26.)

Admittedly, the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it; and "many shall enter by the broad path and the wide gate that leads to destruction" instead. But does the good shepherd only act as the Way and the Gate, waiting for those to enter? -- or does He go out after the final sheep of His flock, sweeping up vigorously after the final coin stamped with His image, until He finds and brings the lost (destroyed) one home? Are universalists the ones who deny one teaching instead of affirming both?

This saying has strong relations to GosLuke 13:22-30, where Luke reports a man approaching Jesus on the road, during His final journey up to Jerusalem, asking the question (v.24), "Are there only a few who are being saved?" and Jesus



answered Him with very similar words, "Strive to enter by the narrow door, for many I tell you will seek to enter and will not be able once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door".

But that isn't the end of it. Jesus goes on immediately to say, "And you (plural) will begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' And He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from... Depart from Me all you who do injustice!'"

"There will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves being cast out.

"And they will come from the east and west, and from north and south, and will recline (at the table) in the kingdom of God.

"Now look: those are last who will be first and those are first who will be last."

That reversal of first-and-last is a typical saying of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospel reports, showing that He is criticizing whoever was asking the question. And the ones coming from all corners of the compass, show that many in fact must be being saved after all, even though many will not be strong to enter (the more literal reading of the Greek there) once God shuts the door.

Moreover, in Ancient (and modern) Near Eastern symbolism, the common meal together with those

who are enemies points to reconciliation of enemies; in fact once the first bite is taken, the reconciliation has so strongly begun that neither side is allowed to talk again about what has happened. The host of those who had been his enemies could even be adopting them into his family!

So when the man is asking Jesus, "Lord, are there only a few who are being saved?" he is asking in effect whether only a few will be eating at the reconciliation banquet, and depending on the spirit of his question he is looking to reconcile with only a few enemies if any. Such a person is in principle necessarily excluding himself from the reconciliation banquet!

So who is the "you" (plural) whom the lord of the house is talking to outside, wailing and gnashing their teeth? Are the ones being punished outside the ones who fully expect many unexpected people from all the compass reclining at the table of God's reconciliation, being admitted into the family with the patriarchs and the prophets (as in 13:28 and elsewhere)? -- or are they ones who expected God to only save a few? Who are the ones who would be the first, outside wailing and gnashing their teeth? Are they the ones who refused to judge lest they be judged? -- or are they the ones who expected this kind of judgment for others?

Apparently there are many more entering into life than that man was expecting who only expected a few to be saved! He himself is going down the broad path to the broad gate, not the narrow path

to the narrow door, and he himself shall be wailing and gnashing his teeth on being thrown outside when he sees people coming from all quarters of the compass to eat in the kingdom with the patriarchs and the prophets.

Jesus does talk to "you-plural" when answering the man, so He is addressing multiple people in the nearby traveling crowd generally; but His reply only makes sense so far as they agree with the man in wanting Jesus to affirm that only a few are being saved. Expecting (in the sense of intentionally wanting) only a few to be saved, is itself the broad path to destruction which many find, not the narrow path which only a few find! For such people it doesn't matter that they recognize Jesus' authority enough to call Him Lord. "Lord, is it only a few who are being saved?" "You will start standing outside saying, 'Lord, open up to us!'" But so long as they are wailing and gnashing their teeth at seeing so many entering in to the kingdom to eat at the reconciliation table with God after all, they cannot be claiming to come from, to be part of, that table fellowship. God is not denying omniscience here: "I do not know where you are from. I tell you I do not know where you are from!" And notice that the people so strongly reject identifying with the table of reconciling enemies, that they metaphorically answer that they come from outside where the Lord was teaching in their streets. They are willing to acknowledge that they accepted the Lord's own offer to them of a fellowship meal, "We ate and drank in Your presence," but they are not willing

to accept His invitation and reconciliation with those-other-people-over-there.

Such people would prefer to fulfill non-fair-togetherness, which is unrighteousness, injustice, in regard to those people, even though they quite naturally (and properly so far as they go) want positive justice done for themselves. But they are doers of injustice by insisting that only a few are being saved.

Again, back at Matthew's report of a similar saying during the healing of the centurion's servant boy (Matt 8:5-13), Jesus' whole rebuke is that "the sons of the kingdom" themselves are the ones who will be shocked to find far more people coming into the kingdom than they were expecting, while they themselves are being thrown outside where the wailing is and the gnashing of the teeth! That phrase, "sons of the kingdom", is the same phrase Jesus uses in Matthew's report of other teaching a few chapters later (Matt 13) to talk about people who will certainly be saved -- but the contexts there continue to warn against people expecting other people not to be finally saved.

Relatedly again, back at Luke's semi-parallel in chapter 13, he also reports the parable of the mustard seed immediately before the story of the man who came to ask if only a few are being saved; in GosMatt and GosMark that parable is directly connected with warnings against expecting hopeless punishment and being unmerciful. (Whether Jesus repeated the teaching

at this incident, or Luke ported the teaching over here for topical purposes, is irrelevant.)

Who, then, being thrown outside, are the ones being judged by the standard of their judgment (Matt 7:1-2)? Those who are merciful even to those who are thrown outside? Or those who are unmerciful?

"Love your enemies," Jesus says in Luke's report of the same incident (Luke 6:35-38) "and do good, and lend, not despairing at all of receiving nothing in return, and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High! -- for He Himself is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil ones. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Now do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; release and you will be released. Give and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap! For by your standard of measure, will it be measured to you in return!"

It may make more sense not to regard the warnings of Matthew's 7th chapter to be against Christian universalists after all.

(See extensive comments on Matthew 13 for further connections to Luke 13.)

**Matt 10:28;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless): paralleled with slight differences at GosLuke 12:4-7, for a different incident. If only one version of the saying is historical, internal

evidence suggests it's Luke's version on the road, with Matthew having ported it (and some other material from that Lukan incident) back into Jesus' discussion about the call of the apostles and Jesus commissioning them as preachers. But it isn't impossible Jesus said it first to the apostles before sending them out on their first evangelical mission, and then later to the general public while on the way into Jerusalem from Jericho the week before final Passover.

In Luke's version, Jesus says, "But I am saying to you, My friends -- do not be afraid of those who kill the body, yet after this they can do no more. Now I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him Who after killing has authority to cast you in Gehenna! Certainly I tell you, be afraid of this One!"

In Matthew's version, Jesus says, "And do not fear those who kill the body, but haven't the strength to kill the soul; but rather, fear the One Who is strong to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."

What does it mean to kill body and soul in Gehenna? Who is the one who has both the authority and power to do so? And is this destruction hopeless?

Some have argued that Satan is the one who has authority and strength to kill both body and soul in Gehenna; but those people are, perhaps inadvertently, denying trinitarian theism or even a mere supernaturalistic theism where God as the

ultimate judge is certainly the only one with the authority and the power to punish sinners in Gehenna, even if He delegated that authority and empowers other creatures to do so -- and in the scriptures He never delegates that authority or power to anyone else, unless it is to the Messiah (in a non-trinitarian Christology). Satan does receive delegated authority or permission to destroy the body sometimes, but not the soul or spirit (or anyway not in a sense that could be contrasted to destroying the body only, i.e. the soul or psuche is not merely the life of the body in GosMatt's version of this saying; and Gehenna involves something more than bodily death in GosLuke's report of the saying.)

To be fair, the people who go this route tend to ignore GosMatt's version (through inadvertence or as an inaccurate version). But I could also name a prominent and highly respected modern New Testament scholar (one whom I also highly respect) who tried to go this route without reference to GosMatt's data, and also without much consistency to two of his other unusual positions: that sinners are annihilated by God's authority (not Satan's authority and power) in the final judgment; and that most or nearly all judgment warnings in the Gospels, especially Gehenna warnings, are not about final judgment at all but are only about the fall of Jerusalem, where the Romans (not God nor Satan) killed only the bodies and dumped them into the valley of Gehinnom nearby and after that could do no more! But he recognized that this saying couldn't only refer to the Roman slaughter of Jewish rebels, because that would fit the category of whom not

to fear, and yet he didn't want to regard God as the one Who actively annihilates sinners ("waiting with a large stick to beat anyone who steps out of line"), so who is left over? In his account, it could only be Satan!

This scholar was certainly correct that in Luke's next verse Israel's God is portrayed as the creator and sustainer Who can be lovingly trusted in all circumstances, which was part of his reason for inferring Jesus must be referring to Satan (though without Jesus saying so specifically); but since this scholar believes in a finally hopeless punishment or fate for at least some sinners, he was unable to reconcile the idea of Jesus specifically saying we shouldn't fear God Who has only good intentions and caring love toward us, with the only one Who not only has the only metaphysical power and authority to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna (if even a mere supernaturalistic theism is true, much moreso trinitarian theism), but Who is also the only One ever shown to do something like that in the scriptures!

To which could be added, if it was needed, that if Jesus had an Old Testament reference in mind, it was probably Isaiah 8:12-13, where YHWH Himself is encouraging people not to fear the coming Assyrian punishment, even though it was going to result in death; but to fear and dread YHWH the holy ADNY of armies, Who was the one authoritatively sending the evildoers to destroy both houses of Israel.



At any rate, the question of who should be feared has to be answered by who fits the criteria: he has the authority and strength to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna, not only the mere capability of killing the body and then after that being unable to do anything more to the person (whatever else he may also do to the body). And whoever that is, that isn't Satan, much less Titus or Vespasian; nor do the Pharisees (whom Jesus was more explicitly warning not to fear) have authority to do any of that.

Nor can the {exousia} or authority be an impersonal power, like "sin". There are several dozen occurrences of {exousia} in the New Testament, and not one of them elsewhere refers to impersonal authorities, including earlier in Matt 10 (translated by the author or compiler of GosMatt from Jesus' original Aramaic of course) where Jesus gives {exousia} to His apostles. Even the "powers and authorities" whom St. Paul pits spiritually against Christ and His church, are regarded as being in personal rebellion and even as being reconciled eventually to Christ Who thus becomes "the head of every {exousia}" in the Epistle to the Ephesians.) To be fair, the Matt 10 version of this warning uses a more generic term for strength, not for power, which could be impersonal, unlike authority in Luke 12's version; and the pronouns in either Gospel's report could be translated impersonally. But we would need strong contextual reasons to regard this as the only impersonal usage of "authority" in the New Testament, and those strong contextual reasons just don't exist.

In Matt 10, Christ has just finished encouraging the apostles not to fear persecution and death from personal authorities: if they call the master Beelzeboul, how much rather those of his household, etc.! (Notably the Pharisees will do just that in the incident of the sin against the Holy Spirit, which I grant was certainly a case of their flagrant hypocrisy.) Christ follows up with a warning that He will (personally) disavow those in front of the Father who disavow Him before people. Warnings of personal distress from family persecution are included before the end of that address and that chapter.

So the contexts of Matt 10, before and after verse 28, are repeatedly and strongly warning that those persons who can kill the body are going to do so, but the apostles should keep on going and don't fear them, with at least one warning (in this group of sayings) of a personal threat from Jesus. I grant it's likely Matthew ported the saying of warning and consolation from the Luke 12 address (which is a different scene) back here for topical convenience, but he dropped it into a context of personal threat to the body and encouragement not to fear those people who can only harm the body.

I'll also grant that Luke (in my harmonization judgment) has a tendency to cluster teaching portions out of chronological order, and that this was most likely part of the teaching on the road during the final approach from Jericho to Jerusalem before Passover (which Luke spreads out as a central saying source throughout the central portion of his Gospel), whereas the dinner with

the Pharisees back in Luke 11 most likely happened much earlier, maybe even more than a year earlier. But Luke has at least put them in close proximity for topical purposes, and while again I'll grant that Luke has almost certainly spiced up the dispute with the lawyers and Pharisees at that dinner with sayings from the Greater Condemnation denouncement vs the Pharisees at the Temple on Tuesday or Wednesday of Holy Week (a scene he doesn't otherwise include in his Gospel, so this is as good a place as any to thematically include them) nevertheless the point is that Jesus has thrown down hard against the Pharisees recently in the narrative, and so (11:53) the scribes and the Pharisees are beginning to hem Him in dreadfully and to be quizzing Him concerning more things, ambushing Him, seeking to pounce on something out of His mouth in order to accuse Him. And that's personal persecution with an intent to get the crowds to be in favor of killing Him.

That's the context of the "leaven (sin) of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy": personal persecution by religious authorities to the death. Be not afraid of the ones, therefore, that are killing the body and after this do not have anything more excessive they can do; be afraid of the one that after killing has authority to be casting into Gehenna.

Local context afterward includes a judgment warning (just like in GosMatt) that those who disavow Christ, which (like GosMatt) uses a term involving personal renunciation of Christ to other persons (disavowed before men, or avowed

before men), shall be disavowed by Christ before the Father (or avowed).

(Also there's another callback to the sin of hypocrisy of the Pharisees at the incident of the sin against the Holy Spirit, which Luke provides direct reference to here at 12:10. He hadn't included that point when relating the incident earlier, unlike Mark and Matt.)

What follows and ends this pericope? A warning that the disciples will be persecuted by human authorities, but encouragement that the Holy Spirit will help them defend themselves.

So again, in somewhat similar and somewhat different ways (including thematic connection to prominent Pharisee hypocrisy scenes in GosMatt which GosLuke happens not to otherwise report), the situational context locally before and after Luke 12:4-5, involves persecution by personal authorities. For whatever reason, he has placed it into a context of personal threat to the body and encouragement not to fear those people who can harm the body but that's all.

Granting then that the total weight lands heavily on the authority being personal, could the authority to be feared be a personalization of sin?

I don't have a problem with the personalization of sin in principle, though in practice when I find similar things elsewhere I notice they tend to be ascribed to Satan personally (for example "the death"). But I see plenty of reason, in the

surrounding local contexts of each occurrence of the saying, to be comparing personal authorities who are actually personal not mere personifications. The opponents of Christ are all personal, and in their own limited ways they are personally authoritative, in judging those who avow and disavow Christ; Christ and the Father are personal in authoritatively judging those who avow and disavow Christ. The opponents of Christ may have authority and capability to kill the body but nothing more; the Son and the Father certainly have authority and capability to do more than kill the body (regardless of whether They use that authority or to what extent They use it).

I see absolutely no reason, from the context, to introduce sin as a personalization having metaphorical authority to do what two personal authorities in the context of both sayings certainly have the authority and power to do (the Son and the Father), in judgment against a person, which judgment the context of both sayings indisputably mentions (disavowing those who disavow Christ to spare themselves from trial by human authorities).

An argument would have to be made from extended context somehow trumping the local surrounding context, and/or from theological principle (for example God has no power or authority to destroy the soul as well as the body, nor to send a person to Gehenna whatever that means.) But I certainly see no such argument from theological principle, since I affirm (from a consistent supernaturalistic theism, including trinitarian

theism) that God does have both power and authority to destroy the soul as well as the body in Gehenna; and I have yet to see any kind of extended context argument (much less a strong one) that, in comparison with criteria elsewhere, the details of this saying signal a personalization of sin as the authority to be feared.

Moreover, whatever Gehenna means, it has to refer to a condition where this person, who has authority and power, can destroy both soul and body (whatever "destroy" means here), not only do something else to the body after killing the body. Satan does not even have the mere power, much less the authority, to destroy the soul as well as the body; much less do Pharisees or Romans have power to destroy the soul; and Romans only killed bodies at the fall of Jerusalem anyway, throwing only the bodies into the literal Ge-henna.

Only God has power and authority to destroy both body and soul -- which thus also means Gehenna metaphorically represents more than a burning garbage heap, which after all can only destroy the body, whether at that time or later in 70 CE. Proposing anything else with that power and authority, isn't even supernaturalistic theism anymore; and the scriptures show nothing and no one else having anything like that power and authority -- on the contrary, the scriptural testimony is strongly emphatic and colorful about God being the one to do it!

If even "destroying" the soul and body in Gehenna is a hopeful punishment, however, everything becomes easy: God is able to save even the "lost" or "destroyed", the terms being exactly the same in Biblical Greek, even (or especially) when God is the One Who does the destroying. For (as Jesus goes on to say not long afterward in Luke's report, GosLuke 12:27-28 and contexts, related to His immediate consolation about the birds back at 12:6-7, though mirrored in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount 6:25-30 and contexts rather than Matt 10) if God cares so much about the grass of the field to dress them in greater glory than Solomon, even though the flowers are here today and tomorrow are cast into the fire, how much more does God care for you, you of little faith! God does not regard you, even if you have poor faith, as something only to be thrown away and burned like trash; nor is Christ speaking obviously here about some special elect whom God values more than flowers while He values the non-elect not even so much as flowers, giving them souls which by His choice can only do injustice and shall only be annihilated back out of existence or else suffer unending torments.

The local (if not immediate) context of the saying, consequently, weighs heavily back in the direction that even though God can and does destroy some souls as well as bodies in Gehenna (which adds more evidence toward Gehenna representing the lake of fire judgment after the general resurrection, by the way); nevertheless, God does not intend this as a hopeless punishment, but instead graciously values rational creatures, even if they are currently

impenitent sinners, more than to be disposable trash.

Nor can someone get around this reassurance about God's intentions, by foisting the hopelessness onto the Father, from Whom we are protected by the Son (somehow -- which would make less than no sense on any trinitarian theism, and would not even make sense on any lesser Christology). For the Son Himself on one hand says He joins the Father in the judgment against those who deny Him (so no division in intention there), and on the other hand also says that the Father (not merely Himself the Son) values people more than flowers which are thrown into the fiery furnace.

To put the conclusion more shortly: when a loving parent says to a rebelliously unjust child, "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it!", that reflects a real point on which we ought to respect our parents, but that doesn't mean our mother or father is going to annihilate us or torment us in punishment forever with no hope. On the other hand, Jesus indicates (with another nearby judgment warning directly referencing Himself and the Father) that we ought to be wary about the judgment brought against us by God if we betray Him, and so to fear God more in that regard than to fear evil persons; yet the proper response to the God Who cares for us more than for the grass that is thrown like trash into the furnace, Who gives Himself to the very death for our sake while we are still rebels against Him, is not wary fear of a threat, but respectful numinous fear, leading into adoration.



**Matt 12:22-45;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism): despite the sin against the Holy Spirit being mentioned in the middle of this scene, the tenor of the scene as a whole involves Christ warning His opponents among the Pharisees for calling the salvation of sinners by Christ the act of Satan.

Specifically the sinner in view is the mute and blind demented man, already healed previously by Christ on His late arrival into Capernaum, as reported by Matthew back at Matt 9:32-34 with foreshadowing as to how this was going to relate to the scene in Matt 12 later. ("But the Pharisees were saying, 'He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.'") The man who was previously only mute thanks to demon-possession returns now blind as well as mute despite having been healed by Christ, and the Pharisees use this as a pretext to condemn Christ. Christ explains that even if a person is exorcised, if he does not repent and fill his heart with God then his last state shall be worse than his first (v.45; Luke also includes this portion in his account of the incident, GosLuke 11:14-26, although he saves the statement about the sin that will not be forgiven until a little later). Yet even this was not hopeless for the man in such a worse state! - - and it is a sin against the Holy Spirit to insist that the man's condition must have been hopeless, and so to insist that such (apparent) salvation of him must be from the devil not from God.

This of course applies just as well to interpretations of the sin against the Holy

Spirit! -- to interpret it as being hopeless for the one who sins that way, is to fall into the same sin one's self. (Although the attitude of the heart in doing so makes the difference, not merely a well-intentioned error of theological misinterpretation.)

Whoever does not gather with Christ scatters instead (12:30, Luke 11:23), and so is not with Christ but against Christ. Who is Christ gathering? -- those captured by Beelzebub (or Beelzeboul, or Satan), even the one whom Jesus had to rescue from a latter state worse than his former. To deny that God gathers such people, results in people scattering away from Christ. This not only involves acting against Christ in several ways (directly hindering Christ's mission, and also setting one's self against the competency and completion of Christ's evangelical mission), but also insultingly misrepresents the Holy Spirit's reputation among men.

In Mark's report of the same incident (3:28-29), Jesus also insists (strongly stressed in the Greek) that every sin and blasphemy whatever shall be forgiven men. One way or another, it is necessary to interpret verse 29 by verse 28, or verse 28 by verse 29. But to interpret 28 by 29 is to claim (in effect) that where grace exceeds sin super-exceeds for not as the grace is the sin.

Note that Christ's repeat of the warning (at a later scene during the final approach to Jerusalem), reported at Luke 12:8-10, is given under the opening warning to "Beware the leaven

of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." The Pharisees were willing to contradict their own principles of judgment in order to condemn Christ for saving a man who, by natural expectations, should have been permanently lost.

The most serious problem left over, is Mark 3:29 which refers in most ancient Greek texts to an "eonian sin". The evidence from textual copies (not only in Greek but other ancient translations and applications of GosMark) that "sin" was the original reading here is very strong, even though there is disagreement about the precise grammatic form of the word; and there is no disagreement at all about {aiônious}. This would be the only time sin is called "eonian" in the New Testament.

An impressive number of other Greek texts, some early, as well as other languages (some early) feature "crisis" {kriseôs} here instead (with a couple of texts using another term for judgment from which we now derive "crime", and a couple using both "crisis" and "sin", and a couple using {kolasis} instead as in Matthew 25.) The textual evidence in itself is about equal either way, although either way (eternal sin or eternal crisis) the term would be unique in the New Testament; but the majority existence of an odd form of the term for sin {hamartêματος}, with a few Greek texts and most translations from Greek witnessing to the more expected form {hamartias} instead, is hard to explain if "sin" was not the original reading.

If "punishment" or "crisis" (judgment) was the original reading, then certainly that would come

uniquely from God, and so the term would be entirely neutral to the question of whether or not the sin (and thus the punishment) ever ends. Such variants themselves actually testify to the notion that "eonian" was understood to mean that the noun described by the adjective comes uniquely from God, which would be theologically shocking if "sin" was the noun! But fairness requires me, at this time, to acknowledge "sin" as, most likely, the original reading.

What does the phrase "eonian sin" necessarily imply, if so? By the evidence of surrounding context, the other Synoptic accounts of the saying, and the usage of the term elsewhere in both the OT and the NT, nothing fatal to universalism.

1.) The argument previously given, from story details, about Jesus' intention in talking about the sin against the Holy Spirit, still stands on its own merits, over-against a hopeless interpretation of the phrase. This in itself might be considered decisive! -- unless a case can be made for a hopeless meaning which does not also involve charging God with having no intention or no capability of saving those who have been plundered by the Plunder-possessor (against Jesus' own sarcastic retorts to the criticisms of the Pharisees). But which interpretation gathers the most with Christ, and which interpretations involve scattering instead? -- and does gathering with Christ or scattering instead involve being for or against Christ?! Which interpretations involve bringing shame onto the Holy Spirit, even defying salvation "into the

Holy Spirit" (as Mark puts it, as into the face of the Person of God Who convicts sinners of sin) and which does not? Any Christian should carefully consider the varieties of options, whether Calvinistic, Arminianistic, or universalistic.

2.) In Mark's report, the grammar is very strange in any case. Jesus says whoever blasphemes "into the Holy Spirit" (which I agree has a connotation of being "against the Holy Spirit" in this context), is not having pardon into the eon (which is clear enough grammar, regardless of what "into the eon" may or may not mean), "but a liable-one is sin-effect of-eonian." In other words, in that last clause (which is a small independent sentence in itself) "a liable one" or "the liable" one (or the guilty-one, or the one who is obliged, or the one held fast, like the prisoners Christ just talked about rescuing from Satan) is the subject of the verb "is", and "sin-effect", {hamartêmatos}, is the object of the verb, or more accurately the predicate nominative. {Hamartêmatos} isn't the object of the preposition implied by {aiônious} which is in the genitive form.

In other words, the (probably original) grammar doesn't read "X is guilty of-sin", and so also doesn't read "X is guilty of-eonian-sin". In English terms, the grammar is more like "the-guilty-one", that which is under judgment, "is sin of-eonian". If this doesn't mean God, the Eonian One, is guilty of sin-effect (and it doesn't, because that would be ridiculous theologically and certainly wouldn't fit the

topical context), it would mean eonian sin-effect itself, not the sinner, is what is bound for judgment!

No doubt this is why some Greek texts, and many translations into other languages from Greek, replace the term either with {hamartias} which is a genitive noun to fit with the "of-eonian" (thus matching the usual translation "of eonian sin"), or with {kriseôs} which is also a genitive noun to fit the prepositional phrase as "of-eonian-judgment". But notice then that the one who is guilty, is the one who insists on eonian judgment, or who insists on an eonian sin-effect! (The guilty-one is of-eonian-judgment, or is of-eonian-sin-effect. The phrasing matches that for identifying someone who holds to a particular party, or who follows a person, or comes from a certain place. For example, St. Paul's complaint of factions disputing because "I am of Apollos!" "I am of Paul!")

Putting it another way, the actual strange grammar of the end of Mark 3:29 fits the idea that the ones being condemned of sin against the Holy Spirit are those who insist on some eonian effect of sin in a way that insults the reputation of the Holy Spirit before men, a way that involves rejecting (as the work of Satan not of God) Christ's salvation of the man whose latter state was worse than his former, and a way that involves scattering instead of gathering with Christ. That way would not be Christian universalism, obviously!

Admittedly, the grammatic issues here are extremely difficult, and so perhaps open to other interpretations. (Possibly there is an underlying Aramaic grammatic issue here explaining the oddity in some other way, for example.) But the difficulties of the grammar do provide at least some evidence in favor of a more hopeful reading of the text, in conjunction with the various contextual details around the text.

Assuming, then, that these two points are not sufficient to carry the rebuttal against using "eonian sin" as testimony of a hopeless result, I will continue with some other observations about the situation, first by clarifying a point previously mentioned:

3.) As I indicated previously, the peculiar form of the term in GosMark, {hamartêματος}, which agrees grammatically with Jesus' previous extremely strong statement one verse prior about all sins and blasphemies being forgiven, indicates a result of the action of the sin with the {-ma} type of suffix. This explains why "eonian" can be used to describe the noun: the sin is not "eonian", the results of the sin are "eonian", and the results are (at least) judgmental punishment uniquely from God (thus explaining substitutions in many texts with "crisis"). On the theory that "eonian" in the NT refers to things which come uniquely from God, this term still fits (and not referring to sin coming uniquely from God!) Whether the crisis or the punishment/kolasis continues never-endingly is a whole other question. Thus the grammar (in this case) can fit annihilationism well enough,

too: if the result of the sin is the permanent annihilation of the sinner, that would be quite arguably an eonian sin-effect, too, even if "eonian" only referred to something happening in the next eon or age!

4.) On the other hand, at least once indisputably in the New Testament (at Romans 16:25), and often in the Greek Old Testament, the term "eonian" refers to something which has an end. Whether that applies in this example or not, is admittedly a question of contextual evidence; but this is why I have given the topical and thematic contextual argument first!

5.) In Luke's report of the saying (probably happening at a later time in Jesus' ministry), Jesus doesn't use any emphatic statements about a lack of forgiveness. But in Matthew's report, Jesus says such sin {ouk aphethêsetai}, shall not be being pardoned, and {ouk aphethêsetai aut(i)ô oute en tout(i)ô t(i)ô aiôni oute en t(i)ô mellonti}, shall not be being pardoned to him neither in to-this-the-eon nor in to-the-coming-one. And in Mark's own report (admittedly not present in a few respectable Greek copies of the text, but still more likely to be original to the text on text-critical principles overall) Jesus says that whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit {ouk echei aphasin eis ton aiôna} is not having pardon into the eon.

The phrasing here opens up the possibility that Jesus is talking about the eonian sin-effect or sin-penalty (per Mark's account) being restricted to this age and then to only one of the following



ages to come. But to be fair, all the ages of ages to come may also be regarded as one overarching Age-Day of the Lord, so even a limited distinction of ages might involve continuing forever in the never-ending grand Age to come.

It could be replied that, if so, it's odd that Luke (or Jesus Himself by report) doesn't include this emphasis in Luke's account; but a lack of detail somewhere doesn't count against an inclusion of detail elsewhere.

Much more relevantly, the term (in two forms) {aphesis} has a primary meaning of being released from bonds or imprisonment; thus also (more commonly in the NT) by metaphor, being released from imprisonment and other effects of sin or rebellion against an authority.

All three Synoptic authors connect this narrative incident (although Luke for whatever reason disconnects the sin against the Holy Spirit warning from this incident and reports a saying of it later) to general reports of exorcism, and in both GosMatt and GosLuke to a specific case of Jesus setting people free from demons. Matthew and Mark also connect it to saving people on the sabbath (the man with the withered hand), whereas Luke connects it to the material about how we ought to expect good things from God, not harmful things. Matthew does, too, with the denunciation that a "brood of vipers" expects bad fruit from an ideal tree, and that a wicked man is pulling forth wicked things from the overflowing superabundance of his heart. All three reports

connect it to Jesus' pun on plundering Beelzeboul the Plunder-possessor, raiding the chief of raiders (as a nickname for Satan, per the context) to tie him up and take his things from him; which in context of Matthew's and Luke's report of the healing of the mute and blind demented man (which is explicitly treated as an exorcism) must refer to freeing the prisoners of the bandit chief.

The nearby context for all three Gospels (although it's more specifically obvious in GosMatt and GosLuke), is about Jesus being called the servant of Satan for releasing people from bonds or imprisonment. In retort to that accusation, Jesus says such people shall not be set free from their bonds or imprisonment neither in this age nor the age to come.

It could be replied that Jesus is talking about the punishment upon such people being their imprisonment by God instead of by the Plunder-possessor -- and I agree that's true -- and so naturally no one can rescue them from God's imprisonment, whereas people can be rescued by God from imprisonment by the Plunder-possessor -- which I also agree is all true -- and that God has no intentions of setting them free, thus they can never be set free. But this means they are imprisoned by God in their sins and so God either fails or chooses not to save them from their sins! The position comes back around to being that criticized by Jesus here! -- to take the position that God would not or could not save someone from his sin, earns this denunciation! Besides which, there are many scriptures speaking

of God releasing prisoners and reconciling with them, whom He Himself has imprisoned for their sins.

Matthew's account, being the fullest, makes this point even stronger by saying that "this wicked generation" who seeks a sign that, in effect, God can and does save sinners whose later state is worse than their former and will punish those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit by insisting only Satan saves the worst sinners, not God, shall themselves be put into the position of the man whose later state was worse than his former: "And the last state of that person is becoming worse than the first. Thus will it be to this wicked generation also!"

At best they were using Jesus' second salvation of that man as evidence that His healing, being imperfect, must come from Satan not from God -- although Jesus' denunciations indicate it wasn't the need to heal again which was the problem but the idea that God would keep on trying to save the sinner until He gets it done. Consequently, in a very typical judgment saying of Jesus (and of God in the OT), they shall have done to them what they wanted to hopelessly condemn in others.

But if we insist their imprisonment is hopeless because God is the one imprisoning them, we put ourselves in their place in turn!

Relatedly, "If I in the Spirit of God am casting out the demons, consequently the kingdom of the God {ephthasen eph humas} overruns you!" (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20) The primary verb there

involves moving ahead or moving beyond; and combined with a prepositional phrase "upon / over you", when applied against enemies, tends to involve punitive authoritative action: the metaphorical idea would be of a king running down his opponents on the field of battle. Thus talking of the same kind of people in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets: "They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all people, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to overrun them!" Why? Because they are not pleasing to God and are hostile to all men. How? In insisting that those outside should not be saved by God!

Satan doesn't keep at saving people from sin even when they relapse. Satan hinders people from being saved from their sins at all. That has a parallel at 1 Thess 2, too, verse 18, "For we wanted to come to you [in Gentile lands for the Gentile mission], I Paul more than once, yet Satan hindered us," like the false Jewish teachers, hindering evangelization of the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

(1 Thess 2:16 also says the wrath, of God implicitly (and so added in a few texts), overruns them {eis telos} into completion. What that completion is, could be strongly connected to how the term is used in universalistic evidential texts elsewhere, although nothing in the immediate context points that way.)

6.) If the final clause of Mark 3:29 somehow doesn't mean (especially in context) that the idea of hopelessly final sin is what Jesus is judging against presently, but rather that the persons themselves who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (whatever that means) are guilty of an eonian sin, or bound for an eonian sin-effect; then the grammar at least indicates that those who do so are presently this moment (when they do it) under judgment (like His Pharisee opponents at that moment, who are insulting His reputation before men by claiming that salvation of those they deem unsavable is the work of Satan not of God). This would also fit Jesus' double-emphasis reported by Matthew in the same scene: shall-not-be-forgiven, not only in the eon to come, but also in this eon. The sin is already active now. But even most non-universalists in Christian history have acknowledged that those currently guilty of this sin can be forgiven if they repent; otherwise they have trouble accounting for the example of Saint Simon Peter, chief of apostles, who rebelled so hard that he called curses against Himself in order to deny Christ the night before the crucifixion, and who at another time (in denial of the coming crucifixion) was denounced by the name of Satan by Jesus Himself! Or else, if somehow those didn't count as sins against the Holy Spirit but "only" as blasphemies and sins against the Son of Man, it becomes increasingly difficult to figure out what would count as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit -- not without schisming between the Persons of God (as if the Spirit could be blasphemed against apart from blasphemy against the Son), or schisming the two natures of Christ

(as if someone could sin against Christ's humanity and not against the divinity of Christ). This was most likely why in late texts (much too late to be counted as evidence in favor of an original reading) some Church authorities interpretatively changed the reading here at Mark to say that the one sinning against the Holy Spirit "is in danger of" eonian sin.

(This cannot be the original text, based on the evidence of the manuscripts, so I cannot use this variation as a mitigating option. But notice that the attempt itself would be another way of "fixing" the strange grammar where the sin of-eonian is itself what is being bound for judgment, or is itself what is guilty, in contrast to the sinner against the Holy Spirit: {alla}, but, the sinner against the Holy Spirit etc.)

But if a person can be freed from the sin against the Holy Spirit, and its eonian sin-effect, despite being guilty of it now, and despite the sin not being forgiven in this eon (per GosMatt's account), there is nothing in the saying or its context which locks the sinner from repenting and being forgiven in the age to come either.

7.) Relatedly, the term for forgiveness (here in Mark, and in the Synoptic parallels) is {aphesis}, remitting the sin, sending the sin away from the person, freeing the person from the sin, not merely passing by the past sin {paresis}. No sin can be sent away from the person if the person insists on holding to it. But if someone stops holding to their sins, and

cooperates with the Holy Spirit, God will send their sin away. Whether God fails, or never even tries, to lead someone to stop holding to their sin, is a whole other question. But people (like the Pharisee opponents in this scene) who deny God can or does send away sins for someone, are at least acting against the principle that God can or does send away their own sin, too.

Beyond all this, I will add that no Calvinist anywhere at any time should be particularly comfortable appealing to this incident as evidence in favor of hopeless punishment, because Calvinist soteriology either reduces the warning to nonsense, or the warning voids Calvinistic soteriology. Who is this warning supposed to apply to? It cannot apply to the Calvinistic elect, not and mean a warning about hopeless punishment which on the terms of the warning (especially in GosMatt) may still be avoided. On the other hand, what is the point of warning the non-elect about some kind of special sin which is unforgiveable? -- on Calvinistic notions of the non-elect, God not only never intended to forgive any of their sins at all, but never even intended to give them the ability to not sin, much less to repent of sin! Every sin is a hopelessly unforgiveable sin to the Calvinistic non-elect in several ways; no sin is hopelessly unforgiveable to the Calvinistic elect. This is a major criticism by Arminians vs Calvinists (and their Catholic analogues either way). It is at least a major problem, not to be lightly dismissed. \*\*\* [a version of same problem for Arms?]

**Matt 13;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism): Three parables from this chapter are often appealed to as evidence for hopeless punishment, whether that God has no intention of saving some sinners from sin (Calvinistic), or that God is incompetent to save all sinners from sin (Arminianistic).

Any interpretation should keep in mind, however, that (as GosMatt 12, the immediately preceding chapter, makes clearer than the other Synoptics), Jesus has just recently shifted over to parables the afternoon after the Pharisees of Capernaum had charged Him with serving and healing by the power of the devil, when He had healed a demonized man a second time (as Matthew also somewhat clarifies) whose latter state was worse than his former. The Pharisees are condemned by Jesus for being willing to contradict their own principles in order to put limits on God's intentions or capabilities in saving people from sin; so we afterward ought to be loath to interpret Jesus' parables (and to interpret His interpretation of His parables!) with limits on His salvation of people from sin.

In regard to the parable with good soil vs. barren, thorny, and rocky soils: the apostles and disciples themselves misunderstood the parable so as to need explanation, but Jesus in explaining it to them said "Whenever anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it", like the apostles, then they are like the ones on whom the seed is sown by the road! Moreover, all the apostles and disciples ended up having no firm



root and fell away immediately (though to various degrees) when persecution arose -- and this was [u]after[/u] having had the parable explained to them! So they were ones on whom the seed was sown in rocky places. Again, Peter routinely had problems realizing he was supposed to be evangelizing Gentiles and not only Jews, and wasn't called to make converts to "Judaism" per se. St. Paul consequently had some sharp things to say about him being afraid of the opinion of others! -- and that all happened well into the post-resurrection ministry! Peter (even if not the others somehow) counts as one on whom the seed was sown among the thorns! Considering that no one regards God as having failed to save the apostles from sin, much less as not intending to save them from sin in the first place, and considering that the apostles themselves exemplified all three poor soils, the soils should not be regarded as a hopeless fate and/or punishment.

In regard to the parable of the wheat and the tares: the "sons of the kingdom" regarded as the "wheat" by Jesus in His explanation, are also (by the exact same phrase) warned by Jesus back in Matt 8:12 that they would be wailing and gnashing their teeth over having been thrown outside and seeing people they weren't expecting to be saved entering into the kingdom to dine with the patriarchs at the table of the Lord! So at the very least there aren't two completely separate people of elect and non-elect in this parable: the sons of the kingdom may be sons of the evil one (apparently by being sure God will not save various people!) and punished thereby. (To which

could be added that the parable has nothing at all to say about conversion, as well as the landowner being surprised and impotent to do anything about the enemy sowing the tares, so Calvs and Arms must both acknowledge that the details shouldn't be held to rigorously even in a "spiritual" sense.)

Relatedly, who are the wheat, whom the tares resemble until the end of the age when their rotten poisonousness shows forth? Jesus in explaining the parable quotes Daniel 12:3 in reference to them shining forth (like the sun in GosMatt, like the blue sky and the stars in Daniel into the eons of the eons): they are the instructors, or those who have insight, and those who lead the many to righteousness, who having died will be raised to eonian life. Those who are raised from death to eonian contempt or abhorrence would be those who, by contrast, are not concerned with leading the many to righteousness. What do the righteous understand? The angel of God explains to Daniel shortly afterward (almost the end of the final prophecy given to Daniel): "Many will be purged, made white (or purified) and refined (i.e. in a furnace); but the unjust will act unjustly and none of the unjust will understand but the instructors (or those who have insight) will understand."

In regard to the parable about the good fish and the bad fish: Jesus reverses the actual imagery somewhat, with the explanation being that the bad fish are thrown in the fire -- where, per Matt 8:12, the sons of the kingdom will also be thrown

if they don't cooperate with God bringing in people whom the sons aren't expecting to be brought in!) If the lake == hades/Gehenna, which would be typical Jewish poetic imagery, that means the good fish as being saved out of the spirit prison but others thrown back in. That would run rather counter to the notion that the good fish don't go to spirit prison in the first place, and tends to suggest salvation of penitent post-mortem spirits. Which could work with Calvinism, too, so long as the Calvinist allows post-mortem salvation of the elect. But the details of the parable subtly undermine any notion of two absolutely separate people in the Calvinistic sense required. Unless Calvinists are saying that God only saves people who are already good enough to be saved to begin with (which Calvs strongly argue against vs. the implications of Arm soteriology).

The most that can be said for sure of the parable is that it teaches punishment of the wicked eventually in fire and with weeping and gnashing of teeth (which "sons of the kingdom" may also be punished with per Matt 8!), which is a belief Arms and (purgatorial) Kath's share with Calvs. What it means for them to be so punished has to be established elsewhere.

But, per GosMatt's preceding account of the sin against the Holy Spirit, the meaning mustn't involve denying that God is able and willing to save those whose latter states are worse than their former. And per Jesus' reference to Daniel 12, the furnace into which the fish are thrown (13:49-50) and the tares (13:42), the same

furnace into which even sons of the kingdom may be thrown who are not expecting various people to be saved into the kingdom (Matt 8:12), is for refining the many clean, purifying them white, polished to brightness. But the unjust will not understand this, even to the end of the age, although the instructors will know.

Matt 13:31-32; (punishment not hopeless) (scope of salvation): in the brief parable of the mustard seed, Christ quotes somewhere in the OT about the tree being a salvation shelter. What are the references? Dan 4:12, Neb's punitive remediation for his pride and restoration; Ezek 17:23, 31:6; Psalm 104:12. Check these for comparison.

**Matt 18:12-14;** (persistence and scope of salvation): the parable of the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep, although with the detail of "one of these little ones". Occurs in the same scene and context as Mark 9:49-50.

**Matt 18:21-35;** (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation) (warning against non-universalism): Peter, after the lesson concerning the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep and the explanation of Gehenna's purpose (from Mark 9:49-50), returns to Christ afterward and wants to know if there are limits to forgiveness for repentance. This may be regarded as the typical Arminian question (instead of the typical Calvinist question of "Who is my neighbor?" when looking for limits about whom they can expect even God to love as themselves, with saving love.)

Christ warns him that those who look for such limits will be put into the same torment they insist upon for others, and will not come out until they pay the final cent they owe (i.e. until they are willing to forgive others). Matt 5 also connects the payment of the final cent to being punished in Gehenna, and just like here (even more explicitly) what is owed by the one being punished is forgiveness and mercy.

Some non-universalists insist that God is not and cannot be the Father of those He punishes in Gehenna, and may cite this parable as evidence that Jesus' father, not the father of the apostles like Simon Peter whom Jesus is warning, shall be doing to them as the king did to the unforgiving servant if they are not forgiving their brother from their heart. But not long afterward in that same Great Sermon which Matthew starts reporting in GosMatt 5, Jesus says, "If you will not pardon people for their offenses, neither will your Father in the heavens be pardoning you for yours." Jesus makes it fairly clear that not to be pardoned means being put into Gehenna (as any non-universalist generally agrees, citing the topical connections in Matt 18 for example!) So it is not only "My Father", the Father of Jesus, Who does this to the unmerciful, but also "your Father" the Father of the unmerciful. Thus Jesus says in the Great Sermon, "Become merciful, as your Father in the heavens is merciful," in connection to loving one's own enemies with self-sacrificial love.

**Matt 22:1-14;** (counter-evidence against universalism): Jesus is reported as telling this

parable on two occasions, the other being during a banquet at Luke 14:16-24 (back much earlier in His ministry when He was still being invited to supper by Pharisees). The ramp-up of violence reported in Matthew's version fits the setting when Jesus gives it, as a final set of increasingly exasperated warnings to Jesus' Pharisee (and probably also Sadducee) opponents. (It should be remembered that Jesus has praise for at least one scribe of the Pharisee party on that day, Mark 12:28-34 and parallels.)

While some Christian ultra-universalists, who don't believe in any divine punishment, try to interpret this king as being Herod or some other unjust tyrant, I (and most other purgatorial universalists) agree this far with the gist of the traditional interpretation: the king is God, and He's punishing various rebels. (Some Christian ultra-universalists would agree with that, too, but for various reasons would argue that the threat is a matter of principle, not a prophetic warning of what God will actually do. Or that it's a prophetic warning of what God will actually do, but God has already fully done it with the fall of Jerusalem.)

One type of rebel (found in each parable) is represented by the people who give insultingly lame excuses not to come to the wedding feast. In Luke's version there is no violence done by either the king or the rebels; in the version reported by Matthew, the violence starts with the rebel wealthy servants of the king, some of whom are not satisfied to only give insultingly lame excuses (calculated to be polite indications of

rebellion and of no confidence in the reign of the King, by the cultural standards of the time).

The other type of rebel, found only here in GosMatt, is the one who agrees to come to the feast but tries to get in on his own terms. While the parable doesn't explicitly say so, culturally speaking the king would have provided at least a sash for his poorer guests to wear so that they would not be ashamed. This man, having accepted the offer to come to the feast, has bluntly refused to wear the sash. The king is entirely correct to throw this insulting ingrate (whom the King still calls "friend") into the outer darkness.

In short, the king is acting honorably, and those who are being punished have acted very dishonorably, even criminally or murderously.

At the same time, the parable (in one or both forms) features details that don't synch well with Calvinistic or Arminianistic soteriologies. Or rather, both groups appeal to certain details in their favor. So why not appeal to both sets?

The main Calv detail is that some of the doers of good and evil (Matt 22:10) who don't start out servants of the king, are compelled by the king (Luke 14:23) to attend the feast, not simply invited. They don't earn their way in by any ethical merit, and they don't have to convince the king to keep inviting them in until they arrive. In the GosLuke version, the king keeps on (practically) dragging them into the wedding feast until His banquet hall is crammed full!

The main Arm detail is that the king's offer to His chief servants is, by all story details, sincere. He's surprised they didn't come, and annoyed at their grave (even murderous) disrespect of His offer. He doesn't choose in advance not to even seriously invite them, nor is their invitation incidental. Except for what happens to them they would have fit the Calv notion of the elect: they have already been called to be servants of the king (or they wouldn't be in their current position) and they're directly and intentionally called again to attend the wedding feast. In fact, they're called TWICE: once to let them know the wedding feast is on the way (so they have plenty of time to prepare), and once to let them know the specific time they ought to arrive. This social protocol is more evident in GosLuke's version. In GosMatt's version the repeated invitation isn't about properly and politely alerting them to be ready and to come, but about persisting to some degree at bringing them in, with the persistence met by murderous rebellion rather than only further insults.

The moral of the story at the end of GosMatt's version, "For many are called but few are chosen", whatever it may mean, doesn't fit the parable on standard interpretations. The king did very seriously call very many (actually everyone in the story population); by Calv standards they ought to therefore have been chosen for salvation from sin, too, at which God should have been able to competently succeed. And the group actually at the wedding feast (in either version) clearly



outnumbers those outside the feast. The numerical contrast of the moral doesn't fit the details of the parable (either in GosLuke or GosMatt) at all, if the moral is applied to few being chosen for salvation. But if Jesus is making an unexpected reversal of a standard saying, then the moral would fit the details of either parable: many are called for the feast and few are chosen for punishment. (Compare with comments on Luke 13:22-30, where Jesus answers the man who is asking whether only a few are being saved, that he himself is going to be unpleasantly surprised by how many from all corners of the compass enter the kingdom while he himself is thrown outside with the weeping and gnashing of teeth! Strive to enter by the narrow door indeed, but many more people are coming in through the narrow door after all than this man was apparently expecting! -- perhaps because Salvation and Life is a shepherd Who goes out after the 100th sheep and the 10th coin, not only a Way and a Door sitting statically somewhere.)

It might be replied that the wedding feast represents membership in the Church, not final heaven per se; and that would solve a number of difficulties in the parables. But the wedding feast (so far as this parable goes in either version) doesn't represent final salvation in heaven, neither does it represent final perdition (whether eternal conscious torment or annihilation -- nothing in either parable directly points to annihilation anyway, and certainly not if the story hasn't reached the general resurrection of the good and evil yet.)

Which means neither parable can be appealed to as testimony against universal salvation.

On the contrary, if someone holds the doctrine that God will competently persist at saving whomever He intends to save from sin, until He gets it done, thus also bringing them permanently into the Church sooner or later, then the GosMatt version of this parable must testify at least to post-mortem salvation! -- since the rebel noblemen are slain yet were seriously invited in. (Possibly also the rebel peasant ingrate, depending on whether the "outer darkness / weeping / teeth-gnashing" ever or always refers to punitive death. I'm inclined to think so, but I acknowledge it might refer to a non-fatal divine punishment, too.)

Obviously, an Arminian, who doesn't hold to the doctrine of original divine perseverance in salvation, wouldn't arrive at such a conclusion; and since neither version of the parable involves an explicit notion of persistence to success (either generally or for every group invited in), I don't try to argue for universalism from this parable. A Calvinist, on the other hand, could argue that strictly speaking neither parable directly testifies to the scope of invitation being total -- there might have been nobles or 'peasants' that the king happened never to invite, and we're just not told about them because the parable isn't about them in the first place. The Arminian might reply to this, that the parable does involve a serious invitation to everyone it talks about, and neither does the parable mention explicit exclusions to the

invitation; but the Calvinist could counter-riposte that such exclusion is inferred from other testimony. Whether that's validly true or not would be a whole other question: for purposes of this parable, my critique of a Calvinist interpretation (as an Arminianist would also probably critique) hinges on what happens to the people who are positively invited, which is everyone Jesus happens to mention in each version of the parable. The king ought to be persisting in bringing the rebel nobles or the rebel pauper into His kingdom until He gets it done; and He shouldn't be seriously inviting them into the feast in the first place if He isn't going to persist at bringing them in.

Of course, if the story isn't over yet for the ones being punished, and if the doctrine of divine persistence is well-established elsewhere, then there is no problem for a Calvinistic interpretation -- there might have to be a minor adjustment to expect some post-mortem salvation of God's elect, and a Calvinist might have to suppose that the parable simply isn't talking about those whom God doesn't seriously evangelize (much as Calvs interpret the parable of the 100th sheep and the 10th coin). The main adjustment would be that the parable should be read as a warning that even God's elect may seriously rebel against Him and have to be seriously punished.

But then, neither can the parable on those terms be read over against an Arm or Kath interpretation. If the story isn't over for those who are punished, then it can't count as testifying in favor of hopeless punishment.

Then again, if the meaning of election isn't primarily about being elected to salvation from sin (although that, too), but about being elected for some purpose, then the moral (many called but few are chosen) doesn't have to be about punishment one way or another. For example, if election is about being chosen to be an evangelical witness to the world (as everyone on all sides of the question generally agrees about Israel), then bringing such an interpretation (exegetically established elsewhere) into the interpretation of the moral would result in a coherent criticism by Jesus of those who had been elected (the rich nobility and landowners, who by the king's authority have been given administrative advantages) to be the light of the world to those who are called (everyone, rich and poor alike). The warning, like practically all of Jesus' other warnings about eschatological punishment on the way, would be directed against lazy and/or uncharitable and/or rebellious servants of His: if the moral is proposed to critique against misbehavior by those relatively few whom God elects for special evangelical service (such as originally Israel and even the Pharisees), that would cleanly fit the gist of the parable's details.

At any rate Kath's (universalists) would notice that the people being punished look a lot like they were elected by God to be at the wedding feast, and would agree with Calvin that we should expect God to persist in saving those whom He elects for salvation; therefore we would conclude, with dovetailing evidence exegeted from

elsewhere, that the story for those being punished isn't over. And we would notice with the Arminians that, so far as the parable seems to indicate, everyone is seriously called to the feast. We wouldn't be able to get continual original persistence from this parable, but neither can the Calvinist; for this parable, taken only as itself, the Arms would have priority of direct exegesis (in my estimation).

There is one small but significant problem with an Arm interpretation: the fellow without the sash is thrown outside again. But this is only a problem if the wedding feast is regarded as final salvation. But if the feast is regarded as membership in the Church, then neither hardshell Arminians (who would say that anyone can lose their salvation short of heaven) nor softshell Arminians (who would say that he was in the Church without having seriously converted, so of course God would not be expected to persist in saving him yet) would have no problem at all.

(Or almost no problem for the Arminians, since the language does look like eschatological punishment, not merely exclusion from the church.)

On a final note, what if this parable (in either version but especially GosMatt's) refers to the coming fall of Jerusalem? Then either it has no relevance at all to the question of what basic type of soteriology is true (in some variation); or else the destruction of Jerusalem counts as a symbol for future judgment. The outer darkness / wailing / teeth-gnashing would not settle that

question in themselves, since full preterists (try to) argue that such language is only a poetic description of the fall of Jerusalem and nothing more. While I myself don't agree with that for various reasons (although I'm inclined to agree that the fall of Jerusalem is at least partly in Jesus' view for this incident on Jesus' final day in the Temple in GosMatt), that dispute is a whole other question than what these parables refer to if more than the fall of Jerusalem.

Matt 23:37-39; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation):

The second of Christ's two reported "O Jerusalem" lamentations, this one comes at the conclusion of the Greater Condemnations against the hypocrites of the Pharisee party, when Jesus leaves the Temple for the final time (probably Wednesday afternoon of that ultimate Passover week), aside from a brief return under arrest for formal conviction on Friday morning (reported only in GosLuke).

Aside from the shared point of the original lamentation, that Jesus wants to protect Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (probably in reference to a fire, thus probably in reference to the coming destruction by the Romans forty years later), Jesus now adds that He is leaving the Temple in a way that God's Presence previously left the Temple in ethical protest over its leaders (a subtle Most High Deity claim), and that Jerusalem in general shall not be seeing Him return to the Temple "until you

are saying, 'Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord,'" which is a reference to the coming of the visible Presence of YHWH at the time of judgment in the Day of YHWH (so another subtle Most High Deity claim, citing Psalm 118:26 -- Jesus had previously gotten in trouble with the Temple leaders earlier that week for accepting this Psalm sung in Hosanna to Himself, as reported at GosMatt 21:9.)

However, the same "you" who will then be singing to Jesus the Psalm of loyal praise to YHWH, includes at least the people who are generally and fatally rejecting Jesus at the moment; so also includes the people being specifically addressed for condemnation by Jesus, namely the rebel Pharisees. Jesus is prophesying that they shall eventually repent and come back to loyalty to Himself (again, a subtle claim to Most High Deity); but the implication is that this won't happen until the coming of the visible YHWH in power to judge and rule the world directly. Which would be post-mortem repentance and salvation, for people whom Christ has just greatly condemned with responsibility for all the righteous blood shed on the earth, and whom He has called "serpents", "brood of vipers", who (in a rhetorical question) shall not escape the criminal judgment {krima} of Gehenna. But their repentance will involve loyally accepting Christ as YHWH ADNY after all, the Presence of God.

**Matt 25:46;** (everlasting not everlasting) (punishment not hopeless) (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism):

The judgment of the sheep and the goats from GosMatt 25(usually listed among the parables), is one of the most famous and common texts throughout Christian history, for supporting some kind of final hopeless punishment, whether by proponents of some variety of eternal conscious torment, or by proponents of annihilation.

One line of universalist reply has been to interpret this and other such judgment prophecy/parables preteristically, as referring only to the coming fall of Jerusalem, which has already happened. Non-universalistic preterists would answer that this in no way necessarily implies that the results of the judgment are hopeful instead of hopeless! -- not unless preterism is combined with an argument to Christian universalism from a common type of penal substitutionary atonement, which has to be made separately prior to coming to this parable at all, in which case the question would be how to read the proper doctrines into this parable not from it. At best, trying to argue for hopeful punishment (or at least not hopeless) from this parable has to be attempted independently of the question of whether the parable refers only to something that has already long-since happened by our time.

As it happens I am not a preterist (although I recognize that some of Christ's prophecies were intended to be fulfilled by the fall of Jerusalem), so for me this is not an issue; I agree with most conservative Christians (although preterists can be theologically conservative,



too) that this judgment refers to something still to happen in our future, and/or as a general example of how Christ judges all souls at any time.

We should notice however that the annihilationist must either take this as referring to the lake of fire judgment after the final general resurrection (which I would primarily agree with), or else never refer to this parable as evidence in favor of annihilation, because otherwise the situation described here occurs (in one or more ways) before the general resurrection, meaning the unjust people are not in fact being annihilated as a result of this judgment. (Or the annihilationist must deny the resurrection of the wicked as well as the good, which I understand to be a rare position among annis.)

Anyway, for exegetical purposes, the question is: what do the narrative, thematic and grammatic details of the parable add up to, if we approach the data from a neutral standpoint without begging the question in favor of one or another category?

Christ gathers all the nations together when He comes with His angels to sit on His glorious throne, and separates them from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. That means Christ is acting as the shepherd of the goats as well as of the sheep. The goats belong to Him just like the sheep do, and are part of His flock.

Moreover, the term usually translated sheep, "probaton", doesn't exclusively mean sheep. It's a general term for any small herd animal including goats. It's also almost always the term used in the New Testament where the English translates as "sheep". This means in most cases we could just as easily be talking about the Good Goatherd herding His goats, and going out after the 100th goat to save it! (There is an ancient painting of Christ saving the 100th goat, for example.) Sheep are admittedly more numerous than goats, usually, whether altogether or in distinct flocks, but that doesn't mean the term exclusively means sheep.

On the other hand, the word translated goat here, "eriphos", does mean goat. But it very specifically means BABY GOAT! (The same term is used in the parable of the prodigal son when the older son complains that his father never gave him and his friends a baby goat to party with.)

If Matthew, or whoever translated Matthew's Gospel into Greek, or even Jesus originally (in Aramaic or Greek), went to the trouble of calling them baby goats... why haven't translators usually followed suit?! As we shall see, those baby goats do make an important difference as baby goats!

Meanwhile, if the goats are specifically baby goats, then the "probatons" by contrast are probably mature sheep, or maybe the mature herd in general: either way the difference must be the contrast in spiritual maturity. But is there any evidence in the parable itself that their

maturity is being contrasted to the im-maturity of the baby goats?

Christ sends the sheep (let us call them for now) into "eonian life", with the praise that they have served Him very well. This catches the sheep entirely by surprise: when did they ever serve Christ??? Any Christian (especially one familiar with this judgment parable) ought to know the answer already, and certainly ought to be expecting to have been serving Christ, which indicates that these people are not formally Christian! But Christ counts them as His servants anyway. Why? Because when these people (the "righteous" or "just" ones) were feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty and inviting strangers in, and clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those imprisoned -- to the extent they did this "to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

Who are these brothers of Christ He is pointing to? (The grammar in Greek is emphatic that Christ is indicating someone there on the scene.) Some people have supposed it was the righteous angels in disguise, or other sheep, since the only other characters in the scene are the baby goats, who are literally the least of Christ's flock.

The baby goats, on the other hand (literally!), are sent by Christ into "eonian kolasis" (whatever we decide from the context that involves). This surprises the baby goats: they thought they had been serving Christ! When did they ever refuse to give charity to Christ??

When they refused to feed, clothe, visit in prison etc., "even the least of these", to that extent they did not do it to Christ.

The story warns ostensible followers of Christ that they may be revealed to be the least of Christ's flock. And what constitutes this revelation? The baby goats did not act to bring the least of Christ's flock (whether really so or in the perception of the baby goats) out of their misery: the way Christ acts. The sheep, or the mature flock, were following Christ; the baby goats were not.

The story is a reversal of expectation, but it's also set up to test the audience. And the test is this: how are we to regard the baby goats, the least of Christ's flock?!

Are we to deny the baby goats shepherded by Christ are of Christ's flock at all? If they are hungry, thirsty, strangers outside, sick and imprisoned, are we to ignore them? Is that what the mature flock does?! Should we expect the good sheep (and the Good Shepherd!) to start behaving like the baby goats now?! Or should we expect them to continue behaving like good sheep and the Good Shepherd?

Because we know from a bunch of other judgment details what's going to happen to those "baby goats" (whether analogically or literally). They're going to be hungry now, and thirsty, and outside the gates of the New Jerusalem, and their clothes will be dirty, and they'll be imprisoned in the lake of fire (along with the rebel angels,

the "eonian fire prepared for the devil and his angels" as Matt 25:41 puts it), and be sick at least in mind (fondling their sins impenitently).

That's the scene set in the final chapter of the Revelation to John.

So: what are the Son and the Spirit, and the Bride (the mature flock), doing there? Are they treating those "baby goats" the way the "sheep" in this judgment would? -- are they going out to exhort those strangers outside the New Jerusalem to slake their thirst in the freely given water of life flowing out of the never-closed gates of the city, and to wash their robes, so that they might obtain permission to come inside the city and eat the fruit of the log (i.e. the cross) of life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations?

Or, is the mature flock now acting like baby goats to the baby goats of Christ, who have themselves been condemned to "eonian kolasis" for acting like baby goats to the baby goats of Christ?!

Even if I didn't have the end of RevJohn, I would still know what to expect, from the narrative and thematic logic of this judgment parable.

I would expect the sheep, and the Shepherd, to keep on acting toward the baby goats like good sheep and the Good Shepherd -- on pain of being found, myself, to only be a baby goat.

Compare with preceding parable, GosMatt's version of the parable of the talents/minas, where the servant of God who tries to flatter God by comparing Him with a rebel-brigand chief (a standard flattery trope in the Near Middle East even today) gets thrown outside with the unbelievers. An interpretation of the sheep and goats that involves the Good Shepherd coming to hopelessly destroy part of His flock, puts Christ (per John 10:10) in the place of the rebel/thief who comes to steal, sacrifice and destroy part of the flock! Moreover, another part of the lazy servant's excuse for not engaging in the work his master expected him to do, which by comparison with the sheep/goat judgment must be saving souls who have been punished by God, was that he thought God acted like a bandit and so had that kind of character toward His own possessions!

(While I am passing nearby, the parable of the ten virgins, which starts chapter 25, involves a situation where the foolish servants of the bridegroom would not be left outside forever, only overnight: they would be picked up the next morning, embarrassed about having been left outside, and wiser for the experience.)

Compare further with Ezekiel 34 where YHWH sends His servant the Son of David to judge between the rams and the he-goats, between the fat sheep and the lean: the fat sheep and the rams are fed with judgment compared to the lean sheep and goats, but the false shepherds were killing the fat sheep and not feeding the hungry, not bringing back the scattered, not binding up those who were broken, not seeking the lost, not healing the

diseased. Consequently the Son of David will be the judge of the sheep and the goats instead, and will chastise those who misbehave in order to bring them to loyal behavior, making a new covenant of peace with all His rebel sheep thereby. (There is no point making a new covenant of peace except with former rebels; which is certainly an occasional theme in the OT prophets!) If the fat sheep and rams are hopefully fed with judgment (even to destruction!) in Ezekiel compared to the pitiful goats, that lends very strong evidence that the {kolasis} the baby goats are being sent into, is intended to be hopeful not hopeless, with a goal of bringing them to be mature goats instead: the most reliable and even actively helpful of an earthly shepherd's flock, once they've been trained out of their immature obstinacy.

Yet again, once the connection of this judgment parable to Ezekiel 34 is noticed, another nearby judgment parable warning synchs up topically: for Jesus starts this sequence, not with the parable of the foolish virgins at (what we now call) 25:1, but with the parable of the abusive chief servant, who says in his heart, "My Lord is delaying" and begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eating and drinking with the drunken! When the lord of that slave, whom he (or of course He) has placed over His household to give them nourishment in season, returns on a day and hour which the wicked administrator does not know and even is hoping won't be soon, the Lord shall be cutting him apart and appointing him a place with the hypocrites where the lamentation shall be and the gnashing of the teeth!

So in fact at least three out of the four warning parables here are aimed, not only at misbehaving Christians (which the ten foolish virgins also count among), but at misbehaving Christians appointed by Christ as leaders! -- and then the connection with the devil and his rebel angels, and the eonian fire prepared for them (25:41), becomes clearer, seeing as how originally they were not only created good but rebelled from being in a high authority assigned to them by God.

This leads to the question of whether the term "eonian kolasis" refers to an inherently hopeless punishment, since if the term allows any leeway for hopeful punishment then the context of the parable of the sheep and the goats anyway would determine the meaning (and the context definitely points toward a hopeful punishment and even a warning against interpreting the punishment of the baby goats as hopeless!)

Everyone agrees that "kolasis" is a term for punishment; and it's borrowed from an agricultural term for cleaning sick branches from a vine. There is also evidence in the Greco-Roman culture outside the New Testament that "kolasis" was often used for remedial punishment; but the author of GosMatt translating Jesus into Greek (or Jesus if for some reason He was speaking Greek to His disciples in this incident) might have used the term for some other meaning: many foreign words ported into Greek and Hebrew by the scriptural authors are used in significantly different fashions than the surrounding culture



did, especially when talking about theology. (The common Greek term for hopeless punishment, "timoria", is actually used for hopeful punishment elsewhere in the New Testament, to give an especially pertinent example!)

What people disagree on, is whether (analogically speaking) the sick branches are thrown hopelessly into a fire (as Jesus' imagery at the beginning of His final discourse in GosJohn might mean -- although that might be a rather different meaning if the purpose of the unquenchable fire, even in Gehenna, is to salt our hearts so that we will be at peace with one another!); or whether the sick branches can be grafted into the vine of Israel once they are healed (even if they have been cut off previously), as Saint Paul definitely uses the metaphor in Romans 11. Since the concept of the term can, by reference to Romans 11, refer to hopeful punishment, this leaves the question open for context to settle here at Matt 25.

1 John 4:18 may also count as evidence that the term cannot intrinsically refer to hopeless punishment, though it might still do so in a particular application: "Fear is not in love, but perfect love is casting out the fear, for the fear has kolasis and the one who is fearing is not perfected in the love." But the whole point is that "the one who is fearing is not perfected in the love". That doesn't mean perfect love is NOT casting out fear, which the same verse says it does. Nor does the fact that perfect love is casting out fear mean fear has no kolasis purpose, which the verse also says. Rather, the gist of the verse is that God acts to bring about

perfect love which casts out fear, thus also to cast out kolasis -- but not short of perfecting the love of the object God is acting on. So far as the testimony goes, it tends toward the ending of kolasis as God perfects love in the person.

A verb form of the term, {kolazô}, is also used in Acts 4:21 to describe punishment being considered by the Sanhedrin for the apostles. This could parallel synagogue punishment (such as the forty lashes minus one) intended as disciplinary and remedial instruction.

That leaves over 2 Peter 2:9, where the unrighteous are kept under punishing (the verb form again) for the day of judgment.

So the term doesn't refer to hopeless punishment at least once (in 1 John), maybe twice (including Acts 4); and the concept (as will be seen later in a fuller discussion of Rom 11) definitely can involve hopeful instead of hopeless punishment.

Uniform testimony in favor of hopeless punishment elsewhere wouldn't necessarily invalidate the contextual argument here, but the difference would have to be noted, and the evidence would at least suggest rechecking the contextual argument again. But since the term can (at least plausibly) refer to hopeful punishment elsewhere, the term itself is no bar at all to a contextual conclusion that it ought to be interpreted that way here; and the contextual arguments suggests the term ought to be regarded as hopeful (when the kolasis is coming from God anyway) even in 2 Peter 2:9, although that and its parallels in

Jude and 1 Peter should also be looked into on their own merits.

In regard to the adjective "eonian", any student of New Testament (and Old Testament) Greek ought to either know or quickly discover that the authors could use this term to refer to events or objects that are not actually eternal, but which have a beginning and/or an ending. Indeed, strictly speaking, the punishment here cannot be literally eternal, as it does at least have a beginning! Whereas, on the other hand, the "eonian life" from God given to the faithful does not in itself have a beginning, even though at some point the faithful begin to receive it.

To this observation, a proponent of hopeless punishment could reasonably apply the classical objection (going back at least as far as Augustine), that in comparing the life to the punishment the adjectives ought to be considered equally parallel: if eonian means never-ending for the life, then how could eonian not mean (by virtue of the comparison) never-ending for the punishment? Or vice versa, if eonian does not mean never-ending for the punishment, how could it hope to mean never-ending for the life?! So from this direction our hope for the life must be in direct proportion to the hopelessness of the punishment; if the hopelessness is threatened the hope is threatened.

But non-universalists themselves, specifically in order to argue against a universalist conclusion from other scriptures, are absolutely committed to exegeting identical terms in important close

topical context, and even in direct comparison, as meaning substantially different things.

One famous example is Romans 5, where direct immediate parallel comparisons of "all" are required not in fact to both mean "all" (and similar comparisons of "many" are required not in fact to both mean whatever "many" means). It is entirely clear enough, that if "many" by contextual comparison to "all" means "all" each time "many" is used there, and if "all" means "all" each time "all" is used there, then Paul would be teaching universal salvation from sin by Christ. Typically, non-universalists appeal to other indirectly related testimony to try to argue against this, rather than to direct context in Romans 5; which I will allow could be proper to do, perhaps. My point here is not to argue Romans 5 (that's a whole other debate) but to give an example where non-universalists as such must be committed (whatever their reasons may be) to reading identical terms very differently in closely connected context on the topic of salvation.

Similarly, in order to avoid a universal salvation conclusion from exegeting Colossians 1, non-universalists must either deny that the same words used in affirming the utter divine supremacy of Christ over creation do not have the same meaning when talking immediately afterward about the scope (and potency) of God's action to reconcile all things to Himself through the blood of the cross; or they must deny that the same word for "reconcile" when used immediately afterward to speak of the salvation of enemies of

God from sin (namely Paul's readers in the Colossians congregation) does not mean the salvation of enemies of God from sin when speaking of the scope of reconciliation of all things to God by God through the blood of the cross. My point here, again, is not to argue Colossians 1 (that's a whole other debate) but to give another example where non-universalists, as such, must be committed (whatever their reasons may be) to reading identical terms very differently in closely connected context on the topic of salvation.

It may be replied that "all" and "many" are common general terms -- although I don't know how far that reply would stretch to include the terms in Colossians 1! But those terms aren't the important word "eonian". Maybe it's theoretically possible for "eonian" to mean two superficially similar but also importantly different things in close context, but are there any Biblical examples of such usage?

In fact there are a few such times!

In the final blessing address of his epistle to the Romans, Paul writes in verse 25 of that 16th chapter that a secret hushed in times eonian has now been revealed which it is our responsibility as Christians to proclaim. Now, those times did not continue but are in the process of ending, and so in a sense have already ended, and will certainly end (one way or another) when Christ Jesus is finally heralded to all creation. Nor did those times stretch without beginning into the past. So those times had a beginning, and are

having an end, and will someday be completely ended, and yet are described as "eonian".

But in the very same sentence, only a few words later, Paul talks about this secret of eonian times having been manifested both now and through prophetic scriptures thanks to the injunction of the eonian God! The same word absolutely cannot mean only never-ending or only ending in both cases. It has to be talking about something that never ends in one case (God) and something that (sooner and later) definitely ends (the times of the secret).

But it may be replied again that Paul does not here directly compare the eonian God with the times eonian. No, that's true. But the prophet Habakkuk makes such a comparison!

Habakkuk 3:6, "He (speaking of YHWH in the Day of the Lord to come) stood and measured the earth; He beheld and drove asunder (or startled) the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, the eonian hills collapsed. His ways are eonian!"

Here we have an example of a primitive word, AHD, originally similar in meaning to another word used here in this verse, oLaHM. Both refer to the horizon, but AHD means the line of the horizon (or any similar line beyond which something still exists) and oLaHM refers to that which is beyond the horizon. Either way both words by metaphor are often employed to talk about the absolute everlasting greatness of God; but both words are also occasionally used for things which aren't

actually everlasting. This verse might have been expressly designed to contrast those two concepts! For not only are the AHD mountains shattered but the oLaHM hills collapse (using a verb which has a double-meaning of bowing down), when faced with the true oLaHM of God.

oLaHM is the same word usually translated "eonian" in Biblical Greek (although AHD sometimes could be, too.) And this is in fact how the Jews translated this verse for the Greek version of the scriptures, the Septuagint.

So this is a direct example of eonian (both in Greek and in its underlying Hebrew) meaning two similar but ultimately also very different things, not only in close proximity, and not only in close topical proximity, but in actual direct immediate comparison. In this case the context immediately clarifies the distinction; I argue that in the judgment of the sheep (or the mature flock) and the baby goats, the nearby context also clarifies a similar distinction. Both the life and the kolasis (or punishment) are from God, and both can go on for a long time, but the similarities end there. The eonian life goes on forever, by God's intention; but God intends an end to the eonian kolasis.

So, such a different double-usage of eonian in immediate context may not happen often. But it does happen to various degrees, including at least once in the closest possible comparison of things described by the term eonian.

(See also Titus 1:2 for a related example, where Paul has no problem using eonian to describe both the life he's expecting and also the promises God made before times eonian. Practically no English translator presents that as "before eternal times" or even "before everlasting times". But while the meaning is somewhat different between the two close usages of eonian, there isn't a contrast like in Romans 16: the eonian times aren't ending or have come to an end for the Titus sentence.)

Of course, if we go with my preferred interpretation, where "eonian" is used to describe things that come especially from God (yes, even God from God as Romans 16:26 may thereby be rendered! -- which no one affirming "very God of very God" will dare deny the propriety of!), then there is no problem at all: the life and the punishment are both equally and especially from God. But that usage is entirely neutral as to the question of whether the punishment is unending. It might or might not be. But then so much for using the term in itself as definite evidence that the punishment will be unending.

And, if the issue is pressed that this means eonian life might or might not end, well yes that's true based on God's intention: our lives are always derivative of God anyway. I have less than no problem trusting that God will continue to give His life to those who continue in fellowship with Him; just as I have less than no problem noting that unfallen angels also have



eonian life from God. Including Lucifer and his allies! -- before they fell!

So, unless we're talking about the actively self-living self-existent God Himself, having eonian life is not in itself a guarantee of its own continuation -- which maybe Lucifer was expecting! -- but rather God gives eonian life or withdraws it according to His love and justice. He grafts branches into the Vine and breaks branches off; and those He grafts in may be cut out, and those born by God's decree natural to the Vine may be broken off -- but those broken off by God may easily be grafted back in by God when-if-ever God so deems it proper to do so.

**Matt 26:24;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (better that he should not be born): this verse (which is identical to Mark 14:21 except GosMark doesn't include a verb for the sentence) is often appealed to as testimony against the salvation of Judas.

In order to understand it, first we must figure out who the pronouns in the verse refer to, which turns out to be somewhat difficult (even though I'm going to end up with the traditional interpretation for reasons I'll explain below).

kalon (en) aut(i)o ei ouk egennethe ho anthropos  
ekeinos

kalon = good

(en) = was (found in GosMatt's text, omitted from GosMark's)

aut(i)o = a prepositional third person pronoun, but in a weird case: "him" with a preposition implied. Most translations go with "for" as the equivalent English preposition, but to be blunt that's kind of a guess, as exemplified by Green who in his literal translation took the standard "for" but in his super-literal translation he didn't bother even trying to supply a preposition! -- but placed the implied "it" there instead.

ei = if

ouk = not

egennethe = was conceived (Note: not the term usually used for giving birth, although a failed birth turns out to be the contextual reference. But it doesn't really matter either way.)

ho anthropos = the person

ekeinos = this is an odd reflexive term in Greek; it's built from a word for "there" but is used for emphasis in regard to the noun it modifies (sometimes with its own direct article, though not this time). We would say in English "that there one"! Or "that selfsame one".

The final clause certainly reads then: "if not was conceived that there person" or "that selfsame person" or "that very same person".

The implication from the emphasis at the end is that the speaker is talking about a person he

just recently referenced. By context, this can only mean Jesus or Judas; and almost certainly means the person being talked about in the first clause.

So if the "him" in the first clause is Judas, the second clause's person is also (almost certainly) Judas. If the "him" in the first clause is Jesus, the second clause's person is (almost certainly) Jesus.

Now however we get to another related use of {ekeinos}: a tool for helping authors distinguish between men when talking about two of them (especially in relation to each other). Is there another nearby use of "that very man"? Yes there is, back in the previous sentence (both in GosMatt and GosMark; also GosLuke for what it is worth although GosLuke doesn't have either of the two clauses of the ending sentence.) "But woe to that-very man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed."

By grammatic implication, the two "that-very" men are the same man, namely the one who betrays the Son of Man. So was the Son of Man betraying the Son of Man?! Matt 26:25, "And Judas, who was betraying Him..." starts the next sentence. (Also the preceding context reads, "One of you will betray Me".)

This however opens back up the possibility that the "him" in the first clause of the final sentence does not refer to "that-very man", since the term is definitely used for another purpose. It could of course be used for both purposes; but

since "him" has already been used once in this statement and only for the Son of Man, then the parallels of usage would suggest that "him" refers to "Him" rather than to "that-very man".

In the final analysis the grammar could be used either way: "him" in verse 24c (and its Markan parallel) could still be Jesus or Judas, although Judas is definitely "that-very man" at the end of 24c (and GosMark's parallel).

Fortunately all this can be settled by cultural context much more easily -- and, in passing, also lends weight to an interpretation of what we ought to be expecting from Christ in regard to Judas: the saying elsewhere (such as in Job 10 or Jeremiah 20) is a call for pity for that man of whom it would have been better had he not been born. (For the purpose of the saying, it is irrelevant whether the term is "born" or "conceived"; Job and Jeremiah wished they had died in the womb after conception.) And that fits the term being used for "wail" or "woe" in all three Synoptics here: it means "lament" in pity.

That means the saying is in fact about Judas in both its clauses. But it isn't a curse of hopelessness for Judas: it's a cry for pity for Judas, expressing a wish that his situation would be mended. Jesus instructs His other disciples (and us too by extension) to be sorrowing in pity for Judas; to be hopefully loving him even in our grief for him.

Compare also with comments to John 15:1-7.

Mark 3:20-30; (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism): this is one of the accounts of the sin against the Holy Spirit (the other main account being at Matt 12). It leaves out some very important details that, taken altogether, indicate that to insist hopelessly against someone else's salvation from sin is to sin against the Holy Spirit (depending on the attitude of the insistence). But it includes something GosMatt lacks, namely Christ's more emphatic declaration at verse 28 that all sins whatever they are shall be forgiven men. (Matt 12:31-32 does have statements about forgiveness, too, including speaking a word against Christ, but the emphasis is even more strongly complete at Mark 3:28.) The underlying challenge then becomes whether verse 29 shall be interpreted by verse 28 (resulting in a promise of salvation even for those who blaspheme against the Spirit and so who sin for an eon); or whether verse 28 shall be interpreted by verse 29 (resulting in an insistence that some sinners are beyond the salvation of Christ -- over against Christ's whole warning to people insisting on this in Matt 12, that they are in danger of the sin against the Holy Spirit!) See comments on Matt 12 for more details.

Mark 4; see comments on Matt 13 generally.

Mark 4:24-25; (warning against unmercy): a version of this saying is often found elsewhere in the Synoptics connected to warnings against being unmerciful. Compare with the larger scale interpretation of Matt 13 which Mark 4 parallels.

Mark 4: 30-31; see comments on Matt 13:31-32.

Mark 9:49-50; (post-mortem salvation) (warning against non-universalism): here Christ explains the purpose of the unquenchable fire of Gehenna. Note that the possibly original extension, about every sacrifice being salted with salt, does not abrogate the point, since the sacrifice goes on to the fire anyway. If those were in fact Christ's original words, they were referring to a sacrifice of praise and restoration in the Temple, not to a sacrifice of sin outside the city; but either way the point would be that sin is put away by the fire of sacrifice in order to restore fellowship with God.

1.) The post-positive {gar} of verse 49 absolutely connects this verse topically to verse 48, so there should be no question what fire is being referenced: it's the everlasting fire of Gehenna.

1.1.) Incidentally, in Greek the purgatorial nature of the verse is even more striking, because the Greek word for fire there is {puri}. From which we directly derive the English word 'pure', 'purify', and other cognates. (Or rather, we derive this eventual meaning from how the Greek word is contextually used in Judeo-Christian scriptures.)

2.) The term {pas} (which is the first word of verse 49, before the post-positive {gar} which in English we would put first, "For") means all, and its being fronted here is probably an emphasis to

its meaning. Translations which go with "everyone" or even "everything" (which is typical even for nominally non-universalistic translations) are not out of bounds in doing so, especially when verse 50 is accounted for contextual purposes.

3.) {kalon} is fronted as the first word in verse 50 (or as the first word of the next sentence, keeping in mind that there was no versification scheme in the original text). This is a Greek word with connotations stronger than our English word 'good'; 'ideal' or 'best' would be a better translation.

4.) There is no verb in the sentence {kalon to halas}, which tends to emphasize the absolute declaration of the statement: this salting with the unquenchable fire of Gehenna (what Matthew reports Jesus, in the same scene, calling "the fire the eonian") is the best of things.

5.) {to halas} connects back emphatically to the salting at the end of the previous sentence (where everyone or everything is being salted with fire), by use of the direct article: the salt, or this salt. (Though admittedly there could have been an even stronger way to say "this salt".)

6.) A generic conjunction {de} topically connects the next sentence to the strong statement about this salt being ideal or the best. (Though admittedly stronger words could have been used there.)

7.) {ean}, which introduces the hypothetical English "if" structure, is fronted for emphasis even before the conjunctive {de}.

8.) If this salt ({to halas} again) becomes unsalty ({analon}), then with what will you season it? It is worthless, and fit only to be trampled underfoot (as Jesus says elsewhere about unsalty salt). Poetically speaking, this doctrine about the fire being salt (or the salt being fire for that matter!) should not be deprived of its flavor (in any of several ways), or it becomes despicable (in any of several ways).

9.) "Have (this or the) salt in yourselves": same salt.

10.) "And be at peace among each other". Well, of course, if salt is ideal, the best, then this would be the result of having salt in ourselves. Which applies to {pas}, all. How? By the salting. What does the salting? The {puri}, the fire. Which fire is that? Grammatically, it can only be one fire: the same fire Jesus was talking about just a moment ago, the everlasting fire of Gehenna.

Note that taking the whole saying into context answers the rebuttal challenge of whether the verb usually translated "shall be salted" really means "shall be scattered" instead, which is technically possible.

But does the proponent of hopeless punishment really want to translate the term, "For everyone shall be scattered with fire"? Even if that



somehow made sense, Jesus would still be going on to say that "scatter" is the best of things and that if "scatter" is "unscatter" how can it be made "scattery" again, so have "scatter" in our hearts and be at peace with one another! "Salt" in various cognates makes much better sense. It also fits contextually with the common extension to the verse, that every sacrifice will be 'verbed' with the same 'noun'.

**Mark 11:20-26;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (praying for all salvation) (warning against non-universalism): a two-part incident which starts back at Mark 11:12-14. Paralleled, with much less detail, in Matt 21:18-22. GosLuke doesn't have this incident. The texts either way are stably transmitted in the details relevant for our purposes, except for Mark 11:26 which many manuscripts don't have but which highlights the connections to Matt 6:13-14.

Mark includes (at verse 22) the imperative command or recommendation, "Have faith of-God". This is very clear in the Greek (which reads {Echete pistin theou}, with some variation about whether a word equivalent to English "if" is included or not), but doesn't seem to make sense in English so translations usually read "Have faith in God" or perhaps "from God" instead. But was Mark using unusual grammar here, or transliterating an underlying Aramaic phrase, or writing in a local Greek idiom, or did Jesus actually mean (in Greek or Aramaic) we should have the faith of God? And if so, what might that mean?

This is one of the incidents where Jesus makes very extravagant promises about the certainty of God answering prayers for miraculous results, which have long puzzled readers and theologians because not only does this clearly not happen in practice but it doesn't even happen for Jesus! -- since the Father rejects the Son's request (soon afterward) in Gethsemane; and Mark reports earlier in GosMark that Jesus was unable to heal many people in Nazareth due to their lack of faith, which may be another example of the Father not granting the request of the Son Himself (since the implication is that Jesus tries but it doesn't work, thus the explanation for it not working).

Jesus also doesn't directly explain the purpose of this one destructive miracle (nor do the authors suggest explanations), leaving readers to draw conclusions as best we can. Generally theologians and commentators have agreed that this is an enacted parable against Jerusalem generally (compare with Christ's lament over Jerusalem during the triumphant entry a couple of days previously); and against the Jewish religious leaders especially, such as Mark shows between the cursing of the tree and it being revealed as withering: when Jesus denounces the Temple leaders as being a den of rebels, using language much harsher than a couple of years previously when driving the moneychangers out of the court of the Gentiles -- a policy which later rabbis blamed on the ruling Sadduceean party.

If the withering of the tree is meant to be connected specifically with that particular

incident (driving out the moneychangers again), the relevant details would be that Jesus has previously (as reported in GosJohn 2:13-22) given the leaders an opportunity to correct what might arguably have been a well-intentioned convenience (taking over the Court of the Gentiles to allow Jews to more easily buy animals for sacrifice); but they refused to do so, revealing themselves to be a den of rebels blocking people from devotedly worshiping in prayer at the Temple. Who are they keeping out? -- not the Jews, for whom the alteration was made (although later rabbis reported that the ruling party was also receiving major profit from this activity), but for the Gentiles! The whole world was, ideally, invited to worship the God of the whole world at the Temple, and a place had been made for them, but that place was being denied by the religious leaders.

This is exactly the context of Christ's quotation from Isaiah 56: a place is supposed to be made for Gentiles to come to loyally worship YHWH (and even to be given names greater than the sons and daughters); but the shepherds appointed by God over this flock which is supposed to include the Gentiles, are acting like greedy dogs instead, getting drunk on unjust gain! (The call in Isaiah 56 is absolutely total in scope, by the way: not only all "beasts in the field" but "all you beasts in the forest" are called to come to eat.)

Again, the point to Jesus quoting from Jeremiah 7:11 is that the people refuse to do justice with widows, orphans, and foreigners, and then who go to the Temple to declare that God has delivered

themselves, are about to be in big trouble! (The other sins of Israel in Jeremiah's day aren't the sins of Israel in the day of Jesus, which is why He doesn't complain about them being horrible idolaters and child sacrificers for example.) God refuses (as in Jeremiah 6) to accept their sacrifices, which after all He never even asked for, much less which impress Him, much less which He needs. Consequently, the nation and the city will soon be violently overthrown by pagan armies.

Some people appeal to this miracle (the withering of the tree) as evidence against the eventual salvation of the condemned sinners from their sins. Part of the unspoken imagery is that at this time, before the actual season for figs, there ought to have been small pre-fig fruits in the flowers of the tree; and if none can be found, the flowering is useless and the tree will produce no more fruit (short of a miracle!) so it might as well be slain and rooted up.

Another cultural point worth noting, however, is why Jesus has to go a distance off the road to get to the tree: the undersides of trees were regarded as unclean for many reason, and travelers might sleep under them but only if they didn't care about keeping kosher. So not only were there laws about keeping trees away from roads lest travelers accidentally defile themselves by, symbolically, walking into and out of an unclean habitation; but also a rabbi also wouldn't normally go looking for fruit. But Jesus goes looking into the unclean area, which probably represents the court of the Gentiles

specifically. How could that area ever provide any fruit (Gentile converts) so long as the chief priests had taken it over so that Gentiles couldn't worship there?!

There are several reasons why this need not have been regarded as a prophecy of hopeless punishment coming to Israel, though.

1.) The Temple is supposed to be rebuilt, mirroring Jesus' own resurrection, after it was destroyed, in a fashion acceptable to God. Figuratively the Church itself will be the New Jerusalem and Christ shall be the Temple, but apparently there will be a literally rebuilt Jerusalem and a new temple (for a while anyway) as well. Either way the principle stands, the punishment isn't hopeless.

2.) The destroyed fruitless tree, presumably slated to be chopped down and burned later, echoes the judgment of Malachi 4. But Malachi says that this judgment (against rebel Jewish religious leaders, per Malachi 3, with comparisons drawn later by John the Baptist) is meant to be remedial and purifying, bringing the rebels back to true righteousness and loyalty to God. So not only is the punishment hopeful, but evidently the salvation will be post-mortem (since the rebel leaders are slated to die by the punishment).

3.) Mark reports the terms for having such miracles granted as withering the fig tree or throwing "this mountain" (apparently Jerusalem) "into the sea" (typologically into the prison of

dead rebel spirits): not only must someone have the faith of God (if that cognate for God is accurate), but "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be [granted] to-you." In some other places, the all-things for which we as believers are supposed to pray and ask, and which will be granted to believers (and to the Son by the Father, and to the Father by the Son), are sinners saved from their sins.

4.) Jesus immediately continues in verse 25 with a saying the gist of which is also found elsewhere: "And whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." To which some late manuscripts add verse 26 so the saying parallels GosMatt 6:14-15, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father Who is in heaven forgive your transgressions." Whether or not Jesus added that here (but Mark and/or Peter just didn't mention it), topically the saying connects back to that incident where Jesus was teaching the Lord's Prayer, which involves praying for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in the heavens, so it's understandable why late scribes would put the followup saying here.

But it's also understandable why later scribes would put the followup warning at verse 26, even if it wasn't originally in GosMark's text, because that would anchor out and finish the point to the enacted parable! The leaders of the

Temple, whether the Sadducees who had infested the Court of the Gentiles, or the Pharisees whom Jesus had been reaching out to a lot more than He ever did to the Sadducees, weren't (generally) interested in their enemies being saved from their sins.

At any rate, the overall context suggests what Jesus meant here (and so also elsewhere) about God granting everything to us if we pray with the faith of God (or even faith in God): the "everything" isn't miraculous granting of prayer requests on every topic, but the granting of saving of all sinners! -- even those whose tree has been destroyed and whose mountain has been cast into the sea.

See also the commentary on GosMatt 7:13-12, which features some interesting topical parallels.

**Mark 14:21;** (counter-evidence against universalism): see comments to Matthew 26:24.

**Luke 3:16-17;** (counter-evidence against universalism): also verse 9. See notes on parallel at Matt 3:10-12.

**Luke 6:34-38;** (warning against non-universalism): those who insist on others having no mercy, shall be punished by the same standard.

Luke 12:4-5; (counter-evidence against universalism): this is Luke's report of the warning to fear God who having killed has

authority to cast into Gehenna. See comments on Matt 10:28.

**Luke 12:8-10;** (counter-evidence against universalism): this is Luke's report, in a very different scene, of Jesus' saying about the sin against the Holy Spirit, aka the unforgivable sin. Luke does not include this as part of his version of the accusation against Jesus of healing by the power of Satan (Luke 11:14-26), although he puts the two scenes relatively close together. See comments on Matthew 12.

**Luke 13:18-21;** see comments on Matt 13:31-21, and Matt 13 in general.

**Luke 13:22-30;** (warning against non-universalism): Christ warns the man asking if only a few are being saved, that he himself is going down the broad path not the narrow door, and that he shall be wailing and gnashing his teeth on being thrown outside when he sees people coming from all quarters of the compass to eat in the kingdom with the patriarchs and the prophets. Note that Luke puts the parable of the mustard seed just previously, which in the other two Synoptics is connected directly to warnings against being unmerciful and expecting hopeless punishment from God! (See commentary on Matt 13, and on Matt 7:7-23. Note also that the warning here is very similar to that given to "the sons of the kingdom" in Matt 8, which is a key to interpreting Matt 13.)



**Luke 14:16-24;** (counter-evidence against universalism): Luke's report of The Parable of the Wedding Feast. See comments on Matt 22:1-14.

**Luke 15:1-10;** (scope of salvation) (persistence of salvation): parable of the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep and 10<sup>th</sup> coin. Followed in the same scene immediately with the parable of the prodigal son.

**Luke 15:11-32;** (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless) (warning against non-universalism): in the parable of the prodigal son, the lost son (although both are in rebellion against the father actually) is regarded as dead and destroyed and is put into hellish circumstances until he repents and returns home to confess his sin to his father, who receives him with such joyful extremity it catches both sons by surprise. (And the elder son is jealous!)

**Luke 16:19-31;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (post-mortem punishment not hopeless): the Rich Man is tormented by fire in hades after death but before any resurrection (as Lazarus and Abraham are also present in hades). A great gulf is fixed which those on Abraham's side cannot cross, much less Dives (his nickname in Latin), even if they wanted to. However, God the Omnipresent, including the Holy Spirit (Who on evidence of other scriptures is doubtless the fire in hades) and the Son (Who has the keys of death and hades, Rev 1:18 as well as implied in several Gospel references), can and does cross that gulf. Moreover, the parable does not indicate that the Rich Man is in any way repentant, but rather would prefer for poor

Lazarus to enter torment to serve himself even a little! -- so it is no wonder that salvation from his punishment is not discussed. Topically, this parable follows two startling examples: of an impenitent but clever sinner being praised for his cleverness by Christ (as a 'how much moreso should you' example); and the parable of the prodigal son where the language of the narrative moral practically spells out the implications of post-mortem repentance and salvation! -- as well as warning against an attitude of resentment for such salvation by those who regard themselves as loyal to the Father!

**John 1:1-18;** (scope of God's intention) (empowerment by God) (mercy for mercy)

v.7: "This one [John the Baptist, sent with a mission from God, per v.6] came for a testimony, that he might bear witness of the Light [the life within God, including within the Son of God], so that all might believe through him." Or possibly "through Him", depending on whether the pronoun refers to belief through the witness of the Baptist, or refers to belief through the Light Himself. Either or both interpretations could be accepted in various ways by all three basic soteriologies.

Where the soteriologies differ is whether the Son (through His human agents or otherwise) will succeed in His mission to bring all to belief (Kaths yes, Arms no), or whether that was really the Son's mission to begin with (Kaths yes, Calvs no). Arminians would usually restrict the mission

to all humans, not all rational intelligences, and so actually be secretly Calvinistic on this point, just with a wider scope of the chosen elect (and without Calvinistic assurance of God's victory!)

Another possibility for Calv interpretation, and perhaps for Arm interpretation, is that while testimony about Christ may and should be preached to all persons (even to rebel angels, if they exist), this does not necessarily mean an evangelical appeal for repentance unto salvation. It may only mean testimony to various factual statements about Christ (such as that the Word is emphatically God, etc.) Kaths (and most if not all Arms), however, would expect such factual testimony to include the intention of God, in and as Christ, to save all rebels from sin, and so would be obligated as ambassadorial representatives of Christ to truly (and not only formally or facetiously) extend the exhortation to repent and "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20) to all sinners.

The grammar here does clearly indicate a purpose of God parallel to another purpose in immediate context (introduced with an identical {hina}): God sent the Baptist {hina} he might bear witness to the Light. The question is whether God's fulfillment of one purpose (sending the Baptist to testify and prepare the way), counts as evidence that God shall fulfill the related parallel {hina} purpose (all will come to believe in Christ).

v.9: "This [Light, which was not John the Baptist but which he came to bear witness to, per v.8] was the true Light Who is enlightening every person who is coming into the world!" (Or possibly, "Who, coming into the world, is enlightening every person!")

Kaths and Arms would have no problem with the scope of this verse, but it might be considered direct counter-testimony to at least some Calvinistic notions, specifically ones which involve denying that the Holy Spirit acts to "enlighten" the non-elect in any regard.

The notion here is that if the Holy Spirit actually helps a sinner see (spiritual) light, then the Spirit is providing at least a little empowerment to accept truth and repent. But if a soul is given even a little empowerment, then (per Calvinistic and Universalistic salvation theories) we can trust the Spirit to keep persisting at this until the soul is saved from sin, however long it takes, even if the sinner persists in squinting his eyes against the light. This verse only testifies to the scope of the Light's enlightenment, however, not to the persistence of God for the sinner to accept the light.)

v.11: "Unto His own He came, but those who are His own did not accept Him."

A Calvinist would have no problem affirming that God will eventually save "His own" even if they currently do not accept Him; or alternately might regard this as ontologically "His own": God came

to everyone, for even the non-elect are His own in that sense, but God did not empower them to accept Him. However, the Light enlightening every person implies some empowerment to choose to accept Him. At any rate, this verse indicates that all have sinned and rejected God, even those who are God's own.

Those who do accept Him (as noted in the following verses) are given authority to be heir-children of God. This does not mean they are merely adopted into God's family, however, as though God was not their Father in the first place, for "those who trust into His name" are described as "begotten not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but of God!" The cultural concept (as in Galatians 4) is that "His own" (from verse 16) are actually children of God, just as nothing came into existence by any other way than by God (and just as the Light enlightens everyone), but are not mature children yet. Until they are mature they do not have authority from the Father to inherit. Whether they ever will mature or not, and follow and acknowledge God, is another question; certainly they won't unless God empowers them.

v.16: "For we all received from that which fills Him, and joy for joy!"

The Evangelist may only be talking about "all we Christians" here, especially since the verb indicates an intentional reception by hand (possibly referring thus to the Eucharist -- the

Word became flesh and dwells as in a holy tent among us and we behold His glory).

However, verse 17 goes on to say that joy and truth (or reality) came into being through Jesus Christ. Why is this important? After all, it doesn't say there that all persons receive truth through Jesus Christ, or anything else for that matter!

No; but verse 16 does say that "we all" have received from that which fills Him. What fills Him? {charis} and {alêtheia}, as stated back in verse 14. Moreover, we either give {charis} for {charis} received from Christ, or we receive {charis} for {charis} we give.

It cannot be that we fill Christ with {charis} (much less with original self-existent Life!) from which we receive in return -- unless supernaturalistic theism is false, and besides that would run against the whole ontological thrust of the GosJohn prologue, including just afterward in verse 17, where {charis} comes into existence at all through Jesus Christ. The {charis} must come first from Christ to us, and then we give it.

The other contextually plausible option of action-direction is that we receive {charis} from Christ [u]when[/u] we give {charis} to other persons who, like ourselves, have been created by Christ: a notion that has strong relationship with statements in the Synoptics concerning mercy and forgiveness: we shall be given mercy /

forgiveness / {charis} (usually translated "grace") if we give this to other persons.

Does the "we" in "we all" here at verse 16 provide local support for reading an exclusion in favor of Calvinistic elect into locally previous verses? No, because all three branches of soteriology (broadly speaking) can easily agree with the "we all" referring to loyal Christians here.

While the GosJohn prologue doesn't seem to testify to the persistence of God at saving sinners from sin, it does testify heavily toward the scope of God's intention to save sinners, and doesn't deny the persistence of God in salvation at least. It also perhaps hints at the mercy-for-mercy grace of God testified frequently in the Synoptics: if we do not act to give God's mercy to others, God will not give mercy to us. But that doesn't mean we are convincing God to give us mercy originally, for we can be heir-children of God only if God begets us (not by the will of man). Even God's own may reject the coming of God, while still remaining His own; and the category of "God's own" is closely connected with the absolute ontological supremacy of the Father and the Son as God, without Whom not one thing exists which has come into existence, and from Whom come joy and truth, and the Light of Whom enlightens every person (even if the person rejects the coming of the Light. Which John, or possibly Jesus Himself in dialogue, will have more to say about later.)

John 3:36; (counter-evidence against universalism): "he that does not believe the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." This could only count against universal salvation if it was taken to mean that at the time it was written or spoken no one who did not already believe the Son would ever see life but only the wrath of God -- which would mean no one could be saved after the day of the Baptist's final public testimony! Either this denies all and any effective subsequent evangelism (even by the Son and the Holy Spirit), or it only means that while anyone continues in such a state the wrath of God dwells on him; which is entirely neutral to the question of whether God shall bring all persons to honor the Son and the Father and so to receive eonian life from the Son. (But other things said by Jesus in GosJohn's report are not neutral to that question!)

John 4:24; (God and honest loyalty): those who worship God must do so in spirit and in truth. This precludes God accepting any false worship.

**John 5:19-30;** (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation) (all things gathered finally under Christ): while these verses definitely testify to a coming resurrection into judgment (literally crisis) of those who still do evil things, verse 23 expressly explains what the purpose of the judgment by the Son is for: so that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Nor is this honoring at all intended to be a false or hypocritical honoring (the Greek term is routinely used in the NT for positive valuing of the object). Those who honor the Son,



and so who honor the Father in honoring the Son, receive eonian life and come out of the death into life. It is also expressly on this principle, of rebels coming to properly honor the Father (through honoring the Son), that Christ declares His judgment is fair or just: "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him Who sent Me." "I do absolutely nothing for Myself." A judging that did not result in those who are being judged (with eonian crisising) coming to honor the Father would be (per Arminianism) failure by the Son; and if it did not have such a goal at all (per Calvinism), it would be (by God's standards) an unjust judgment.

verses 22-23: the purpose of the Father, in giving all judgment to the Son: {hina pantes timôsi ton huion kathôs timôsi ton patera} "in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (with the logical clarification that "the one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father Who sent Him"). The usual explanation of these verses, is that while the judgment may be given to the Son so that all may honor the Son, that doesn't mean the purpose of Christ's judgment is for all to honor the Son; but that would be a very strange disjunction of the purposes of the Son acting in judgment compared to the purposes of the Father! The Son may do nothing for Himself and may want people to honor Him so that the Father may be honored, but the purposes are mutually coherent: the Son purposes that the Father may be honored, and the Father purposes that the Son may be honored.

verses 24-25: the one who hears the word of the Son and believes in the Father Who sends the Son, already honors the Son and the Father (of course), so has eonian life and passes out of the death {ek tou thanatou} into the life, instead of coming into the judgment (or crisis) by the Son - the goal of the Son's judgment being that all may be coming to honor the Son and the Father, the result of which would be that those who come to honor the Son and the Father pass out of the death into eonian life. It is in this context that the double-amen occurs, promising that an hour is coming when the dead ones shall hear the voice of the Son, and those who hear shall live.

verses 26-27: Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He also gives (a more accurate translation than "gave") to the Son to also have life in Himself, and gives to the Son (as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God per verse 25) authority to do judging -- the goal of which was already just recently explained to be that all may honor the Son and the Father and so pass out of the death into eonian life.

verses 28-29: An hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and those who do good shall go out into a resurrection of life, yet those who do the bad( thing)s shall go out into a resurrection of judgment -- the goal of the judgment being (as was just previously explained by Jesus) that all may honor the Son and the Father and so pass out of the death into eonian life.

verse 30: As the Son hears, He judges, absolutely

not for Himself (with a double-negative emphasis in Greek), because He does not seek His own will but the will of the One Who sends Him. And His judging is fair (or just) {kai hê krisis hê emê dikaia estin} -- because the goal of the Son's judgment, as the Son just recently explained, is that all may honor the Son and the Father and so pass out of the death into eonian life.

Verse 23 not only expressly explains the goal of the Son's judgment, but provides the context for understanding what the Son means by just or fair judgment -- even when that judgment is, understandably, a crisis for the currently impenitent sinner, the one who is still doing the bad things.

There are four ways to attempt to get around this conclusion.

The first way, is to try claiming that "all" here only means "many", so that the purpose of the Father and the Son in the judgment of the Son is not to bring all to honor the Father and the Son but only some to honor the Father and the Son. Personally I am glad it is not my task to try to explain that the Father and the Son have no intention for some rational creatures to honor the Father and the Son! -- how could the Son choose that a rational creature never honors the Father?? That would be rebellion by the Son against the Father! That the Father would choose (and so ensure) that a rational creature would never honor the Son, would be for the Father to ensure that the Son is permanently dishonored. The choice itself is an act (as Calvinists of all

people ought to be aware, yet in my experience they appeal to this notion more than Arminians, that if God chooses for only some people to honor Him, He somehow hasn't chosen for people to dishonor Him).

The second way around it, is to try claiming that "honor" doesn't necessarily mean positively valuing God. But aside from the verb being a simple modification of the Greek word "to value" (as in the commandment to honor your father and mother), there are very many scriptures (including some here in GosJohn) indicating that God does not accept false honor of Himself (a pertinent example of the exact same term being YHWH's complaint from Isaiah that people honor Him with their lips but their hearts are far from Him), so such a theory requires for God (in any or all Persons) to be seeking a final result which God (in any or all Persons) does not accept.

Throughout the scriptures the unanimous theme is that those who honor God (whether or not this verb {timaô} or a cognate is used, but especially when this term is referenced) are accepted and saved from their sins; those who dishonor God, including by hypocritical honor, are rejected and punished. God may accept dishonest honor or other dishonor for a time in order to get other things done, but for God to seek to accept final dishonor would be self-contradictory.

The third and fourth ways around it take a little longer to explain, and involve appealing to the verb form for honoring the Father and the Son (as

the goal/result of giving all judgment to the Son).

The verb form, {timôsi} is exactly the same both ways: it's a 3rd person plural (to match "all") present active form. Strictly speaking it would read "so that all are honoring the Son accord-as (they) are honoring the Father". (The 3rd person pronoun "they" is implied in the verb even though not printed out in the Greek here.) However, the mood of the verbs either way could be indicative or could be subjunctive.

Indicative mood would be equivalent to our future tense in English: "so that all shall be honoring the Son just as they shall be honoring the Father". So the third way around the conclusion of a successful remedial (and truly re-tributive) judgment, is to try claiming that the result of the judgment shall be that some people equally do not honor the Son just as they do not honor the Father.

But those who shall be judged in the resurrection, already do not honor either the Son or the Father (whether from dishonoring both actively or only actively dishonoring one of them, the Son by local context)! -- that is exactly why they are being raised to a resurrection of judgment! So on this theory, there is no real result to the judgment, much less a goal, of all equally honoring or, on this theory, equally dishonoring both Persons. This way of trying to get around the conclusion also falls into the problem of "honoring" really meaning "dishonoring", although the problem is

admittedly more subtle and nuanced than trying to claim that someone can falsely honor God and have that be the goal or result of God's judgment.

The fourth way around a conclusion that Jesus is testifying here to a successful remedial judgment in the resurrection, is to try to appeal to the subjunctive mood of the verbs. (I will add here that Jesus almost certainly wasn't speaking Greek to these people, so arguments about nit-picking Greek grammar may seem specious. But I'm working on the assumption that John's choice of translation into Greek could be important enough to check on for getting the correct intention of meaning.)

The subjunctive mood has two main grammatic functions in Greek. One is to show the doer of the verb reflexively doing the verb: the doer verbs himself, doing the action to himself. That can't be what's happening here, since the doer of "honoring" is verb-ing the Son and the Father.

The other purpose of the subjunctive mood is to speak in terms of possibility, which is naturally related to the mood being used for a future tense. In English we can get across the same combined two meanings with "may verb" or "may be verbing". Thus, "so that all may be honoring the Son just as they may be honoring the Father".

Before I continue, I'll take the opportunity to mention that since the mood forms are identical, the meaning could be future tense for one and subjunctive for the other. So someone could theoretically translate the clause "so that all

may be honoring the Son just as they shall be honoring the Father". But the connecting {kathôs} between the two verbs shows that equivalent meanings are meant.

For this fourth rebuttal attempt, the idea would be that the (possible) subjunctive mood of the verb(s) stresses possibility not future certainty, so instead of "may" (which could be read in English either way) the proper translation would be something like "so that all might perhaps honor the Son just as they might perhaps honor the Father". Since, on this argument, the verb would only indicate possibility of result, not certainty, then that would leave open the possibility of failing the goal as a result, and so would allow that some people never come to honor the Son and the Father after all even though this fourth attempt acknowledges that this will be God's intended goal in giving all judgment to the Son and so in raising those who dishonor the Father and the Son (and otherwise who do the bad things) to a resurrection of judgment.

Note that this could only be an Arminianistic attempt; no Calvinistic theory could seriously allow that God ever truly tries to bring anyone who shall be finally lost to truly honor Him and so, as Jesus puts it here, to thereby come out of the death and into eonian life.

Note also that this fourth attempt requires allowing that post-mortem salvation could be at least theoretically possible, even after the judgment has started, since this salvation from

sin (and from rebellion against and dishonoring of God) would be acknowledged as the goal of God.

This fourth rebuttal attempt however requires, first, that the {hina} must be only the goal and not the result -- which is grammatically possible, but then the attempt needs to acknowledge that {hina} might mean the result of a goal, too. The rebutter no doubt would appeal to extended context as deciding the case one way or another; but then second, the rebuttal attempt must either ignore the local reference to Daniel 12 or must shift the argument over to arguing against Daniel seeing that the righteous ones shall be teaching those unrighteous ones raised to olam abomination to do justice instead. So far as John 5 is used in an extended Johannine argument for universal salvation (via John 17 for example) the appeal to extended context to settle the {hina} question might not work either.

The third and, I think, decisive problem against this fourth rebuttal type, is that the subjunctive in Greek actually has a third function when used with a {hina}! When that happens, then the form indicates a formal royal declaration, or some other authoritative promise of what shall be happening in the future. This can be seen in the world-famous John 3:16, to give a relevant example of Johannine usage, where God gives His only begotten Son {hina}, so that, all those who trust in Him shall not be perishing but shall be having eonian life. The verb form there is just the same as the form for the honoring verb here in John 5:23 (though the verbs themselves are different of course: dying and



having/receiving back there, honoring here). It's a perfect example of the royal/divine promise or declarative form.

The {hina}, in other words, along with a mood of the honoring verb(s) which could be subjunctive or indicative, combines to create an effect similar to how in slightly archaic English someone can use "may" as a permission or promise about something that could otherwise go either way but will happen one way instead of the other if the promise or permission is kept: so that all who trust in Jesus may (by God's promise and gift) be having eternal life. No Christian anywhere thinks that those who trust in Christ for eternal life might only possibly maybe perhaps receive eternal life! God Most High would be failing His side of the promise if so!

By exactly the same token, I argue that we should not think that God might only possibly maybe perhaps achieve His goal of God's own judgment: so that all shall be honoring the Son just as they shall be honoring the Father.

I suppose a fifth, related attempt at getting around this conclusion, could be a unitarian Christology where Jesus (however much of a created super-angel he, not He, may or may not be) is only a creature and so may fail in keeping the royal/divine declarative promised goal and purpose of the Father giving all judgment to the Son: the Father, being God, wouldn't fail in the purpose of His judgment, but the Son not being God could fail.

To that I would reply, first, be that as it may I'm a trinitarian theologian working out a trinitarian soteriology primarily for an expected reading audience either of fellow trinitarians or at least who have some interest in a trinitarian logic-of-salvation; and second, that this hardly would lead anyone to think any kind of merely unitarian Christology is worth investing our faith in; especially because, third, there is no way for such a unitarian appeal to avoid the parallel possibility of failure of the promise of John 3:16! The Son, not being God Most High Himself on this theory, might possibly fail His promise that (per John 6:37) He shall not lose any of "the all" who have been given to him by the Father including (v.40) all the ones whom Jesus shall be raising on the final Day! If you are asking us to put our trust in a not-God person for salvation, but admitting that trusting in some not-God person instead of in God for salvation could lead to someone not receiving eonian life (call it eternal life as you wish), then thanks but no thanks! -- we'll keep trusting in God for our salvation instead, and not put our faith in any lesser lord or god!

Ultimately, then, I find the four or five ways around my conclusion to be unsatisfactory, especially when in one or another way they violate the coherency of trinitarian theism (or, as with the fifth riposte attempt, appeal to an outright denial of ortho-trin).

**John 6:44;** (all things gathered finally under Christ) (post-mortem salvation) (total scope) (total assurance): involves people given to the Son by

the Father being saved by being (rather explicitly in the Greek) "dragged" to Him: a topic directly related to them being resurrected on the final Day. Relatedly, all that the Father gives Him shall come to Him and shall not be cast out (v.36), nor shall the Son lose any of the all who have been given to Him by the Father. (v.39) The disputed question, between purgatorial Christian universalists and non-universalist Christians, is whether anyone who beholds the Son (which would logically be everyone He raises and judges) and yet doesn't believe in Him shall be lost. (Ultra-universalistic Christians would argue that everyone who beholds the Son, which everyone will do, will accept Him, with no post-mortem punishment at all.)

But then they wouldn't be coming to Him: because if they were coming to Him they wouldn't be cast out! So either not all people are given to Him by the Father (which could hardly be an Arminian position, although a Calvinist might try it), or else all people that the Father gives Him shall NOT come to Him and some shall be lost who have been given to Him by the Father! Which runs totally against the promise of this verse.

At any rate, not even one person can come toward the Son if the Father Who sends the Son does not draw (i.e. drag) him; yet the Son shall still be raising such a person in the final day. (verse 44; the Greek grammatically indicates the same "him" is being talked about for raising as for not coming to the Son.)

This is sometimes suggested, especially by Calvinists, to indicate a schism of intention between those whom God intends to save and those He never intended to save and so whom He never even tried to drag in the first place. But Jesus (in verse 45) connects this raising of those not drawn to Him with the prophecy from Jeremiah 31:34 that all people from the least to the greatest shall come to YHWH to be taught by YHWH, "for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more." So the topic is not about Jesus raising people who will never be given to Him, but about raising people who have not come to Him yet: but they will, and will be saved. (Jeremiah 31 is also where God, having slain rebel Ephraim for his sins, comforts righteous Rachel that He has not forgotten Ephraim and will surely restore him once Ephraim learns his lesson and repents of his sins. God promises that He will accomplish this in a riddle where He shall be doing a new thing involving a woman encompassing a man. Matthew regarded this chapter as a prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ, and cites it as having been at least partially fulfilled in the deaths of the innocent children murdered by Herod; but it wasn't innocent children who had been slain by God originally, so there is a much more important fulfillment on the way.)

The resurrection itself, even of those not yet drawn to the Son, thus counts as part of the dragging of all to the Son, once all the pieces are accounted in context. The scope of salvific intention is total, as Arminians tend to recognize here (emphasizing the phrase "the

all"); and the assurance of salvific victory is total, as Calvinists tend to recognize here. As usual, a place where Arms and Calvs tend to quote scripture against each other, turns out to mean both sides are right! -- but then hopeless punishment must be wrong (which to be fair is why each side opposes the gospel assurance each other draws from this area of scripture).

Besides which, the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands (John 3:35) and Jesus gratefully praises the Father for giving all things into His hands (John 13:3). "Ask of Me and I shall give You the heathen for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession" says the Father to the Son in Psalm 2:8. Many other such testimonies could be found in the scriptures.

**John 8:21-28ff;** (counter-evidence against universalism)(post-mortem salvation): Jesus promises that a group of Jews (by context most likely rabbis and/or Pharisees) shall certainly die in their sins, and that they will die in their sins if they do not recognize Him as "I AM" (John 8:21, in relation to their complaint that He is making Himself out to be God Most High, Whose name of self-existence is "I AM"). Yet He also says (v.28) that they shall come to know He is "I AM" after (or when) they lift Him up.

In other words, He's saying that some of them shall certainly die in their sins (after lifting Him on the cross) without believing He is "I AM" and not go where He is going (also said at John 7:34, although for that purpose probably more in

reference to Him going beyond the current boundaries of Israel into the regions of Tyre and Sidon and thence back down through the Decapolis); but then shall come to know He is "I AM" after all, later (after lifting Him up as the Son of Man somehow).

Those who come to believe in Him while He is saying such things (v.30) are the ones who end up being rebuked by Him as children of the devil -- much as Peter is rebuked like Satan in the Synoptics, and who certainly doesn't abide in or keep His word! If these are thus taken as examples thereby of a separate group of non-elect, by the same evidence Peter must be of the non-elect, which no Calvinist would admit, and at the same time no Arminian would say the case of St. Peter was hopeless. And indeed, Jesus says later to His own apostles (John 13:33), "You shall seek Me, and as I said unto the Jews, where I go you cannot come, so now I say it to you." They are not forbidden from following after -- in fact Christ goes on to promise this soon (13:36) -- but neither is that group of Jews forbidden from following later. If these are the Pharisee opponents, Jesus does later say, during His greatest condemnations against them, that they shall eventually praise Him Who comes in the name of the Lord (Matt 23:38-39).

Similarly, such choices by the people involved, leading to rebuke and judgment by Christ, don't prevent God from saving them later (even if they have to be punished first). That someone cannot find Christ at first while seeking Him, does not void the promise of Christ that those who seek,

and who keep on knocking, shall find Him (Matt 7:7; Luke 11:9); even though true repentance will first be necessary before someone can seek with all their heart (Jer 29:13).

John 8:34-36, by the way, probably refers to the 'paterfamilias' concept of 'son-placement' (or adoption as it's translated) mentioned by St. Paul in Galatians 4, where the children of the father are slaves in regard to authority until the father judges they are mature enough to be given the authority and responsibilities of the family name, thus coming into their inheritance. (The original Greek probably didn't read "slave of sin" at verse 34.) The slave wouldn't remain in the house forever, because as the child grows older but not more mature the father would put him or her out of the house until when-if-ever the child repented of his or her behavior.

John 9:4; (counter-evidence against universalism): Jesus says, "I must be working the works of Him Who sends Me while it is day. Night is coming, when no one can work." Sometimes this is appealed to, to mean that even Jesus cannot save someone once someone has died; but since the reference is to Jesus working while He has a chance before He Himself dies (thus setting an example for His disciples, as in what He says afterward to His disciples on challenging death threats to raise Lazarus), any argument of non-salvation from such evidence would be that Jesus must save people while He is still alive because after Jesus dies even He cannot save anyone! But no Christians anywhere at any time after Jesus died, has ever believed this -- except maybe on

the first Good Friday night and Holy Saturday when the disciples thought Jesus had totally failed! (Is Jesus the light of the world only while He is in the world? A miserably low Christology at best! Certainly not trinitarian theism.) This is only a case of preachers wanting to bolster a point by quoting something that sounds appropriate without regard for context: whether or not the saying could also be applied to human evangelism (do it now before you can't do it anymore) or human repentance (do it now before you can't do it anymore), it cannot be exegetical evidence for a coming hopeless punishment.

**John 12:30-50;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (all things gathered finally under Christ) (intention of judgment) (annihilation refuted) (post-mortem salvation): It is certainly true that when the phrase of Christ dragging all toward Himself (from John 6:44), in clearly the same context, is repeated by Christ in the report of a later saying here at John 12:32, it definitely involves a judgment context of the world from verse 31. But verse 33 (unless the Evangelist has misunderstood) indicates the "lifting up" to be Jesus raised on the cross (indicating the death He would die), which does not lend itself well to interpretations of hopeless ruling judgment against enemies.

It is also true that Jesus goes on to say in this later scene (probably meant to be the afternoon of the Lord's Supper and Gethsemene to come, as John reports Jesus overcoming a brief pre-Gethsemene inclination to be saved from the



torment to come) that the people in the crowd should come to and walk by the light (meaning Himself) while the light is still among them because once the light is gone they'll be walking in darkness not knowing where they go. But that can hardly be taken to mean salvation is hopeless thereby, or no one could ever be saved after the death and resurrection of Jesus!

Again, John reports that the lack of belief (though many of the synagogue chiefs did in fact secretly believe) fulfilled prophecies from Isaiah, including one Jesus Himself connected to His complaint about the stubbornness of His religious opponents: that they refuse to hear and see and soften their hearts so that they will be saved. (Note that John says when Isaiah heard this from YHWH Most High, he was perceiving the glory of Jesus! -- one of the more subtle trinitarian scriptural evidences.) In the Synoptics, Jesus' complaint is directed at their choice to do so; here, John says God Himself was Who blinded them so that they would not be saved. (The original verses at Isaiah 6:9-13 seem to mix the ideas: Isaiah is told to go tell the people, by context apparently the rebel religious leaders, to keep on seeing and hearing but not understanding and for the religious leaders to render the hearts and ears and eyes of the people dull and fat and heavy lest the people see and be saved. It's a statement of critical sarcasm in other words; the religious leaders are already doing it, and God tells them to keep on doing what He criticizes them for doing.)

Calvinists naturally point at this as evidence God has no intention of ever saving some people; but aside from the prior contexts in John strongly indicating otherwise (as Arminians are aware), if scripture indicates that God heals such people later (and some do as noted elsewhere in this compilation) then the testimony here cannot be accounted an absolute intention of God. Rather He confirms various choices at the time (the choices being what God complains about) in order to get other things accomplished first (Christ's death here, the destruction of Israel by foreign armies in Isaiah's original prophecy), then will go back later and heal the hearts and eyes of the people so that they may be saved.

The conclusion of Jesus' final public evangelism before His death, at verses 47-50, provides one of the great interpretative mysteries (also alluded to earlier in GosJohn when Jesus contested with the Pharisees, and returned to again soon in the Final Discourse): the Son is not sent by the Father to judge the world (down to the one) who doesn't maintain His declarations but to save the world (v.47). What does judge the one who is repudiating Christ and not receiving His declaration, is the word spoken by Christ, which also shall be judging such a one on the last day. The targets apparently in view (especially from immediately preceding context) are those who worship the Father but reject the Son sent by the Father. The precept given to the Son by the Father to be saying and speaking, the word which shall be judging those who reject the Son on the final day, is itself eonian life. But Jesus has also just said that He doesn't give

this judgment to be judging the world but rather to save the world!

In other words, the judgment of the last day will itself be the gift of eonian life by the Son, and not with the intention of hopelessly judging the world but to save the world.

So God does intend to save those who reject Him by rejecting the Son, and the scope of salvation of sinners (as Arminians know) is the whole world (for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, thus all of us reject the Son whenever we sin); and this precept of God, which shall certainly be accomplished (as Calvinists know), is eonian life, which is also what shall be judging those who do not accept the Son -- but not hopelessly judging them. The ones being judged may still continue rejecting eonian life for a while, but they were already rejecting eonian life and God was insisting on giving it to them, so it is not a case of God 'respecting' their choice to be finally unrighteous (as though He Who Is Essential Righteousness could ever be feasibly said to respect any choice of unrighteousness per se!) -- or He wouldn't be acting to save any sinner at all! Remember, back at the beginning of this portion of scripture, the Son is dragging all toward Himself by being raised out from the earth. That isn't a passive offer which someone might refuse without God's active pursuit, and the scope of the action is all not only some.

This means, not incidentally, that annihilation is also thus refuted by the contexts of this

scriptural set: the judgment itself is eonian life, which God is pressing those who don't have it to accept, and whom God is dragging to accept. Their refusal to accept it doesn't obviate God goading them to accept it until He gets it done. How hard it may be for them to kick against the goads, as Saul of Tarsus once did! -- but God accomplished His goading of Saint Paul, and God means to accomplish this goading, too.

Jesus' prior application of this image (dragging all to Himself by means of the cross and by being raised up from the earth in various other ways) makes the total scope and total victorious persistence even more clear, so these verses should be interpreted in light of those at 6:44 (and surrounding contexts): see exegetical commentary there.

GosJohn 5:19-30 relevantly reports the purpose of the Son's just judgment at the resurrection -- to bring all to positively honor and value the Father through the Son. See commentary there.

**John 15:1-7;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning about non-universalism) (the name of Jesus): Jesus here contrasts those who remain in the Vine (cooperating with Him) but are cleaned, with those who are removed from the Vine and burned. This warning explicitly includes the apostles and not only in theory because everyone on all sides of the issue acknowledges one apostle who didn't remain in the Vine: Judas Iscariot who recently before this saying departed to go betray Jesus. Which means he isn't there being addressed by Jesus in giving this warning

to His disciples. More to the point the threat is explicitly leveled at people who start off in the Vine, which counts strongly against either the Calvinistic idea of the non-elect, or the Calvinistic idea of the persistence of the elect (if not against both ideas). If the other apostles do not remain in Christ's love however they will not be remaining in Christ and shall cast out and wither and be burnt. The condition here is important: those who do not bring forth much fruit and who do not keep His commands (15:10) are not loving Him. Presumably this includes the "new commandment" Christ already gave them about loving each other as Christ loves them (13:34-35), by which people would know that they are His disciples, and which Christ reminds them of again here (15:12-14), "This is My precept, that you be loving one another in accord with how I love you" etc. Christ also reminds them that no man has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends; yet Christ has already told them long ago (during the Sermon on the Mount) that He expects them to love their enemies and sacrifice themselves for the sake of their enemies -- which Christ Himself is about to do! Similarly at that time Christ wryly observed that if they do good only for each other, what more are they doing than pagans and traitors!? (Matt 5:38-48) This all fits the concept that Christ was trying to ease them into loving and forgiving Judas Iscariot: after all, He had already warned them that they would act very unfriendly toward Him and betray and abandon Him, too, later that night! God's love is greater than merely human love, for (as Paul says in Romans 5) hardly anyone would dare to die for a good man,

but Christ showed God's true love by coming and dying for us while we were yet sinners. Apostles who loved Judas Iscariot self-sacrificially would be staying in Jesus' love and would be loving one another in a new way that the world would not conceive of by itself, the way Jesus loves them. But apostles who do not self-sacrificially love Judas Iscariot are under the same warning as what happens to Judas: being thrown out to be burned! Yet by the same token to interpret such a burning as hopeless would be for them to refuse to love their errant brother.

(This concept would also apply to interpretations of John 13:18, where Jesus says He isn't speaking to all of them but knows the ones He has chosen, Iscariot being the clear exception in view from John 13:2. Everyone can at least agree Iscariot wasn't chosen to continue having the authority of an apostle, and Jesus is instructing the other apostles on what this authority involves. But up to this point in the story they've been having at least as much trouble with that as Judas Iscariot!)

St. Paul in Romans 11, in applying the same metaphor, emphatically insists that those who are currently grafted into the Vine should not be hopeless for those who are currently grafted out of the Vine, for God can graft in and out as He wishes and can graft back in whomever He has grafted out! -- and can graft out those who insist on disparaging those who are currently grafted out! Combined with Jesus' remarks that those who bear little fruit (which in context must involve expecting evangelism to be few, not

merely being unsuccessful at evangelical work) are not remaining in Jesus' love, the contexts add up to a warning against expecting hopeless punishment. Relatedly, several times in the Final Discourse, especially near these verses, Jesus repeatedly emphasizes that so long as they remain in His love, whatever they ask for in His name He will grant no matter how extreme. The qualifier "in His name" could refer to the meaning of Jesus' name: "The Lord Saves" or "The Lord Is Salvation". In which case the qualification is that what they ask for leads to the salvation of sinners from sin which Jesus will grant to the final extreme. Just as relatedly, John 13 starts the Lord's Supper scene with a reminder not only that Judas will be betraying Jesus but with the affirmation on either side of that reminder that Jesus loves those given to Him into the uttermost completion (v.1) and that the Father has given all things into Jesus' hands (v.3).

See subsequent comments on John 17 (and the second half of the Final Discourse generally) for more discussion -- not least where Jesus says the way the Father and the Son honor each other is for Jesus to give eonian life to everything which is given to Him! This will necessarily include Iscariot, even though Iscariot has currently rejected Jesus and so in that sense does not belong to Jesus (yet).

Note also that Psalm 41:9, which Jesus quotes as a prophecy to be fulfilled by Judas in regard to Himself ("Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"), is actually about David appealing to God

about his friends abandoning him hopelessly to God's punishment after David has sinned against God! -- but David trusts that God will not hopelessly punish David forever (in imagery similar to being sent to hell) but will accept David's true repentance and raise him up to repay those who turned from him while he was being punished by God. The end result? David the punished sinner will become righteous forever more and be in the presence of God. But Jesus is not a sinner, and needs no repentance; and when God raises Him up, He repays with mercy and reconciliation those apostles, namely all of them, who turned from Him when the time of the crucifixion came. The difference between David and the Son of David is all the difference between a treacherous adulterous murderer abusing his God-given authority, and the sinless God Incarnate ever righteous and loyal to God the Father.

**John 17;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (all things gathered finally under Christ) (post-mortem salvation): sometimes Calvinists will appeal to 17:9 as evidence of a distinction between people whom God intends to save from sin and people He does not intend to save from sin: "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me".

But Calvinists had better hope the scope is wider than that, because Jesus was talking from verses 6-8, and from verses 9-26, about the current disciples and apostles! Is it only the men (and maybe a few women) present at the Last Supper after Judas left, who are the chosen elect of



God, and all the rest of us including all 'Reformed Protestants' from the days of Luther and Calvin to now and ever afterward are among the non-elect?!? The disciples and apostles are only supposed to go out into the world afterward to demonstrate that they are of the elect and no one else is?!? Preposterous! At the very least the scope also includes "those who believe in Me through their word" (v.20), for whom Jesus also prays ("I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but also for those...")

But the scope is explicitly wider even than that, at the start of this same climactic High Priestly prayer, 17:1-2: "Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You; just as You gave Him authority over every flesh, so that He may give eonian life to everything You have given Him."

By those explicit terms, the only way that the Son and the Father may glorify each other is if the Father gives all authority to the Son so that the Son may give eonian life to everything over which He has authority. That's the context in which Jesus says He isn't praying for the world but for His immediate disciples: He's asking that they should be preserved as witnesses to the world, but it's still the same principle because everything the Father gives the Son belongs to both Persons and must not be finally lost.

By the same token, this means that although the "son of perdition" given to the Son to be guarded will perish, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled, he still was also given to the Son and so shall not be finally lost; Judas isn't among

those whom Christ is praying will stay true for evangelizing the world, but he is among all those over whom the Son has been given authority for the purpose of giving them eonian life.

Acts 1:15-26; (counter-evidence against universalism): these verses are sometimes appealed to as testimony against hope that Judas will be saved from his sins. They might theoretically refer to this, but strictly speaking they only refer to messier details of Judas' death, and to Peter's reassurance that Judas' betrayal (and thus the need to appoint a new apostle) was prophesied and so nothing to panic about.

Peter's citation of Psalm 69 (and Psalm 109) is more worrisome, although notably David does expect God to save those He punishes and imprisons for their sins, for example at 69:33, when those-being-punished-and-imprisoned-for-their-sins means David! More importantly, Paul applies the same Psalm to rebel Jews, of whom he yet says, "have they stumbled so as to fall? May it never be!" See comments on Psalm 69.

Acts 3:11-26; (punishment not hopeless) (restoration of all things) (scope of God's salvation): St. Peter's second sermon, which features the only use of {apokatastasis} as a noun in the whole (Greek) Bible, connects the restoration of all things to sinners repenting of sin and returning to God so that God may wipe away their sins. While it is true that every soul which does not listen to Jesus Christ (also

described here as the prophet-like-Moses who is to come) shall be utterly destroyed from among the people, the end goal for God is "to bless you by turning every one from your wicked ways" and to fulfill the covenant made with Abraham to bless all the families of the earth in his seed. The time of restoration of all things is prophesied to certainly come (with the return of Christ from heaven); and the completion of the restoration depends (as in Jer 15:19 for example where a cognate of the same term is used in Greek) on sinners repenting. In other words, if some sinners never repent, then the restoration of all things will fail even if the times of restoration finally come.

Peter does not say in this sermon that God will surely succeed at restoring all things (a restoration necessarily connected to repentance and salvation of "every one [of you]" from sin, so not to be thought of apart from that), only that the time of that restoration will surely come. Whether or not God will succeed in that goal is another question.

See commentary on Gen 22 however with related commentary on appeal to that covenant by St. Paul and the Hebraist: the covenant was made by YHWH with YHWH as the seed of Abraham, thus between Father and Son (with Abraham graciously excluded from taking part in the covenant so that even if he or his descendants sin, which through Christ as God Incarnate includes all created persons, the covenant cannot be broken). Consequently, the Father and/or the Son must break the covenant in order for its goal to fail, which is not going to

happen (and indeed is one reason why the Son sacrificed His own life for the sake of all sinners, who as God's creatures are all descendents of Abraham through the Incarnate Son -- to keep the covenant between Father and Son in effect!) In other words, Peter's connection of the coming restoration of all things to the Abrahamic covenant (upkept by Christ on the cross), not only adds confirmation of the scope of God's goal of salvation from sin (all creatures via God's own voluntary Incarnation as a descendent of Abraham) but clarifies God's persistence to success on this goal: the Father and Son, either one, would be dishonoring one another (at least!) without totally victorious success at the goal of the covenant made with each other!

Does Peter's reference to Deuteronomy 18:15,19 undercut this interpretation? 18:19 doesn't actually say that God will kill those who don't listen to the coming Prophet, rather that God will require something from them -- it is false prophets who speak falsely who are given the explicit death threat a few verses later. There are plenty of other scriptures indicating that being utterly destroyed will be the punishment for those who will not listen to the coming Prophet, so Peter isn't wrong to midrash such a detail there; but what that utter destruction involves as a goal, and whether God thereby accomplishes the goal, isn't mentioned by Moses there. If other scriptures indicate that God shall act more forcibly to require that whoever does not listen to Christ shall listen to Him, that would fit the actual structure of the Deut

18:19 quite perfectly; much moreso if other scriptures indicate God shall certainly succeed thereby.

The incident being referenced by God through Moses there, was reported back in Exodus 20, and recapped previously with the second giving of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5. But the problem wasn't with God and His holy fire! -- the problem was the fear of the people. God meant for them to fellowship directly with them in the fire, and even ate a meal with the elders that way! But the elders and tribal leaders essentially decided to sacrifice Moses to God instead, because they thought they would die by being consumed by the fire, and if they heard the voice of YHWH any longer. "For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?"

They already had seen that God could keep men from dying when speaking to them -- they themselves had already survived it -- and God intended for them and for all the people to do so. Instead, rather than listen to God they begged Moses to do something they thought would be fatal instead, and if he survived they would listen to him rather than to God.

Then comes the Messiah, Who turned out to be none other than the visible YHWH they had already refused to listen to, insisting on a prophet instead who might or might not die by taking what they thought was a fatal risk. Are they going to listen to Him or not?

But again, the problem wasn't that listening to YHWH in the consuming fire was fatal, or men who were clearly sinners would have died when that happened. The problem is that they preferred to listen to someone other than God. So naturally if God sends Himself at last as their expected greatest Prophet (greater than Moses or Elijah), and they do not listen to Him, they will die. But listening to Him involves exposing themselves to the consuming fire, which is what God actually intended them to do.

This has a lot of relevance to Paul talking about how the people preferred, in effect, to hide from the glory of God behind the mask of Moses, so that they couldn't even see the glory of God fading from Moses' face, and that this veil continues to separate them from fellowship with God down to Paul's day. They ought to have been willing to fellowship directly with God in God's glory, not to sacrifice Moses for that and settle for looking at God (in His glory, His Shekinah) through something like a veiled mirror.

This point can be confused with God's preliminary command that the people should not rush up onto the mountain, and so that if man or beast crossed a threshold it should be shot to death. Even then, God meant for the priests to come near after being consecrated, although if they were not consecrated YHWH would break out against them (Exodus 19:22). A couple of verses later God tells Moses and Aaron to go down and come back up again but not to bring the priests (v.24), but there would have been no point to verse 22 unless

God meant for them to come up eventually. And indeed that was what happened: Moses went down; God spoke the Ten Words to the people -- apparently in a way that was visible as well as audible to the people; the people heard and freaked out, insisting that Moses go back instead; so Moses went back up (apparently not with Aaron after all) and received the first set of extra laws beyond the Ten Words (reported or summarized from the end of Ex 20 through Ex 23); and then God said to bring Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel (also Joshua, Moses' servant), to come up onto the mountain for a meal in God's presence though at some distance. (This would be commemorated afterward with the bread of the Face or Presence of God in the tabernacle.) After the meal, Moses calls Moses (and Joshua) up higher and closer to receive the stone tablets of the Law which YHWH is writing for them, while the elders stay behind. (And presumably Joshua doesn't go all the way up, only into the cloud for six days; then Moses goes up on the seventh day for another forty days and nights.) Moses shatters the stone tablets after coming down the mountain (and collecting Joshua) for neither the elders nor Aaron nor anyone else stayed to wait for him, but had gone off to make the golden calf on Aaron's instructions.

The problem, then, was not that God had no intention of bringing them into His presence (or that wouldn't be a chief promise to us through Christ afterward), thus into the presence of the consuming fire, which shakes all that can be shaken until only the unshakable remains; but that the people clearly weren't ready for it, and

indeed preferred their sins to hearing and seeing God and being baptized with the consuming fire.

In summary, the people preferred their sins to listening to YHWH, insisting that someone else should listen and pass it on (if he survived the experience); but ultimately the chief prophet, greater than Moses, who listens to YHWH and passes it on is YHWH Himself, so what are the people going to do then if they insist on not listening to God? They think if they listen to God they shall die, but in fact if they do not listen to God -- which also involves being in the consuming fire -- their soul shall be olethron'd, the verb in Greek being {exolothreuthêsetai}.

Whether olethron-ing their soul is hopeless for them and involves them never being saved from their sins, is a whole other question. St. Paul certainly uses the word once to describe someone's flesh being handed over to Satan so that his spirit will be saved in the Day of the Lord to come, so the term even when indicating a death sentence doesn't necessarily mean a person will never be saved from his sins. More directly, the apokatastasis (or its Aramaic original) being spoken of by Peter here in Acts 3, is connected with God fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant and all that that implies, and looks also to be connected to God's plans for people eating and drinking in the presence of God without dying, listening to His word. And what is Elijah's role in the {apokatastasis pas}? Preaching a baptism of repentance unto the sending away of sin, and not only his baptism by water but Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit even fire -- so some of the



meaning is connected to whether the baptism of impenitents by fire is hopeless in Malachi 3 and 4 or whether God refines those trod into ashes thereby into purity.

Admittedly, simply referring to the apokatastasis there in Acts 3 does not in itself signify how far God intends the {apokatastasis pas}, the restoration of all things, to go; nor how successful He will be in His intentions to {apokathistêmi pas} restore all. But the restoration is definitely referring to salvation from sin, not to any result less than that.

Acts 17:16-34; (scope of salvation) (post-mortem salvation) (purpose of judgment): This is the famous incident of St. Paul being invited to speak at the Mars Hill forum in Athens. Paul develops the following line of thought built, among other things, on his rhetorical use of "all" and "each one":

1.) This unknown God, for Whom they have saved at least one altar, makes the world (kosmos, all natural creation) and all that is in it. ("All" starts off here meaning "all", unless we're talking about some merely polytheistic god and not about supernaturalistic theism.)

2.) He gives life and breath (or maybe spirit) to all. (Unless "all" has suddenly changed so that the life and breath and/or maybe spirit of some creatures comes from a source other than God, the Father of Spirits, then "all" still means "all", although where spirits are involved it may mean

"all persons" whether human or angel.)

3.) He makes every nation of humankind, to be dwelling on every surface of the earth. (Strictly speaking we know now that not every surface of the earth is habitable for human nations or tribal groups; maybe Paul knew this at the time, too, and was only making a rhetorical exaggeration for broad effect. But God is still solely responsible for the existence and ontological upkeep of all persons comprising all nations of humankind.)

4.) God does this (and appoints the setting of the seasons and the bounds of their dwelling, probably referring to the times of their death in the latter case) for them to be seeking Him if they consequently grope for Him. (Referring back so far to the same "all" persons created and sustained by God. Unless Paul is sneaking in a tacit exclusion somewhere, he's saying God intends for the same all created persons He creates and sustains to be seeking Him. If the exclusion is supposed to be that God only intends them to seek Him if they first grope for Him, that would be salvation by works, convincing God to act to save them. If the exclusion is supposed to be that they seek Him as a consequence of the natural evidence God has left for that purpose, then God's purpose is still that all persons shall seek Him -- a purpose not voided if some persons happen not to be seeking Him yet.)

5.) And they may be finding Him, for to be sure He inheres, immanently dwells, "not far from each one of us"; for in Him we live and move and

exist. (Thus it isn't like they have to grope for something far off. God's omnipresence to all those He intends to be groping for Him, is directly connected to His continual upkeep of their existence; and their finding Him is connected directly to His omnipresence.)

6.) Condoning (literally "winking at"!) times of ignorance, God is now charging mankind that all everywhere are to repent. (Even Calvinists usually agree God commands all sinning persons everywhere to repent. What they deny is that God even intends all of them to repent, and so God has not given some of them any ability or real leading to repent. The charge to repent is, for such sinners, only a sort of formal legal command, on Calvinistic soteriology. But anyway, "all" still means "all" here, even on Calvinistic soteriology, the tacit restriction being that, of course, only sinners are called to repent. God doesn't call unfallen angels to repent of their sins for example.)

7.) For He assigns a day in which He is about to be judging the inhabited earth in righteousness... (Judging all the inhabited earth, or only some of the inhabited earth? No one anywhere disagrees that God is at least judging all sinners, not only some sinners. The dispute is over whether on that day God judges saved Christians, too, and if so to what extent or in what way. Which dispute is irrelevant to universal salvation. Anyway, "all" still means "all" here, or if restricted it still means "all persons".)

8.) ... offering faith to all. (By context, the same "all" is in view that has been in view the whole time. The context also indicates God is offering faith to all through His judging the inhabited earth in righteousness.)

Unfortunately Paul's presentation breaks down once he mentions God will be doing this by "the Man Whom He specifies, raising Him out from among the dead ones"; which leads to jeering (although Paul is invited to come back, and at least two people convert subsequently, including a woman named Damaris, and the philosopher Dionysius the Areopagite traditionally believed to be the first bishop of Athens.)

The grammatic thrust of those last two points are connected: a day is coming when God will be judging the earth in righteousness, and (per the grammar) in that judgment He shall be offering faith to all: the same 'all' St. Paul has been collectively talking about throughout his speech. This, to say the least, is not what most non-universalists are expecting from the judgment of the Final Day!

It could of course still be consonant with some Arminian soteriologies -- C. S. Lewis would have no problem with it -- but at the very least the grammar indicates what amounts to a post-mortem (and post resurrection) offer of 'saving faith' at the final judgment.

It might be rather more than merely giving people a chance to 'believe', too: God is offering faith. That's an action of God, something God

does for us from the inside -- an action restricted only to the 'elect' in Calvinism, but they recognize that those to whom God makes this gift shall surely be saved from sin someday. For the faith which God is first and foremost offering, is God's own faithfulness; the faithfulness of the Persons for one another, but also the faithfulness of God to us.

To be fair, the persistence of God to victoriously save doesn't seem to be mentioned here, only the definite scope of God's intention to save (namely all mankind, or all sinning mankind, at the least); but anyone who finds that other assurance of God's salvation elsewhere testified scripturally, would be able to combine it with the evangelical intention of God toward all men here -- an intention that runs (so far as this testimony goes) at least up into the judgment day, and so must involve at the very least an offer of post-mortem salvation to all people. Whether scripture testifies to the assurance of God's victory in such salvation is another question.

Acts 20:26; (counter-evidence against universalism): Paul tells the Ephesian congregation, as he's leaving for Jerusalem never (per a prophecy he received) never to see them again, that "if anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know."

Whether this counts as evidence for some kind of hopeless punishment would depend on the larger context of what Paul means elsewhere when talking

about things like this, and also his soteriology generally elsewhere, and maybe also on whether Paul (or Luke in translation to Greek, although in Ephesus presumably Paul would be speaking Greek) is using eonian or aidios as the adjective for death there.

But none of that matters for this verse, because the quoted translation was absolutely invented by the New Living Translation crew. The Greek doesn't say that at all; not even in the Western Interpolation collections (Acts having the most additions to its text for various reasons); not even in Green's version of the Textus Receptus (which sometimes provides an alternate Greek text that doesn't even register in the Byzantine/Majority group). I couldn't even find reference to variations in other ancient languages in the critical apparatus. The one textual variant I could find, from (Greek) codex D and a few copies, only simplifies the clause leading into the translated clause and doesn't touch this part of the verse at all.

Not surprisingly, this is the NLT version against the world. No one else translates the verse this way, and it cannot even be considered a translation; the actual Greek reads Paul saying he is innocent or pure or clean of all their blood, because he hasn't hesitated to proclaim to them {pasan tên boulên tou theou} "all the will of God".

Ironically, in Paul's (later) epistle to the Ephesians, he reminds them that the secret {thelmô} will of God, for which God operates or

energizes everything in accord with the {boulê} counsel of His {thelmô} will, is that absolutely all creatures even spiritual rebels not yet loyal to Christ, shall come back to being loyal to God under the leadership of Jesus Christ (with high Christology references, too), in terms that Paul definitely connects to being saved from their sins and becoming Christians like himself and his Ephesian congregation, not annihilated out of existence or continuing on forever in torment (much less in tormented rebellion). So the NLT translators have kind of hesitated to declare to their readers the whole will of God there (or "what God wants you to know", if they prefer) that Paul proclaimed to the Ephesians and to the rest of us thereby! See notes on Ephesians 1:9-11, and afterward.

Rom 3:12; (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless): Sometimes this verse is quoted as though universal salvation from sin means people aren't sinners after all in need of God's salvation (quite literally in need of "Jesus"), which Christian universalism certainly doesn't mean!

Other times, this verse is quoted in a rather more subtle way to suggest that sinners have no worth to God, not even that God gives worth to sinners; or if not going that far (because such proponents have to admit God gives worth to at least some sinners by saving them from sin), at least the point is to rebut an idea that sinners are not worthy of being saved.

In the sense that no creature can have worth apart from the worth God gives the creature, that's true, but a Christian universalist can easily agree with that. And in the sense that God does not seek salvation of sinners in order to cooperate with the valuation of sinners by some moral authority higher than God, that's also true, and Christian universalists can easily agree with that, too. Strictly speaking, a Christian universalist could even agree that God only regards sinners as worthless, outside of Christ anyway, and yet chooses to bring all sinners into Christ for salvation from their sins, and so grant them worth in Christ after all.

My basic problem with that latter notion, though, is that it involves a schism in the evaluation of God.

(This metaphysical digression wouldn't normally belong in an exegetical study, per se, but I'm saving it here for later.)

Does the Son regard sinners as worth saving and must convince the Father otherwise? Paul says throughout Romans (especially chapter 5) that the Son acts always in agreement with the Father, including in saving sinners; and at best this idea simply contradicts trinitarian theism, so no trinitarian Christian ought to hold it.

Do the Father and the Son (and the Spirit), the Persons of the one and only God Most High, all agree that sinners are utterly of no value to



them, but then agree to change their minds about that by making sinners of value? -- and do they do this before or after acting to save the sinners from sin?! Either way, even a non-trinitarian theist (alt-Christian or otherwise) ought to pause before the idea of the ground of all reality fundamentally changing His own mind and attitude on a topic like that; though at least this notion avoids such a schism between the Persons themselves.

In any case, God creates what is good, even if created persons then abuse their God-given capabilities; and so long as anything exists, God actively keeps it in existence; so at least to that extent God actively values what exists: God would not create and sustain, even temporarily, what God regarded (before or after creation) as utterly worthless to Himself. And God's own self-existence as the ground of all reality, if trinitarian theism is true, quite literally involves all three Persons of God actively valuing other Persons! Just as we would be acting against God in principle, and so sinning, to disavow the value of persons created by God, so God would be acting against His own active principle of self-existence to not-value any created persons whom He creates and gives a spirit in His own image. God even actively keeps sinning persons in existence, despite them acting against their ground of self-existence, and so to at least that extent actively values even sinners as persons. Even annihilationists cannot consistently deny this, since no annihilationist thinks God instantly annihilates all or any persons acting against their ground of existence

(sinning against God): at least some sinners continue to exist by God's grace, and the greatest sinner has by God's active grace kept on existing (and abusing God's grace) for a very long time!

Someone might reply that Paul here testifies, against this metaphysical argument (even especially from trinitarian theism), that God fundamentally regards sinners as worthless. Or anyway Paul quotes David testifying to such.

But Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, which are slight variations of each other, don't specifically say God regards sinners as utterly worthless. They do say sinners are not "good", using the broadest Hebrew term for good, and so of course they imply that God correctly judges ungood people as not good (duh). But specifically the sinners in view are not good by oppressing instead of helping other people.

The problem isn't that they are intrinsically worthless to God, but that they misuse their God-given authority and abilities. In fact, an even more specific complaint (in either Psalm) is that the evil-doers are oppressing sinners already being punished by God! -- namely rebel Israel.

These Psalms are regarded as prophecies by David that Israel will rebel one day; shall be thrown down and imprisoned by God; shall be oppressed by the evil authorities while imprisoned for their own evil; shall repent of their own evil at least partly thanks to having to live under the oppression of evildoers as punishment for their

own oppression of other people; and then shall be saved by God Who inflicted this punishment on them for being evil -- Who in the process of that salvation shall strike down and imprison (and kill, as He shall do with rebel Israel) those who are taking the opportunity of God's punishment of Israel to mistreat Israel!

Now admittedly, David demonstrably elsewhere seems to have trouble sometimes recognizing that, in (apparently?) calling for the hopeless punishment of those who are trying to hopelessly punish those being punished by God for their sins, he is putting himself in the place of (or revealing himself to be) the same sort of person as the people he hopes and expects and prays God to save God-punished people from (especially when the person to be thus saved is David himself). And he might be doing the same thing in these two Psalms, and not realizing (yet) that he is only continuing to set himself into God's condemnation and continuing punishment by doing so. (It may not be a coincidence that David tacitly condemns himself for not having mercy on those to be punished by God for not having mercy on David being punished by God, as a consequence of David's murderous adultery with Bathsheba. "YOU ARE THE MAN!" took him by surprise on exactly the same principle after all.)

But does Paul show any sign that he understands the inspired critique (whether or not David did yet)?

Yes he does! -- for instead of using a broadly generic term for "good" in Greek, he translates

the Hebrew more specifically as {chrêstês} (in various grammatic forms)!

This term has several connotations, such as 'useful', 'golden', and by a couple of metaphorical derivatives 'healthy' or 'good for health' or 'medicinal'. By the 2nd century, apologists were taking advantage of the pun in Greek to compare the related terms Christos (anointed and so shiny with oil, literally speaking) and Chrestos, especially in the sense of Christ being medicine for healing infection (of sin) like a mustard plaster. Suetonius reports that Claudius briefly expelled Jews from Rome (not many years after the first Easter) due to instigations concerning someone named Chrestos; and Tacitus when speaking more clearly of Christ tacitly corrects the common tendency to call Him Chrestos instead of Christ (though this isn't obvious in English translations.)

The concept can be narrowed down, of course -- wine mellowed with age is declared {chrêstos} (by people who ought to appreciate new wine better) in Luke's translation of Christ's parable (5:39). But the full concept would be useful kindness, active charity.

This connects squarely to the verses from those two Psalms being quoted by Paul (or rather midrashed together): the sinners aren't just passively evil, nor even merely passively useless (or worthless), but actively do hurtful things to other people. The problem is that sinners (which we all are) are {achreios}, anti-useful, unprofitable, they don't do what is morally right

{achrê}; and what is morally right is to help and to save other people, up to and including those whom God Himself has punished.

This is also why Christians, not only non-Christians, and Jews, not only pagans, are warned by God that He regards their (our) sin as worse than that of unbelievers -- a point certainly not foreign to Paul's argument nearby!

Those who try to argue that only Christians as Christians are 'worth' anything to God, anyone else being worthless until they become Christians, aren't only stuck trying to explain why God would punish worthy Christians (even into the outer darkness of the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, where the weeping is and the gnashing of the teeth). The whole idea of trying to regard people, rational creatures (whether human or otherwise!) as worthless to God, runs directly against the principle that to despise other persons even those punished by God for despising other persons, is to put ourselves under God's condemnation -- not because we are worthless, but because we have insisted on regarding those as worthless for whose sake the Son gives His own life even unto death, being reckoned with sinners.

And that's the same as despising the sacrifice of Christ, regarding that as worthless.

Rom 5; (all things gathered finally under Christ): the famous chapter, with "all" meaning all in parallel with Adam's sin, and with the logic that whoever is reconciled to God through

the death of Christ shall just as certainly be saved into the life of Christ. Includes the famous Rom 5:20b, "where sin exceeded, grace hyperexceeded."

Rom 8:9b; (counter-evidence against universalism): see subsequent remarks on v.14.

Rom 8:14; (counter-evidence against universalism): "For whoever are being led by God's spirit, these are sons of God." Sometimes Calvinists will appeal to this verse along with 8:9b ("But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.") as evidence for a division between those whom God intends to save from sin and those whom God does not intend to save from sin. But there are two senses of sonship being discussed nearby.

The immediate sense (v.15) is that of son-placement, the raising to inheritance of those who are naturally children; but this is hardly an exclusively non-porous division, since none of us start out as sons in that sense (not being maturely responsible enough to be regarded as ready to enjoy the full rights of sonship, until which we have the status of slaves), whereas all of us start out as sons in the other far more primary sense: we have spirits given to us by the Father of Spirits, and only by His continual self-sacrificial action do we continue to exist. It is because of the far more primary sense of sonship in which we all start out, that we have any hope of being raised to authoritative sonship: if we are children, then also heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ, but only if we

cooperate with Him by suffering with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him (8:17). Far from being an exclusive salvation from sin, all creation eagerly waits and anxiously longs for the revealing of the sons of God, having been subjected to vanity in hope that the creation itself will also be set from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (8:19-22), which is itself similar to how even we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan within ourselves waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, which is the resurrection of the body (8:23).

Rom 8:21; (all things gathered finally under Christ): the creation is expected to be delivered from bondage of corruption, but this cannot happen if some of corrupted creation are annihilated, much less if some are hopelessly ever after fixed in corruption.

Rom 8:28; (warning against non-universalism): English translations sometimes obscure the order of the phrases in Greek (which while not absolute should still be taken as the first guess of translation), as well as the cases of the prepositional phrases. More literally the verse reads that "we are aware that to/for those who love God all works together into good" (or possibly "[He] works together all into good") to/for the ones being called according to [His] purpose". Part of the problem in translation is that "all" is plural in nominative case, so ought to be a subject of the verb, but "works-together" is in 3rd-person singular form indicating an unspoken subject instead of "all" -- but then

"all" should have been in an objective form (probably accusative) instead of nominative. But this is incidental. More importantly the key prepositional phrases are both dative, thus 'in regard to/for' their objects, which many translations obscure in favor of a genitive case or something else (for example "all things work together for the good of those who love God"); and there is no internal reason to move the first prepositional phrase out of its position. The actual gist of the sentence is that those who love God understand that all things work together to accomplish good to the ones called by God. Calvinist apologists are well aware that this verse cannot be interpreted with Arminian scope to those whom God seriously calls or else it would be universalistic; but even more strongly, those who accept an Arminian scope would have to regard it as a warning! -- those who do not believe God works all things together into good to those He calls (which is everyone per Arm scope) are not yet loving God enough!

Rom 8:29-30: (persistence of salvation) These verses teach the persistence unto salvation of those whom God chooses to be saved, which directly nullifies one chief branch of Arminian thought (where anyone could be finally lost even after fully converting as far as possible before death). Other Arminians still have a difficult time with these verses and generally proceed by not accounting for some of the details. The full logic however runs:



(Premise 1) Those whom God calls He predestines (or more literally foresees) (v.30) and foreknows (v.29) .

(P2) Those whom God calls He also makes just. (v.30)

(P3) Those whom God makes just, He also glorifies. (v.30)

(P4) Those whom God foreknows He also foresees conformed {summorphous} of the image of His Son. (v.29)

(P5) God works together all things (or all works together) into good to those who are called according to God's purpose. (v.28)

(P6) God seriously calls all sinners, without hidden reservations, to repent from their sins and be saved. (The Arminian scope of salvation.)

(Conclusion) God seriously calls all sinners, without hidden reservations, to repent from their sins and be saved -- i.e. to be conformed of the image of His Son, to be made just, and to be glorified; and not only calls them to be that way, but acts to make them that way (God makes just whom He calls, God glorifies whom He makes just); and God foresees and foreknows that this shall be accomplished according to His purpose, working all things together into good for all sinners.

The only escape from the conclusion is to deny the Arminian scope, or to leave out pieces of data.

Rom 8:32; (sinners given to righteous) (scope of salvation): God, Who spares not His own Son, but gives Him up over us all {huper hêmôn pantôn paredôken auton}, shall surely also be gracing {charisetai} to us the-all {ta panta} together to Him {sun autô}. Even if "us all" only means a limited elect in some way, the total scope of creation shall be shared in Christ's grace with the elect, which must include sinners! -- whom the Father shall be gracing to us! These are not expressions which involve part of creation still being in bondage: Rom 8:21 and its contexts just previously denied that some portions of creation will remain in bondage to sin and sins effects. (In other words, the elect don't get to have hopelessly punished sinners to gloat over as torture toys or anything like that.) The only way this doesn't involve at least hope (and maybe persistent assurance) of salvation of all sinners from sin, is if annihilation is true, i.e. if God surely doesn't grace to us the all together to Him but annihilates some of the all instead.

Rom 9: the whole chapter often is adduced against universalism (and against Arminianisms for that matter); but see in-depth notes. Paul's overall argument in chapter 9 favors universalism instead.

Rom 9:6-8; (counter-evidence against universalism): "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel

who are from Israel, neither are they all children because they are Abraham's seed, but 'through Isaac your seed will be named' (Gen 21:12). That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as seed." These verses are sometimes appealed to by non-universalists, especially by Calvinists, as evidence that Paul believed not all people will be saved from their sins, specifically not all the physical descendents of Abraham.

However, Paul started off with concern (one way or another, itself a prior topic) for "my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" whom he directly affirmed "are Israelites" not merely according to the flesh but also "to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the (temple) service and the promises, whose (promises etc.) are the fathers and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all God, blessed into the ages, Amen!" In other words, the same Israel by flesh who are not yet spiritual Israel, who are still stumbling over the stumbling stone, still have the promises! This is Paul's immediate consolation for his unceasing grief over his kinsmen according to the flesh who are not spiritual Israel (as indeed none of us are to begin with, thanks to sin).

It is in this context (vv.1-5) that Paul goes on to declare and discuss why the Word of God has not failed in regard to them. Their apostasy is explained according to the flesh but their salvation was never intended to be according to

the flesh but rather according to the promises: and they are still included in the promises! If the children of the flesh alone could be inheritors, the scope of salvation would be limited to the descendants of Abraham by the flesh, and then restricted further to descendants of Isaac and descendants of Jacob by the flesh. But since it is rather the children of the promise who are inheritors, then (because of the scope of the promise to Abraham, made due to the Creator of all rational spirits standing for Abraham in the covenant as the descendent and heir of Abraham) anyone can be inheritors -- including those descendants of the flesh who are currently stumbling over the stumbling stone, for they are the first of people to be included in the promises of God.

Paul quotes from Gen 21:12, "through Isaac your descendents will be named", which includes Esau as well as Jacob, thus also includes 'spiritual Esau' as well as 'spiritual Jacob'. This is why Paul can be reassure himself, despite his unceasing grief for them, that to them still belongs the adoption as sons, and the promises, and the glory and the covenants, which being all from God shall not fail.

(The covenant made by God with Abraham regarding Abraham's descendents was made by God alone, or rather between the Son and the Father, the visible and the invisible YHWH Most High, Who ensured Abraham would not be able to participate in the covenant ritual (Gen 15); thus Abraham's descendents, even if they break the covenant and are punished for it, cannot nullify it. It is the

Mosaic covenant which is broken and replaced by the superior covenant written in the hearts later -- although the end result demonstrates that even breaking this covenant isn't hopeless!)

This is also why Isaac could be inspired to bless Esau (and thus Esau's descendants Edom) in Jacob, and why God can promise that Esau's descendants will serve Jacob's. Salvation for Esau and his descendants was never predicated on the right of flesh (or Esau would have been included in God's inheritance through Isaac per 9:7 -- but most of us would not, including every non-Jewish Calvinist who has ever lived!), but on the right of God's promise. Just as God promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son, God promised that Abraham's descendants would number more than the stars of heaven regardless of the line of descent through which the agent of that promise (God Himself Incarnate) explicitly came, which is why God could promise to protect Ishmael and could promise to bless Esau.

It is true that (per Paul's continuation of the theme throughout chapter 11, to his climactic rejoicing in God for salvation) only a remnant remain grafted into the vine, and those who are connected to the vine (Who is Christ) are the true Israel -- but through the promises of God, not according to the flesh. They are in virtue of God's intentions the true Israel while grafted into the Vine, regardless of whether they were born (physically) in connection to the vine or not, and regardless of how small a fraction of the population they may be at any time: if they're grafted in, they're grafted into the

identity and into the promises. But those grafted in should not disdain those currently outside, including anyone having been taken out by God, because if God is able to graft in those born outside the vine He is even more able to graft back in those who by nature were born into the vine! -- and if God does not spare those natural to the vine from being grafted out, how much less will He spare those who were foreign to the vine from being taken back out! Grafted out why? For being stubborn against those outside the vine being grafted in!

So Christians should not disdain each other for being Jews or Greeks, and we should not disdain non-Christians for being Jews or Greeks, including Jews currently stumbling over the stumbling stone (a Pauline rabbinic pun for the Son): they haven't stumbled so as to fall, and if we (among the current remnant) insist that they cannot be grafted back in, or that anyone else currently outside cannot be grafted in (as many of us once were), we're the ones God will be grafting back out again! (Even though not hopelessly so.)

It's still proper for us, out of true love, to be unceasingly grieving for those who are currently stumbling (9:2-3a). But it's also proper for us to praise God in rejoicing that He has imprisoned all into disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. Those who are stumbling have not stumbled so that they will fall: **"MAY IT NEVER BE!!!"**

Rom 9:13; (punishment not hopeless) (counter-evidence against universalism): God chooses Jacob

instead of Esau so that God's purposes might stand, not because of works (God's choice preceded the evil deeds of both brothers) but because of Him Who calls. However, St. Paul goes out of his way to indicate the end result of Esau being hated: "it was said to her (Rebekah/Rebecca, mother of both twins), 'The older will serve the younger'". This fits entirely with Isaac's own prophecy that Esau shall still be blessed in Jacob (which Esau, rightly furious at Jacob's satanic trickery, wrongly rejected out of a lack of faith in God, selfishly holding a murderous grudge over loss of his birthright -- until later when he makes peace with Jacob!) Paul also thereby ties a meaning of ultimate reconciliation to his citation of the coming destruction of the land of Edom via Malachi 1:2f. As the land of Edom will eventually be healed and even be a highway for the righteous to pass through on the way to Jerusalem; and as Esau eventually reconciled with Jacob; so Esau's descendents shall eventually reconcile with Jacob's descendents, and be blessed thanks to the blessing of Isaac (specifically that Jacob not Esau should be the line of descent to the Messiah), thanks to God. (Also, historically Esau's descendents have already been incorporated to some extent back into Israel, politically at least, after the deeds of the Maccabees -- although with rulers like the Herods from Edom/Idumea, this relationship has been very strained.)

Rom 9:15-18; (counter-evidence against universalism): The verses cited by Paul are not about contrasting Moses to Pharaoh, but about

promising that God will raise up even Pharaoh to be a witness to the nations despite Pharaoh's own willful obstinacy (which he persisted in, between times when God was hardening his heart); and about God emphasizing His mercy and compassion in His self-existent revelation (to which His promise not to let the guilty go free is subordinate).

It was because of that verse about Pharaoh, that rabbis subsequently couldn't believe he had actually been killed off permanently while fording the Reed Sea, and so suggested various theories about God raising him from the dead afterward to serve as His evangelist. One such theory was that he was raised on the Sinai side of the Sea, humbly followed Israel up the eastern side of the Jordan in anonymity, became disgusted with their infidelity so continued north, where by God's gracious calling and power he eventually became king of Ninevah -- - thus explaining why the king of that city was so quickly willing to lead them to repentance at the ridiculously minimal and hostile preaching of Jonah! The moral of that version of the story being this, that it is not up to the man who wills (Pharaoh the rebel pagan leader) nor the man who runs (Jonah the rebel Jewish prophet and evangelist!) but God Who has mercy.

Whether Paul had that particular rabbinic theory in mind I can't prove, but the context indicates he wasn't trotting out Pharaoh as an example of someone being hopelessly punished, although certainly as someone chosen to be a vessel for pouring out wrath.



Rom 9:19-21; (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against anti-universalism): these are frequently quoted to people who complain about Rom 9 being interpreted as teaching hopeless punishment, and are especially appealed to by Calvinists against complaints about Rom 9 teaching a Calvin version of election and non-election.

To begin, I will observe in passing that this looks (in Greek) to be a statement of what will happen: the pottery will eventually not complain about being made this way. To me this seems a bit hard to square with persons originally elected, by God's own choice, to never be saved from sin (much moreso elected by God's choice to be sinners at all), and so to continually fulminate in rebellion against God forever! (Or alternately to be annihilated out of existence as rebels.)

I will also observe in passing that typically in scriptural use, vessels are used to hold and pour out something. That's true for vessels used by God to pour out destruction in RevJohn, for example. And the topic of God setting up people to pour destruction for the sake of salvation is not exactly foreign to where Paul is going soon in chapter 11: Jews and Gentiles alike have poured destruction on each other, and even on Christ, but God makes use of that for bringing His saving mercy on all. Certainly Paul emphasizes elsewhere, including in Romans (chapter 5 especially), the concept that God Himself pours mercy gratuitously on us when we are only enemies of God, thus bringing us to be

loyal and cooperative and righteous servants of God instead!

But those are in passing. More importantly, Paul has just cited ideas from at least four Old Testament prophecies.

In Jeremiah 18:6, where the Lord sends the prophet to see a potter for an analogy; the pot was spoiled so the potter destroyed it back to a lump -- and made it again. "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does? Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand O House of Israel!" This is very far from hopeless for the ruined pottery, even though YHWH goes on to predict that Israel will refuse to repent and so will be destroyed. From the description in chapter 18 verses 16 and 17, that destruction may look hopelessly final -- but that wasn't how the story ended for the pottery. (Nor is it how the story ends elsewhere in Jeremiah.) God even says in the next chapter that He is going to shatter that pot (in Gehenna / Topheth no less!) But where a human potter would be unable to remake that, unlike a pot spoiled on the wheel before baking, God can do it.

Remaking that pot, shattered beyond human power to remake, is one of the topics of another prophecy Paul is referencing, Isaiah 29:16: "You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered like with the clay, that what is made should say to its maker, 'He did not make me', or what is formed say to him who formed it 'He has no understanding'?" That's a reply to those who

try to hide their plans and deeds from YHWH in dark places, to convince themselves that no one sees them. But YHWH is also talking about a situation where, thanks to their insistence on sinning and on refusing to listen to correction and instruction, God has confirmed Israel in her ignorance, and darkened her prophets, and reduced them to being virtually illiterate when it comes to understanding the scriptures. This leads to Israel's overthrow and destruction. In fact, it leads (in the next chapter, Isaiah 30) to Israel being shattered like the smashing of a potter's jar so that not a shard remains large enough to scoop any water or even hold a coal from a fire (e.g. 30:12-14).

But most of this prophecy is about what happens afterward as a result of her destruction, after the ruthless have come to an end and the scorers are finished and all who are intent on evil are cut off, after God has shattered that pot in Gehenna / Topheth. What happens, is that YHWH deals "marvelously wonderful" with those people despite the acknowledged fact that their hearts are still far from Him and they only worship with their lips not their hearts, revering Him only by rote tradition learned from men. On that day the people God has deafened due to their sins will hear, and the people God has blinded due to their sins will see, and Jacob (sometimes standing for rebel Israel, but standing here for righteous Israel as Rachel does elsewhere) will no longer be ashamed of his children, for they will sanctify God's name and stand in awe of the God of Israel. "And those who err in spirit will know

understanding, and those who murmur (or criticize) will learn instruction!"

Even though they were not willing to repent even when the invading Assyrians came to overrun them (30:15-17), and so were shattered into Gehenna / Topheth such a way that no human could remake them, as a fired pot is shattered, God waits to be gracious and merciful to them, promising that they shall eventually repent and He shall eventually restore them with great blessings (possibly indicating resurrection here, or maybe only talking about the few survivors); binding up the fracture of His people and healing the bruise of His blow against them (e.g. v.26). The rest of the chapter involves YHWH smiting the invading Assyrians instead, striking them with the flame of consuming fire and the rod of punishment and burning them with brimstone and fire in the valley of Topheth (i.e. Gehenna but using the name of its days as a Moloch sacrifice area). The reference to Topheth per se is not only ironic (that the unjust shall be slain where the unjust unjustly slayed), but the term usage itself indicates that YHWH rejects what happens there even though He does it Himself. More importantly, God can and will remake any clay pot He shatters in Gehenna! Together with the explanation of the goal of the utter destruction of rebel Israel, this suggests God does not mean the punishment of the rebel Gentiles to be hopeless either.

Paul also no doubt had Isaiah 64:8 in mind, because he quotes from the beginning of Isaiah chapter 65 soon afterward (the chapter divisions not existing in his time of course). In 64:8, the

prophet is speaking for destroyed rebel Israel, praying in repentance that God will not be angry beyond measure but will stop punishing them and restore them. God replies (in summary) that He will keep on punishing impenitent sinners, but will restore the penitent ones. He also replies soon afterward, however, while describing the new heavens and new earth to come (in the second half of chapter 65) that eventually natural enemies shall live together in peace on His holy mountain, including typologies of ravening rebels like wolves, lions, and most notably the same bronze-serpent from Genesis 3:14 -- finally eating the dust of his humility! So the whole prophecy there in context involves destroyed sinners repenting and being restored, sooner and later, up to and including the great rebel himself.

The language at Romans 9:20 is most similar, however, to Isaiah 45:9, where God is remonstrating against those of Israel who do not believe God will stop punishing Israel and restore her to faithfulness with Him. (And, who perhaps are especially freaked by the recent prophecy that God will accomplish some of this by means of the pagan tyrant Cyrus, a man who does not even know God, but whom God prophecies will come to know of Him! Which Cyrus historically did not before he died, by the way, although he did help restore some of the dispersed Jews to Jerusalem.) The whole chapter, and its preceding prophecy from Isaiah 44, is about God's absolute ultimate power to save sinners from sin, and especially from idolatry to false gods. The end result is predicted: "I have sworn by Myself! --

the word has gone forth from My mouth unto fair-togetherness (or 'righteousness' or 'justice' in English) and will not turn back: that to Me every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance! They will say of Me, 'Only in YHWH are fair-togetherness and strength! Men will come to Him and all who are angry at Him shall be put to shame!'"

We know for certain this portion of scripture was very important to Paul, because he refers to that final result several times, including later in Romans 14:11. The scope is total salvation from sin; none remain disloyal to God, Who (per Isaiah 29 as mentioned above in similar connection to Romans 9:20) does not accept false worship of lying lips and a disloyal heart.

So then, it is true that God hardens whom He wills, as with blind Israel in Isaiah 29; but it is also true that God has mercy on whom He wills, such as blind Israel in Isaiah 29! God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endures with much patience the instruments of wrath that He has created to pour destruction.

The term for "enduring", pherô, is admittedly a broad term for "carrying" with a range of uses; but in regard to God, Paul uses it elsewhere to describe Christ's continual upkeep of all created reality, even the rebel powers and principalities: the things in the heavens who are enemies of God and so who, needing reconciliation, God reconciles to Himself through the blood of the cross. (Col 1:16-22; also Heb

1:3 in regard to Christ: He pherôs all things by the word of His power, and makes purification for sins presumably by that same power.) I wouldn't be too surprised if Paul, the rabbi Pharisee of Pharisees, was also using it as a rabbinic pun connected to Pharaoh, too! -- certainly no one who regards Pharaoh (whom Paul was talking about a few verses earlier) as a vessel of destruction, will deny that God was pherôing Pharaoh!

It's also used to talk about enduring the conduct of someone; and to spare someone from punishment and destruction; and to bear, bring forth, produce someone, or to lead them to something. If God pherôs the vessels of destruction, does He pherô bad fruit or does He pherô good fruit as a result? Is God a bad tree that pherôs bad fruit?? (Matt 7:18; which is immediately before Christ denounces followers of His who despite knowing to give Him the divine double ADNY YHWH, Lord Lord, and despite doing attesting miracles in His name, He's going to throw into the outer darkness for not doing the {thelêma} of God -- the same {thelêma} of God for all men to be saved, per 1 Tim 2:4, and the same {thelêma} of God which assures God saves all whom He thelêmas to save, as in Eph 1:11 and several other places!)

True, God takes away every branch already in Christ that does not pherô fruit (and prunes those that do so that they may bear more fruit), and those branches are cast into the fire (John 15:2f); but Paul goes on a few chapters later to show that God can graft into the Vine anyone currently not on the Vine, even if God has grafted them out of the Vine -- and that we had

better not despise those currently grafted out of the Vine, lest we ourselves be grafted out of the Vine! So again, that which does not pherô good fruit is punished (and that's the agricultural metaphor from which {kolasis} is borrowed); but surely God pherôs good fruit, being Himself the Good Tree instead! God chooses us to pherô good fruit (John 15:16); so it would be radically contradictory to say God can and will pherô someone to end up at last pherôing bad fruit! God pherôs grace instead, for which we as witnesses to the world are expected to prepare our minds for action and to fix our hope upon at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (For no prophecy was ever pherôs by an act of human will, but men pherôed by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.) Even the kings of the earth, the worst human enemies in RevJohn, shall pherô their glory and the honor of their nations into the New Jerusalem, after being shepherded by Christ with the rod of iron (as in Psalm 23)! -- walking by the light of Christ.

Should we not therefore pherô on to a mature understanding of eonian judgement as one of the original things of Christ (per Heb 6:1)? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, pherôs with much makrothumia the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

Is makrothumia (even toward those pouring destruction and wrath) not genuine love in the Holy Spirit, related to kindness, knowledge, and purity? (2 Co 6:6) If it is itself a fruit of the Spirit like humility, love, joy, peace, kindness,



goodness, and faithfulness, shall the Holy Spirit (or any other Person of God) act with some different makrothumia toward sinners? (Gal 5:22) Does God not act to reconcile those who are enemies of God, strengthening them with all power according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and makrothumia (Col 1:11) so that those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, shall put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and makrothumia (Col 3:12)? Does God's own makrothumia to sinners not result in this? -- is it different than what He bears in us as fruit?! Did God not show mercy to Paul, the foremost of sinners, himself once a child of wrath by nature (Eph 2:3), precisely so that Jesus Christ might demonstrate His all-entire makrothumia as an example of those who would believe in Him for eternal life? (1 Tim 1:16)

Does God not do makrothumia with the {boulema} that all shall come to repentance and be saved? (2 Peter 3:9) And does God not work everything according to the {boulê} of His {thelêma} as an energizing will for assurance of salvation according to God's destination? (Eph 1:11) Is that (still in Eph 1) not even the secret of God's will, in accord with God's delight which He purposed in Him (the Father in the Son), to "head up the all in the Christ", i.e. to bring all things into the federal headship of Christ, "both that in the heavens and that on the earth" as the fulfillment of the ages? Did God, intending to more superabundantly exhibit the immutability of His saving {boulê}, not even interpose with an oath, swearing upon Himself since He could swear

by nothing greater, so that by two immutable matters in which it impossible for God to lie we may have a strong expectation lying before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and confirmed? (Heb 6:17-19) Are we not therefore supposed to regard the makrothumia of our Lord as salvation, just as Paul wrote to us according to the wisdom given him? (2 Peter 3:15) Did Peter not there warn against those who twist Paul's words and the rest of the scriptures to their own destruction?

Granted, there are those who twist Paul's words and the rest of the scriptures to their own destruction. But is that warning from Peter not explicitly about making sure we deem the {makrothumia} or patience of the Lord as salvation, in agreement with what Paul writes to us concerning these things? So are we supposed to then turn around to find ways to twist verse 9 to mean less than full scope, or to twist verse 15 to mean less than full assurance of salvation? For who resists God's boulê!? (Rom 9:9)

Should we then, in regard to those vessels prepared for destruction, think lightly of the riches of God's kindness and tolerance and makrothumia, not knowing that the kindness of God leads sinners to repentance? (Rom 2:4)

And if we do regard the makrothumia of God as being of no saving account, do we or do we not store up wrath for ourselves in the day of the wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (the judgment of fair-togetherness), for

obeying wrath, indignation, and unrighteousness (non-fair-togetherness)?!

Consequently then! -- I most certainly am not going to regard God's makrothumia for those vessels of wrath prepared for destruction as being impotent, or else of light concern, in the all-mighty saving counsel of God!

Rom 9:22-23; (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless) (all things gathered together under Christ): Calvinists typically appeal to these verses as evidence of a distinction between people whom God does and does not intend to save from sin, the vessels of mercy and of wrath respectively.

However, "vessels of X" in scripture are demonstrably intended to pour out X upon something or someone. In that context, some people are made to pour out wrath and others are made to pour out mercy. The most relevant example being the bowls brimming with and pouring out God's {thumos} (though not the same term here) in Rev 15-16.

Paul as Saul was certainly among those who had been made to pour out wrath, once upon a time. Moreover, Paul certainly includes himself as a former child of wrath (same term as in Rom 9) by nature, in Eph 2:3. Considering the extremity of his description of such children (into hyperbole?), I do not see any feasible way these cannot be the same class as the vessels of wrath

in Rom 9.

The two classes of vessel are consequently not watertight (so to speak); God saves people from one class into the other class, and makes use of both in His purposes.

Otherwise Paul would not have been able to use the term {makrothumia} explicitly about them at 9:22, which everywhere else in scripture when referring to God indisputably indicates God's intention to save the objects of His "longsuffering". To deny that it means God intends for the vessels of wrath to be saved, at the very least undercuts any assurance of God's {makrothumia} in regard to ourselves, if indeed we think God has any for us at all.

Rom 9:25-27; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): St. Paul in Rom 9:25-26 (immediately before v.27) is directly referencing Hosea 1:10, where YHWH has declared of rebel Israel "you are not My people and I am not yours" (v.9).

"Yet", continues YHWH, and quoted by St. Paul, "the number of the sons of Israel [despite having been reduced to a remnant of a remnant] will be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered; and it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people', it will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God'. And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one leader, and they will go up from the land: for great will

be the day of Jezreel."

Much of the point of Hosea is that God is very angry at His rebel and adulterous bride but, after punishing her (including to the death!), she will repent and God will restore her even better than before. Paul quotes that promise of restoration elsewhere in 1 Cor 15 as being a promise of resurrection, with the famous "O death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting?" (which in Hosea 13:14 is actually calling upon death and hell to punish rebel Israel -- but in the subsequent chapter the result is that they repent and are restored because even in His wrath God actually still loves them.)

The context of Rom 9:25-27, consequently, points directly to all Israel, even rebel Israel, being eventually saved. (This can be argued from Paul's referential citations earlier in the chapter, too.) The comparison is that rebel Israel has become like the Gentiles, but God calls the Gentiles to salvation as well as loyal Israel -- so we're all in the same boat in the final reckoning of things. (This has very obvious connections to chapter 11 later, too, with people being grafted in and out of the vine of the promises to Israel, including people being grafted back in after being grafted out!)

This concept is overlaid by St. Paul with a citation from Isaiah 10:20-23, where survivors of the coming destruction will repent. This is not the same thing as rebel Israel being resurrected, and probably refers to a different coming event,

but the themes are similar. As shall happen with the survivors, so shall happen with those who didn't survive but shall live again: they may have stumbled, but not so as to fall. (See remarks on Rom 11:11 below. Also compare with the reconciliation scene of Isaiah 4, where repentant sinners are explicitly contrasted to the righteously faithful who are called "survivors". The implication is that the now-penitent sinners didn't survive the judgment of YHWH.)

If Paul believed he was talking about a non-elect whom God had no intention to save, he would not go on to say about them (10:1) that "the delight of my heart and my petition to God for their sake is into salvation." He's certainly talking about those who are ignorant of the righteousness of God (among other things), and still stumbling over the stumbling stone; not about the righteous remnant (paralleled to the 7000 remnant in the days of Elijah) who in following Christ are not stumbling over the stumbling stone.

Rom 10:14-18; (scope of salvation) (post-mortem salvation (by citing OT chapters with post-mortem repentance and salvation)): Paul specifically cites Psalm 19:1-3, where the heavens and the skies declare the glory of God all over the world, to count as evangelization by Christ; an evangelization which is not just any random good news, but which the whole context of Romans 10 indicates is explicitly the good news of salvation.

The 14th verse itself is Paul's expanding rhetorical question ("How then shall they call

upon Him in whom they have not believed?" -- and how can they believe if they have not heard, etc.?) following his own citation of Joel 2:32 that "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord (i.e. YHWH) shall be saved," which refers to the coming Day of YHWH (though per Peter's application of this scripture to Pentacost and Christian evangelization, the Day has already begun to some extent.) This directly follows much discussion from Paul about confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised Him from the dead and how this results in salvation. Verse 9: "you shall be saved" (for confessing and believing). Verse 10: "resulting in salvation" (for confessing and believing). Verse 13: "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This confession, which is the same term Paul uses in translating Isaiah 45 in Philippians 2, and later in this epistle at Rom 14:11, is a technical term meaning to praise God for His mighty saving victories. It is not a mere intellectual assent which someone might grudgingly give while still having a spirit of rebellion against the one being confessed.

Paul begins what we call chapter 10 (v.1) declaring that his heart's desire and his prayer to God for non-Christian Israel (those stumbling over the stone of offense, i.e. over Christ) is for their salvation. He cites Isaiah 28:16 at verse 11, where the context is explicitly about God punishing the people in Jerusalem who have made a covenant with death and a pact with Sheol so that they shall repent and be saved. Their covenant with death shall be canceled on God's authority and their pact with Sheol shall not

stand -- but it would be better to put their trust in the cornerstone now than to be made ashamed by God when YHWH rises up at Mount Perazim to do His unusual task and His alien work of the decisive destruction of all the Earth.

The faith that comes from hearing in verse 17 is absolutely saving faith per Paul's prior discussion of it in immediately preceding and local contexts. This is also, by the way, the context of Paul's notice (at verses 19-20, with OT quotations) that Israel had been alerted ahead of time that in one way Gentiles who were not even seeking God would be saved before Israel! Chapter 11 continues the theme of Israel's coming salvation, too: God has not rejected His people, even though they have rejected Him and stumbled over the stumbling stone (which God foreknew would happen). But they have not stumbled so as to fall -- may it never be!

Admittedly, Paul's point here is that Jews (even in the dispersion) have had the same witness from general revelation that everyone else has had, even when they weren't paying sufficient attention to their specially granted revelations. (Paul quotes Isaiah complaining that not all Israel had believed his special revelation to them from God.) But the message from which faith comes is heard through the word of Christ, and Paul's question of whether the Jews have heard the good news of Christ is answered by his reference to general revelation that is available to both Jew and Gentile.



Paul himself goes on, precisely in his reference to Psalm 19, to indicate that the Jews who were rejecting their specially granted revelation (as in Isaiah 53 along with tons of other places in the prophets) still had general revelation available to everyone that they were also rejecting. "But (verse 18) surely they [who at verse 16 rejected the gospel as exemplified by their rejection of Isaiah] have never heard [the word of Christ from which comes faith, per verse 17], have they? Indeed they have!" Whereupon Paul quotes Psalm 19.

It may be strange for Christians to consider this general revelation as being also the saving word of Christ (which of course can be rejected as well as accepted), but it fits Paul's argument earlier in the chapter that the Word (which he explicitly identifies as Christ, although in the OT scripture he is citing the Torah is immediately in view) doesn't have to be brought down from heaven by anyone or brought up from the swirling depths by anyone (a Jewish euphamism for the prison of rebel spirits!), but that the Word (== Christ, Who is the Word of faith being preached by the apostles) is already near, "in your mouth and in your heart". For what purpose? -- to lead people to confess Jesus is YHWH/Lord and that God has raised Him out from the dead, and so be saved.

I also observe that the rabbis, when regarding Isaiah 52:7, considered the beautiful feet bringing good news, as cited by Paul at 10:15, to be first and foremost the feet of the Messiah! In the OT the feet do belong to someone singular --

by context they seem to belong to YHWH Who says "in that day, I am the one Who is speaking, 'Here I am!'" and Who bares His holy arm to save Jerusalem from their folly of allying with pagan oppressors. Paul renders them the feet of plural persons, no doubt to include evangelists less than Christ in Christ's purpose of evangelism. But Christ's purpose and capability of evangelism happens to be primarily in view elsewhere in Romans 10, so it is reasonable to infer that Paul was reminded of the typical rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 52:7. The themes of Israel's salvation from idolatry and from their punishment and oppression as a result of their idolatry, are not exactly foreign to either Paul's nearby argument nor to the other OT verses he cites nearby, of course.

While I grant post-mortem repentance isn't verbally in view here, the repentance in view does have strong connections to OT chapters where rebel Israel has been slain in their sins and yet God still somehow brings them to repentance afterward, as part of the extended and increased evangelism of the Day of the Lord to come. God Himself, in and as Christ, is our chief evangelist, Whose lead any creaturely evangelist is following but Who doesn't necessarily need us for His evangelical work to be both total in scope, and total in success, whether in regard to those in the heavens or those under the earth (or even in the abyss).

Rom 11:11; (punishment not hopeless): "I say then, they [Israel who was hardened and at various times stumbled over the stumbling stone

Who is YHWH and Christ] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? **MAY IT NEVER BE!!**"

What does stumbling and falling mean here?

Based on the context, the ones who have stumbled (or at least some of them) are:

1.) sinning;

2.) grafted out of the promises and so are not part of the remnant.

So "falling" can't be either of those two things. (Because Paul doesn't say that some of the ones who have stumbled will not fall, but is talking inclusively about all who have stumbled over the stone of offense. His point wouldn't tally up if he was only talking about some of the ones who have stumbled.)

The only thing that makes sense to me that would be worse than stumbling out of relation to the vine (i.e. not only stumbling out of relation of the vine but stumbling so as to fall) would be to never be grafted back in again. But Paul expressly says that God can graft back in the ones He has taken out.

I think that's what fits the meaning of stumbling but not so as to fall.

Paralleling the metaphors then:

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stumbling  --  --  --  --  --  --  --  --  --  --
--  so as to fall  --  --  --  --  --  --  --  --

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-- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- not so as  
to fall

grafted out of the vine -- -- -- can't or  
won't be grafted back in -- -- -- -- - can  
and will be grafted back in

Whether Paul was answering eternal torment  
proponents or not, I think he was addressing a  
concern that the promises of God would be voided  
if some of Israel was finally lost. And I'm  
pretty sure most or all commentators agree he was  
concerned with this from at least chapters 9  
through 11: he starts (what we call) chapter 9  
with unceasing anguish over his fellow Israelites  
and ends chapter 11 with praising the unexpected  
awesomeness of God, so one way or another he has  
to be getting from point A(anguish) to point  
P(raise) so to speak.

What theologians have duels over is how and why  
he gets there. Is it because God's promises don't  
really count for some Israelites because not  
everyone Israel by nature is Israel by spirit?  
That's the standard non-universalistic approach  
(whether the result is ECT or anni), and Paul's  
vine-grafting kolasis metaphor (note that this is  
exactly the horticultural situation behind the  
punishment term {kolasis}) does involve something  
of this sort, so they aren't pulling that  
interpretation out of the nether. (Besides Paul  
says as much in this section of chapters, that  
not all those who are Israel by flesh are Israel  
by spirit, or vice versa!)

What I notice is that such an explanation doesn't

fit Paul's strong insistence that God's promises do still count, and not only for loyalists still in the vine of Christ (though obviously for them, too): in fact none of us, whether native to the vine or not, remain in the vine. All have sinned and have fallen short (or more literally and quite appropriately are wanting) the glory of God. This is love, not that we have first loved God, but that while we were yet helpless and sinners, God sent His Son to die for our sake.

What does "May it never be" mean? Does it mean that it's possible but Paul hopes for better?

Theoretically it could be used more literally to mean 'that might happen I suppose but I pray it never does', but generally the person exclaiming this expects God to ensure it never happens. The term is definitely used this way by St. Paul elsewhere in Romans: "The God Who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous is He? May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world?!" (3:5-6)

Or for that matter verse 3 of the same chapter: "So what if some [i.e. of the Jews] disbelieve?! Their unbelief will not be nullifying the faith of God, will it? May it never be! -- let God be true though every man a liar!!"

This is one main reason why I absolutely have to interpret chps 9-11 later in such a way that the unbelief of those who stumble over the stumbling stone does not nullify the faith and the promises of God: God will be faithful to those who stumble, for the sake of the fathers (i.e. to the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob),

even if those who stumble are not faithful to God.

But, neither does that mean people can just sin and it doesn't matter, much less that we ought to sin so that grace will increase (which Paul says some people have been slanderously charging he teaches). Those who sin get grafted out of the vine (for some brisk cleaning, if other NT punishment contexts are remembered, not even counting the contexts of the OT verses Paul constantly cites!); but that can hardly be considered hopeless since we all are grafted out of the vine at some point.

Indeed, part of Paul's ground for believing God will save all Israel (Rom 11:26) is that YHWH Himself, and no one less than YHWH, will be the kinsman-Redeemer for Israel, cleaning Jacob and turning Jacob away from injustice, to make a new covenant with Israel with the Word and the Spirit of God in their mouth and their hearts. On this promise he cites Isaiah 59:20-21. But YHWH has just gotten through saying that, since no one else can save Israel, He's going to armor up and kill the wicked completely -- which would include (as often noted throughout the OT) rebel Jacob! Yet YHWH will also clean Jacob and make a new covenant with him; and the end result of YHWH's punitive war will be for all the Earth, from the west to the rising of the sun, to fear and glory (in a good and positive way) the name of YHWH -- which is also the name of Jesus, as in Acts 2:38-39. Interestingly, the armoring language here is very similar to the poetic language used by Paul in Ephesians 6 for Christians to armor-up with in

order to fight, not against flesh and blood but against the powers of the world: spiritual peace being again the goal.

Rom 16:25; (everlasting not everlasting): the mystery of the gospel has been kept secret from times eonian, but now the eonian God has authorized the revelation and proclamation of the gospel. The eonian God is indeed everlasting, but the times of the secret had a beginning and certainly are having an end (and in a real sense decisively ended long ago with the Great Commission given by Christ.)

1 Cor 5-6; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): this whole chapter (and probably some of chapter 6) centers on St. Paul's judgment against the Stepmom-Sleeping Guy, whom Paul in the name of Christ judges (though absent from Corinth) by handing the SSG over to Satan, into the whole-ruination or total destruction or extermination {olethron} of the flesh. Whatever this means, it's super-harsh, and Paul might be expecting the man to die from it, but it at least means (as the context goes on to explicitly suggest) that the SSG is being put out of the Christian community at Corinth to be judged by God as an outsider who (per chapter 6) shall not be inheriting the kingdom due to his adultery. Paul also talks in chapter 6 about how Christians are expected to judge angels {aggelous krinoumen}, which necessarily must involve rebel angels.

However, Paul draws the angel-judging comparison to indicate that they ought to be competent to judge civil cases among each other, which would normally involve reaching fair judgments to reconcile brothers to one another (rather than taking such cases to the pagan legal courts), and which might suggest the goal of judging angels, though maximally important by contrast, has a similar goal in view -- ditto Paul's judgment of handing the SSG over to Satan. And back in chapter 5, however far Paul intends the SSG to be punished, even if it's to the death, he clearly and explicitly intends the man's spirit to be saved in the day of the Lord to come. The wording even implies that Paul expects the man to die before that happens. Compare with 2 Thess 1:9 (and contexts) where Paul uses the same term {olethron}, described as being eonian, to talk about the punishment coming to evildoers from even the mere presence of Jesus in that Day to come: Paul's verbal comparison to Isaiah 2's prophecy of the same situation indicates that while such people may not die immediately, they'll eventually be compared and contrasted to those who survived the situation instead! Yet then again, per Isaiah's same prophecy, at least some of those who were wholly ruined by the appearance of YHWH (and it is clearly YHWH coming to do it in Isaiah 2-6, with Jesus thus being identified as YHWH by St. Paul), shall come eventually to the "survivors" to petition for reconciliation, and they shall be accepted by God and cleaned by the fire of His spirit, brought finally into comfort. This fits Paul's expectations of the SSG's spirit being saved "in



the day of the Lord Jesus". (See also extensive comments on 2 Thess 1:9 and contexts.)

See also 1 Tim 1:20, where Paul hands the drastically fallen teachers Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan, not for hopeless punishment, but so that they may be taught not to blaspheme. The Greek verb for "taught" is {paideuthôsin}, a cognate of the verb to be instructed like children, and the same term used in the first half of Heb 12 for lovingly hopeful punishment of inheriting children.

1 Cor 12:3; (God and honest loyalty): Just as the Holy Spirit would never inspire a person to say that Christ is anathema, a person who confesses Christ to be Lord can only do so when led by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 15:20-28; (all things gathered finally under Christ) (post-mortem salvation) (scope of salvation) (persistence of salvation) (punishment not hopeless) (God and honest loyalty): without getting into the technical questions of who will be resurrected when (per verses 20-24); Paul testifies to the goal and result not only of the general resurrection but also what Christ intends by reigning in punishment over various sinners.

Once the Son has nullified all rule and all authority and power, the final enemy being "the death" (v.26, probably a reference to Satan by euphemism), He shall deliver up His kingdom to the God and Father. (v.24) Until then, until He has put all His enemies under His feet, the Son must reign. (v.25)

But seeing as how the Son already reigns as the 2nd Person of God, Whose kingdom not only shall never end, but the increase of Whose kingdom shall never have an ending, how shall He be reigning in a way that He shall stop reigning once all His enemies are under His feet? And how are all His enemies not already under His feet? Moreover, how are all His enemies not already under His feet once He starts reigning in this way which He shall eventually stop reigning?

Because while sinners still rebel, they are not His willing subjects, even in relation to His reign as God Most High, so also not to His reign after the general resurrection. All things (except of course the Father) must be brought under true subjection to Him, as the Son Himself is always subject to the Father. (v.28) A still-rebellious "subjection" is not the subjection of the Son to the Father, and is not what the Son seeks to give from creatures to the Father in cooperation with Himself.

Paul even (v.27) cites Psalm 8:4-9 when explaining what it means what the subjection of all things to Christ means, and thus what Christ's reign means. It isn't a hostile reign, but a benevolent reign, with the strength against the satans and those who seek revenge (per the Psalm) coming from the mouth of infants and nursing babes, the most harmless and innocent persons. These are who will rule over the satans and enemies and those who seek revenge, and who shall cause them "to cease" -- which cannot mean such sinners shall be ruled over and "ceased" by

those who are their enemies seeking revenge against them!

Consequently, the "alls" back in 15:22 must both mean the same extent of all; just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. The extent is total either way, and the being "made alive" is not to an unending or otherwise final death for some people dying in Adam. Those who are raised to a resurrection of judgment, whenever that happens, shall be lead to repent by Christ so that He may present them in proper subjection to the Father. Among other things, their repentance means properly subjecting themselves to Christ, and ceasing to be adversaries or to seek revenge against anyone.

Nor is the scope limited in principle only to those rebels who die in Adam and so who, having died, can be resurrected per se: all rule and authority and power (using terms for rebel spiritual powers elsewhere in Paul's epistles), even that of "the death", shall be abolished; but their abolition also means "the satans" are being put under the feet of YHWH, and that's a benevolent reign for bringing them back to proper subjection (not to annihilation as finally impenitent rebels, much less to never-ending rebellion).

This is the {telos}, the end, the completion, which God is striving for and shall reach, so that God may be all in all.

1 Cor 15:54-58; (punishment not hopeless) (assurance of evangelical scope) (assurance of evangelical victory) (post-mortem salvation): Paul declares at the end of what we call chapter 15 that we, his beloved brethren in Christ, should become settled, unmovable, superabounding in the work of the Lord always, being aware that our toil is not for nothing in the Lord. "Now thanks be to God, Who is giving us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

This would make maximum sense if the victory of evangelism was maximal; which at least implies Calv persistence in saving those whom God chooses to save. But does it also imply maximum scope? The eschaton prophecy of vv.20-28 would seem to indicate so. But wouldn't it be great if there was independent confirmation, in this same discussion by Paul, of what Paul meant, one way or another?

Well, right before Paul exhorts us to keep on being steadfast in expecting total victory of our toil in the Lord (which must mean evangelism), he quotes two similar verses, one from Isaiah 25:8 and one from Hosea 13:14.

Isaiah 25 follows a chapter where God utterly destroys the earth, punishing heavenly armies (which must mean rebels) and the kings of the earth on earth, gathering them together, confining them in prison like in a dungeon, after which they will be... well, the Hebrew word there (pawkad) is a primitive one that means a whole bunch of things, which can include being

punished. But they're already being punished, so it might be worth looking at some of the other meanings. The basic meaning however is "to visit". That can be visiting with hostile intention, or with helpful intention; and God has already been hostile to them! There are numerous applications of the term which could mean that they shall be remembered by God, cared for, set free.

Anyway, chapter 25 continues the theme of God ruining, destroying and killing tyrannical Gentiles (including Moab and its fortress specifically). The end result being aimed at by God, however, is also mentioned with scattered references along the way, with special focus in the middle of this prophetic hymn -- which is where Paul is quoting his verse: "And YHWH of Armies will prepare a feast of plump foods for all peoples on His mountain; a banquet of aged wine and fat pieces of meat with marrow, refined aged wine! And on this mountain He will swallow up the face of the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is woven over all the nations. He will swallow up death for all time, and ADNY YHWH will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for YHWH has spoken! And it will be said in that day, 'Behold, this is our God for Whom we have waited that He might save us! This is YHWH for Whom we have waited! Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation!'"

But that only applies to God's righteous people, right? Maybe to God's righteous people among the Gentiles, too (though that would be hardly

imaginable to ancient Jews), but anyway surely by "all people" God doesn't mean the tyrants, too, right?

Well, actually, in verses 3-5, leading directly into the beginning of the victorious peace of verses 6-9 (quoted above), when those strong rebel ruthless tyrant people are overthrown by God and see how God has saved the helpless and weak (whom the rebel tyrants now number among!), the "uproar" (or rebellious chaotic shouting) of the foreigners will be subdued, and the song of the ruthless will be silenced. But that means they will be hopelessly destroyed, maybe even annihilated out of existence, right? As with verse 14 in the following chapter? -- "The dead will not live, the shades will not rise, therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and You have wiped out all remembrance of them!"

Well, whatever it means for those rebels to not live or rise for their remembrance to be altogether wiped out, it apparently must include what God prophecies (through Isaiah) in chapter 25 to be the result of all this overthrow and defeat: "Therefore a strong people will glorify You; cities of ruthless nations will revere You!"

So they cannot in fact be wiped out of existence, yet in some way they must be wiped out of existence; and in some way they must rise again, yet not rise again!

Their destruction as sinners and rebirth as loyal followers of God, in peace with the people they persecuted, would go a very long way toward

fulfilling all these disparate bits of information. It also happens to fit the punishment/salvation theme of 1 Cor 15's middle portion.

Perhaps (not??) incidentally, it also happens to fit the prophecy from the second half of Isaiah 26 where, after stating earlier (at verse 14) that the dead will not live and the shades will not rise due to the punishment and destruction from YHWH, the same punished ones seek YHWH in distress as a pregnant woman in labor who can only bring forth wind, admitting that they could not accomplish deliverance for the earth nor give birth to the inhabitants of the earth. The result of their repentance? "Your dead will live! Their (or My) corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawnlight, and the earth will give birth to the shades!"

So, in fact, after repentance the apparently annihilated rebels from 26:14 will be brought back by God after all -- the parallel of the wording cannot be accidental.

(And then in the sequel chapter, Isaiah 27, in the midst of further colorful descriptions of the forthcoming destruction of rebels, up to and including slaying Leviathan, God speaks of that same day of wrath to come, "I have no wrath! Should someone give Me briars and thorns in battle, I would step on them [i.e. on the briars and thorns], I would burn them up completely. Or let him take hold of My protection, let him make peace with Me, let him make peace with Me!")

At any rate, Paul is here quoting a chapter where the Gentiles are being saved, and he is doing so in context of a discussion of the general resurrection, which in turn is being discussed in context of the salvation of Christ. (And that chapter of Isaiah tends to indicate that it's all the nations, including the die-hard rebels against God, which will see this new life and salvation. But the die-hard rebels will first have to die before they repent. Which God explicitly contrasts to the righteous remnant who are warned to take shelter until all this has come to pass. It is, in fact, Passover imagery.)

The other quote at 1 Cor 15:55 is from Hosea 13:14. This whole scroll is primarily about rebel Israel, sometimes typified by "Ephraim" (which is almost certainly a reference to Absalom the rebel son of David who died, hanging from a tree with a bleeding head and a side pierced by a spear, in the forests of Ephraim between Jerusalem and Jericho. Isaiah has more than a few things to say about rebuking Ephraim, too, not-incidentally, including in chapters closely subsequent to Isaiah 25.)

Basically the same material is covered in this chapter as in Isaiah 25, except the focus is on rebel Israel rather than on the rebel Gentiles. Some of the language of rebuke and destruction is even strikingly similar; for example v.3, "Therefore they [idolatrous Israel] will be like the morning cloud, and like dew which goes away early, like chaff which is blown away from the



threshing floor, and like smoke from a window."

God complains that He has been YHWH their God since they came out of Egypt and they should have known no other god except Him, "for there is no savior beside Me!" The people He cared for in the wilderness became fat and satisfied once they found pasture, and their hearts became proud. So God is going to rip them open like a leopard or a lion, seeing as how they are now "against Me, against your help!"

In fact, the whole 13th chapter is a warning about God's destruction coming upon Ephraim (and also upon Samaria for doing the same ungrateful rebellion against their only Savior). If we only read this chapter, we'd be wondering (quite literally) what the hell Paul saw in this to praise God about in regard to a saving resurrection! -- for verse 14, which he quotes, is presented more as a question: "Shall I ransom them from the hand of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight!!"

In other words, the immediate context looks a lot like God is calling on Death and Sheol to destroy them! Because God is calling on Death and Sheol to destroy them!

But afterward, in chapter 14, God calls on rebel Israel to return to Him for they have stumbled due to their injustice. And in fact God promises to heal their apostasy and will love them freely, for His anger will turn away from them, and He

will restore them to the fullness of His promises for them. But! -- and this must have been what Paul understood -- not until He has completed His prophecies of utter death and destruction for them, down into Sheol! Death and Sheol first, then they'll learn better, then restoration.

This is why Paul can quote a verse from Hosea where God actually calls on the sting of death and Sheol, and use the same phrases as a victorious rebuke against death and Sheol: for the resurrection goes beyond the punishment of God into the reconciliation of sinners with God.

At any rate, Paul is here quoting a chapter where Israel isn't being saved yet (in fact she's being destroyed for being a rebel adulterous idolatrous unjust proud ingrate!), but eventually will be (after the destruction), and he is doing so in the context of the general resurrection, which in turn is being discussed in the context of the salvation of Christ.

So the question from before about the scope of God's persistence in salvation from sin (though not necessarily from punishment), is answered: yes, the scope is total. Rebel Gentiles + rebel Israel (plus even the rebels in heaven grouped with the rebel kings of the earth!) == everyone, all sinners. No sinners are excluded from God's salvation. The verses referenced by Paul fit the interpretation of the God in Christ saving Christ's enemies who will be resurrected to wrath -- but not to hopeless wrath.

In summary: at the end of his discussion on the resurrection, in what we call the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, St. Paul exults in the victory of the general resurrection (by God and in connection to the resurrection of Christ) over death, by (rhetorically) taunting death and the 'pit' (sheol, hades) with two similar quotes from (what we would call Old Testament) scripture. Paul quotes these two verses in context of rejoicing about the victory of Christ in bringing about a widescale resurrection; and the material he quotes is about the resurrection of the post-mortem penitent dead, slain by God in their sins, not about the resurrection and transformation of those who have died in Christ (nor about those who are Christ's at His coming), even though that was Paul's immediately prior topic. This combination of utter and total scope of evangelical victory not only lends independent and close-context confirmation to the interpretation of total scope and persistence of evangelical victory in the prophecy from St. Paul (given not long prior in the middle of what we call chapter 15) about the Son submitting to the Father as all people (including those who were His enemies) after the general resurrection (thus post-mortem) have submitted to Him so that God may be all in all; it also explains why Paul exhorts his Christian readers to keep toiling at evangelism with the assurance that our work will not be in vain in Christ. (See also comments on 2 Cor 6:1-2)

2 Cor 2:5-11; (punishment not hopeless): Paul talks about someone (sometimes thought to be the

Stepmom-Sleeping Guy from 1 Cor 5) who has caused great sorrow to all the Corinthians in the past, whose punishment {hê epitimia}, the upper-honor, the only time that term is used in the NT, comes {hupo tôn pleionôn} under (thus by) the many (so probably meaning the punishment comes from the group, but possibly referring to the Persons of God). Paul is explicitly circumspect about who and what he is talking about "so that I won't be burdensome" by bringing up the details, but it's a situation where Paul himself, not only the congregation, might be regarded as having been offended by this person. And whatever this punishment is, it's strong enough that the receiver is at risk of being "overwhelmed (made down-drunk) by excessive sorrow". Paul urges the Corinthians to counteract that risk by freely giving joy to him ({charisasthai}, to grace someone, as a term for forgiveness) and to console him, thus confirming (validating, ratifying) their love for him. Paul promises to forgive him, too, if they'll forgive him; and moreover Paul regards this ratification of their love, against the (still entirely legitimate) punishment of the person, to be important because to inflict hopeless punishment on him would be a device of Satan by which he would gain more control over them!

2 Cor 5:15 - 6:1-2; (scope of salvation) (all things gathered finally under Christ) (post-mortem salvation) (warning against non-universalism): the traditional chapter division tends to regard 6:1-2 (including the citation from Isaiah 49:8, and Paul's application of it to the present day) as being topically connected more with verses 3ff on

the witness of a good Christian social life, so the point would be not to receive the grace of God and yet have an empty life.

However, this does not at all square with Paul's citation of Isaiah 49 and its contexts, which are extremely different. But those contexts do square up in interesting ways with Paul's famous declarations ending out chapter 5; leading to an exegetical argument that chapter 6 really ought to have started with verse 3 "We are giving no cause for offense in anything so that the ministry is discredited" and so on.

Whatever else Isaiah 49 is about, it is not about living a good life as a witness to the nations for their salvation (good advice though that is for evangelism). Nor is it about a day of salvation (or multiple days thereof) when the Lord supported His people in the past relative to Isaiah's day.

Isaiah 49, including Paul's quoted verse 8, is totally about God's promise to support His people in the future, even though they have betrayed Him once again, when He arrives visibly to rescue them from being overrun by pagan armies in the great and terrible Day of the Lord to come.

This is also thematically woven with God speaking to righteous Israel as His servant -- often regarded by Jews as referring to the King Messiah to come, and of course applied by us Christians to Jesus Christ as the ultimate Messiah (with the prophet taking turns speaking for the Father and the Son), perfectly fulfilling the role of

righteous Israel. So when YHWH says at verse 8 "In a favorable time I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you" He is by narrative design speaking to Israel exemplified in the Messiah.

Paul in referring to this verse and insisting that now is the day of salvation and the favorable time, therefore probably refers to the Father having helped and saved the Messiah/Son -- that time to come was in the future of Isaiah (when the Servant seemed to have toiled in vain and spent His strength for nothing and vanity) but has now been accomplished in Paul's recent past. God's grace (per 2 Cor 6:1) was not in vain after all, despite He Who knew no sin coming to be a sin (offering) on our behalf (5:21 immediately prior). What was the goal? -- why was the Servant spending out His strength to the final extreme? "So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" answers Paul (5:21b); yet not only us, but in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself (5:19) for which reason we are now the ambassadors of God exhorting people and begging them on behalf of Christ "Be reconciled to God!"

As Arminians (and their Catholic predecessors) are aware, and emphasize, God graciously reconciles the whole world to Himself through Christ. Which definitely fits Isaiah 49 where God highly praises the servant and gives to him not only all Israel, both rebel and righteous, but also all the Gentiles. Even though the rebel armies are going to die choking on their own blood, they will somehow be reconciled with

Israel after all, their kings and queens serving Israel humbly. And righteous Israel, grieving over the death of rebel Israel, will be amazed when God not only brings back and restores rebel Israel somehow, but also children they never bore (referring to the Gentiles). The scope of God's intention to save there is, at least poetically, total.

But as Calvinists (and their Catholic predecessors) are aware, and emphasize, God's grace was not and shall not be in vain; as God's reply to the concern of the Servant that he has wasted his strength in vain in Isaiah 49 refutes concluding that the Servant really has wasted his strength; and as Paul stresses here in 2 Cor 6:1.

Just as the Father's grace in saving the Son was not in vain, so the Son's sacrifice on the cross will not be in vain: whomever God intends to save from sin, shall be successfully saved by God.

The love of Christ similarly compels those of us who have concluded that One died for all, therefore all died, and He died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (5:14-15)

To preach less than Christ's goal of reconciling all those who died, for who all He died, or to preach that Christ's reconciliation of any to God shall be in vain, is to receive the grace of Christ in vain -- and, not incidentally, this routinely "gives cause for offense, discrediting our ministry"!

Nor is this topic foreign to Isaiah 49: the purpose of the Servant of God is to bring Jacob (here standing for rebel Israel) back to God so that all Israel may be gathered to Him. (v.5)

To which God adds that being His Servant to both raise up the tribes of Jacob and also to restore the preserved ones of Israel is not enough (which must in context refer to the resurrection of rebel and faithful Jews respectively, thus also to the post-mortem salvation of rebel Jacob!) -- God will also make His Servant a light to the nations so that God's salvation will reach to the ends of the Earth!

Just as the Servant and Holy One, Who was despised and abhorred by the nation of Israel, is rescued by YHWH, so shall rebel Israel who despised the Holy Servant be rescued; and as rescuing all of Israel is too small a thing to honor and glorify God (v.3, 5), so shall God's salvation (the phrase from which Jesus literally derives His name) go out even to the pagan kings and princes who shall come to loyally serve the Servant of Kings (vv.6-7)

Notice! -- any attempt at trying to minimize the actual scope of intention (whether in Isaiah 49, or in what we call the transition between 2 Cor 5 and 6) to save rebels back into honoring and glorifying God, will instantly and fatally crash into the principle that bringing less than all to honor and glorify God, is too small a thing to honor and glorify God!



If God fails to bring all to honor and glorify God, God fails to properly honor and glorify God; if God didn't even intend for some rational creatures to honor and glorify God, God would be dishonoring and blaspheming God! God cannot be honored and glorified with dishonor and blasphemy; and the Persons of God do not honor and glorify each other by giving each other creatures of final dishonor and blasphemy.

The Father has given the Son to us (in Isaiah 49) explicitly as a covenant of the people, that as the Son was answered and saved (after dying no less!) so shall the land be restored and the desolated areas (desolated by God in punishment for sin) be rebuilt, and those in prison and in darkness shall be called forth to show themselves and come to God from the north and from the west even from as far away as "the land of 'the thorns'" (i.e. Sinim, which may be a prophetic reference to China which came to be known by a similar term in several languages. But which surely stands in a pun for the furthest destitution imaginable.)

This is all despite the avowed fact (such as at 49:25-26 but in many other places also) that God intends to utterly kill the pagan armies invading and besieging Israel at the time of His visitation and rescue of Israel from them. But this is so that (as in v.26) all flesh will know that YHWH is the Savior and Redeemer and the Mighty One of Jacob, who in this prophecy is rebel Israel (sometimes "Jacob" stands for righteous Israel, but not in this prophecy -- and the application of Jacob's name to rebel Israel

is itself evidence of God's intentions toward "Jacob" by comparison with the original Jacob who sometimes wrestled against God, and who sometimes even acted like a Satan to those who trusted him): with the results that prophetically follow from people coming to know this, namely (as earlier in the prophecy, with strong though poetic indications of resurrection of the evil as well as the good), final loyalty to God and reconciliation between men.

So while I can and do agree that 2 Cor 6:2 by itself is no argument for post-mortem salvation, in connected context with the preceding verses conjoined with the situation being referenced by Paul in Isaiah, I would argue that Paul is actually admonishing his readers not to be ministers of a lesser reconciliation, and so not to receive the grace of Christ in vain, but to remember instead the example of Christ and His resurrection as the covenant given by God Whom we can expect to keep His side of the covenant (even if we fail or intentionally fall on our side of it) in bringing about God's goals for Christ's sacrifice: the reconciliation of all sinners, living and dead, Jew and Gentile, to God (and in God to each other as well).

Just as God reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and assigned to us the ministry of the reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18), that ministry is explicitly this, and nothing less than this (v.19): that God was in Christ reconciling the world, the "all things" which come from God (v.18), to Himself, not counting their rebellions against them. As ambassadors for Christ (v.19-

20), God has placed in us the "Logos of reconciliation" Himself! Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were exhorting through us: "we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!"

No scope less than the all things made by God, would properly honor and glorify God. No result less than the all things made by God, would properly honor and glorify God. Even after the day of destruction by God, the time is still acceptable for God to listen to the repentant, and the day of salvation remains for God to help all who have rebelled against Him, however many have died in sin (who in the long run is all of us who are sinners, for whom Christ Himself also dies).

And just as we are expected as ambassadors to urge rebels to reconcile to God, as we have been reconciled, so those who work most together with God urge fellow workers with God: DO NOT RECEIVE THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN VAIN! For (5:21) God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

He will have done that in vain, if He does not succeed; He will have done that in vain, if He does not intend to bring all who dishonor and blaspheme God to honor and blaspheme God.

Anything less than total scope, anything less than total victory, is too small a thing for the Father to honor the Son in His suffering, and is too small a thing for the Son to honor the Son with His suffering.

Just as those who have not yet received the grace of Christ are urged to receive the grace of Christ; so also those who have received the grace of Christ are urged DO NOT RECEIVE THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN VAIN!

We are being, at best, poor and incomplete royal ambassadors if we do.

Note that the infamously difficult verse at 5:21 (where Christ, despite never sinning, is "made sin" for us so that we might become the righteousness of God), has a strong relationship to Hebrews 9 and Galatians 3 (via Hebrews 10, where the author talks about Christ sacrificing Himself as a sin offering), which is itself a major (though not well known) set of evidence for God's intention and eventual success at universal salvation from sin.

**Gal 3:6-8;** (scope of salvation) (persistence of salvation): St. Paul argues that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham, but says this in direct citational context of Genesis 18:18 which prophecies that God shall justify the nations by faith: all the nations cannot be blessed in Abraham, the believer, unless all the nations come to have faith in God. By the same token of proportion, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them" -- and in fact no one is justified by the Law before God. All nations have sinned: corporately, individually, and universally. All nations means everyone in

relation to the same context when talking about sin; the prophecy indicates (unless there are good reasons to believe otherwise) all nations means everyone when talking about being saved into faith and becoming sons of Abraham.

Even more importantly, the promise of blessing to all nations is really being offered to Christ, the seed of Abraham (verse 16). Nor can the Law, which came 430 years later, nullify that promise nor invalidate a covenant (actually made with the Son by the Father through Abraham) previously ratified by God. For God grants it to Abraham (and thus to Christ) by means of a promise. Consequently, the failure of both Jews and Gentiles to keep the Law (and Paul recognizes that even Gentiles who do not have the Torah still have a conscience inspired by God to act as Torah within them so that no one has excuse but all are shut up under the Law), does not supercede the promise made to the Son by the Father to bless all nations: a blessing that Paul explicitly identifies as salvation from sin and the reception of the Holy Spirit through faith.

If the promise is given to Christ by the Father, and fulfilled for Christ by the Father, then how would the Father not be shamed by promising to the Son less than what was achieved through sin: the corruption of all humanity?! Or how would the Father not be shamed by giving up or (worse) being incompetent to fulfill that promise to the Son?!

**Gal 4;** (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists point to Galatians 4 as evidence

of interpreting Genesis to mean that the children of Hagar are a separate people who aren't children of God and not chosen by God to be saved from their sins.

Hagar's son Ishmael was also a son of Abraham, and God went very far in promising protection and blessings for him. Paul, in the middle of talking about (and grieving over) those descended from Abraham who are not spiritual Israel, reiterates that those who are not currently spiritual Israel still have the promises, the covenants, and the blessings (up to and including the Christ) given to the patriarchs. (Rom 10-11) They may have stumbled and are currently stumbling over the stumbling stone, but not so as to fall.

Paul's reference to Hagar in Galatians 4 uses her as a metaphor for the covenant of Mount Sinai, being under the Law, which covenant Israel broke and was punished for, but which will be replaced in those who broke it with a superior covenant. (And notice that Hagar's descendants by the flesh weren't making that covenant at Sinai!) Sarah represents the covenant of promise, which only God (incarnated as Abraham's descendant) made with God, not with Abraham (by God's gracious provenance) except in the sense of Christ standing as Abraham's seed; consequently, this covenant cannot be invalidated by the misdeeds of Abraham's descendants. (Similarly the "everlasting" priesthood of Aaron, from the Sinai covenant, is abolished in favor of the priesthood of the Messiah Who is established "not after the law of a carnal commandment but after the power of an endless life". (Heb 7:12-18))

This is the context of Paul's comparison and complaint to the Galatians, about them going back to the covenant of Sinai rather than the covenant of Abraham (through Isaac). Hagar represents the present Jerusalem currently under slavery (Gal 4:25), but those people are not inherently non-elect in the Calvinist sense or no one could be called out of Hagar into the promises of Sarah, the free mother! -- yet Paul says this has happened with his audience (and with him as well). It is even more suggestive that Paul reckons Ishmael, the child of Hagar, into the covenant of Sinai and the present Jerusalem, out of whom we are converted into the promises to Sarah. So there is no absolutely utter distinction in Galatians 4 between "the son of the bondswoman and the son of the free woman": Christ sets us free with the freedom of the free woman, the freedom of the heavenly Jerusalem. But we are set free from the slavery of being immature heirs.

(Galatians 4:1-7, not incidentally, is where Paul talks explicitly about adoption NOT being adoption of those who aren't already children, but adoption of those who are naturally children. On the contrary, he denounces (v.17) those who shut out others even so the others may seek the ones who shut them out! When we mature we are son-placed by the authority of the father into our inheritance; until we mature we remain slaves, though still children of the father.)

It is in this context that Paul quotes Isaiah 54 at Gal 4:27; which (from back at least as far as

Isaiah 49, maybe even Isaiah 47 insofar as Babylon is often mystically identified with rebel Israel) is about Israel being a faithless and treacherous wife who slew her husband (the classic Suffering Servant prophecy from Isaiah 53), and who was punished by God for a moment but who shall be saved everlastingly by Him. There is simply no two separate people in this example, in the sense required.

(See also comments on Paul's statements just previously in Gal 3.)

**Eph 1:9-11;** (all things gathered finally under Christ) (rebel angels saved) (scope of salvation) (certainty of salvation): the secret of God's will, in accord with God's delight which He purposed in Him (the Father in the Son), is to "head up the all in the Christ", i.e. to bring all things into the federal headship of Christ, "both that in the heavens and that on the earth" as the fulfillment of the ages. The all-things must refer to and include those which are not yet led by Christ (thus are ignorantly neutral or in rebellion), as Paul goes on to distinguish in verse 11 that this is the same Christ "in Whom our lot was also cast". Paul also says in verse 11 that God operates ({energeô}, a present active participle) the all in accord with the counsel {boulê} of His will {thelmô}, the same secret will being, as Paul just said, to bring all things into the federal headship of Christ, including things in the heavens and on the earth which are not yet loyal to Christ.



Calvinists (and their Augustinian Catholic predecessors) like to appeal to the "secret will" of God as an explanation for why God supposedly chooses never to even try saving some sinners from sin, much less giving them any ability to do anything other than sin; Paul however explains that the secret will of God is to save all sinners from sin, which He is definitely going to accomplish sooner or later! -- though sooner with some persons than with others.

**Eph 1:18-23;** (all things gathered finally under Christ) (rebel angels saved) (descent of Christ into hades): Paul is praying (in verse 18) that his Christian readers will be enlightened in the eyes of their heart so that they will know what is the hope of God's calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These things (19b) are in accord with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ when He (the Father) raised Him from the dead -- which would be more accurately translated from Greek "raised out of the dead ones" plural (verse 20) -- to be seated in the right-hand of Him among the heavenly ones.

Even if the reference to the dead ones (plural) is discounted as mere style, or only as referring to dead bodies instead of actual dead persons (although then the parallel contrast reference to "heavenly ones" wouldn't seem to refer to actual persons either!), this is still by any reckoning a reference to Christ descending not merely to Earth in the Incarnation but descending to lower

parts of the earth where the dead are. (e.g. Ezekiel 26:20, "Then I [YHWH] will bring you [Tyre] down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I shall make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit.") This fits a translation of Christ descending "in(to) the lowers" or "into the lower parts" "of the earth" later at Eph 4:9.

Paul goes on to say in verses 1:22-23, that the Father under-sets all {panta hypetaxen} under the feet of Christ and gives Christ to the out-called (probably meaning the church here) as head over all {kephalên huper panta}. Headship always implies (later if not sooner!) a proper coherent relationship to those under the head, and the relationship in this case is not merely to the ecclesia but to {panta}, all. It is as the head of all that Christ, Who (very emphatically) fills complete the completion of the all in all (verse 23), is given to the Church (over which Christ is also head of course) by the Father.

And who is also included under this headship that shall complete the completion of the all in all? Every {archês} and {exousias} and {dunameôs} and {kuriotêtos} (every original leader and authority and power and lordship) and every name that is named not only in this age but in the age to come, using terms typically recognized in Pauline language as referring to rebel spirits (human or otherwise).

No doubt since they are still rebelling and so are not yet under the headship of Christ in

proper subjection to Him, much less completed to the emphatic extent of completion by Christ, such promises would be an example of assurance by prophetic promise: the fulfillment is as certain as if it was already fulfilled. And not incidentally, Paul's point here is to reassure Christians and teach them to understand (what they had apparently not understood yet but which would be revealed to them eventually) the total extent of the hope of God's calling, the total extent of the glory of His inheritance to the saints, and the total extent of the surpassing greatness of His power into us {eis hêmas} the ones who believe in accord with the energy of the might of the strength of Him! Just as the Father had the strength to raise Christ out of the dead ones, so He shall have the strength to do all those other things, too. But those other things explicitly include bringing the rebel powers under the headship of the Son so that God may fully complete them, too.

Paul prays back in verse 1:17 that "the Father of the glory" may be giving Christians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the realization of Him, enlightening the eyes of our hearts, into our perception of what we should expectantly hope about this calling. One way or another this would involve the Holy Spirit also leading Christians (sooner or later) to perceive both the utter extent of this evangelical expectation and its utter assurance of salvific victory! So far in Christian history, Christians tend to perceive one or the other assurance but not both; yet either side regularly recognizes that whichever

assurance they perceive does come to them thanks to the operation of the Holy Spirit.

**Eph 2;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (evidence against Calvinistic non-elect): some non-universalists, especially some Calvinists, think that this chapter somehow counts against universal salvation on the ground that no one, or more precisely no sinner, starts off in citizenship of the kingdom but are saved from their sins into loyal citizenship of God's household by the grace of God. Christian universalists wouldn't typically disagree with that, however. Some of us (myself included) disagree that we were utterly not children of God before God saved us and merely adopted us into His family, but that is because we (along with some Calvinists when they think this counts as testimony for God's special election!) remember Galatians 4 among other places, where Paul clearly indicates that by "son-placement" he means the raising to family authority and responsibility a child who is already the son of the father (not at all "adoption" in the sense being usually appealed to here), although the child is treated as being a slave so long as the child is immature and/or rebellious. Similarly, in writing to the Ephesians (most of whom were not previously Jews), Paul speaks in this chapter (v.19) of Gentile Christians no longer being guests and travelers (sometimes mistranslated as "strangers and aliens" as in the NASB) but fellow citizens with the saints and being of God's household. The translation there is somewhat important, because guests and travelers are to be honored in Near Middle Eastern contexts! --

although Paul does agree elsewhere, such as the beginning of the chapter, that as impenitent sinners we are alienated from God and children of indignation and sons of stubbornness. Even so, there can be no absolute distinction here between Calvinist elect and non-elect, for Paul testifies that he and his fellow Christians were among the sons of stubbornness and children of indignation (vv.2-3)! Despite this, God, being rich in mercy because of His vast love with which He loves us, brings us to life together in Christ, saving us by grace, and rousing us together seats us among the celestials in Christ Jesus (v.4ff). Along the way, St. Paul quotes from Isaiah 57, where God talks about how He punishes rebels even to death in order to lead them to repentance and salvation from sin, promising that He will surely succeed at this and so comfort both those who were punished and those who are mourning over those who have sinned. (See comments on Isaiah 57.)

**Eph 3:7-11;** (scope of salvation) (salvation of rebel angels): one of the purposes of the church, and of St. Paul as a saint, in cooperation with the purpose of the ages which God the creator of all things brought about in Christ Jesus our Lord, is to make known the inimitable riches of Christ and the manifold wisdom of God, not only to the Gentiles (as well as the Jews), but even "to the rulers and authorities in the heavens".

That these are paralleled with the Gentiles is evidence in itself that Paul is talking about rebel angels; but he also uses identical (though somewhat expanded) phraseology later in the same epistle chapter 6:12 when talking about our war

against the world rulers of this (present) darkness, against the authorities and against the spirituals (in other words the spiritual authorities) of evil in the heavens.

Since the goal of making the inimitable riches of Christ known to Gentiles is to seek their salvation from sin, calling them to loyalty with the one and only God Most High, so the goal would be the same when making this known to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.

Notably, Paul says earlier in chapter 3 that this mystery in Christ was not made known previously to the sons of men as it has now (in Paul's day) been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; but while he refers first to the inheritance of the Gentiles as fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of Christ, Paul writes elsewhere (such as to the Romans) that this was revealed plainly and often enough to Israel of old, but due to their hardness of heart Israel wouldn't hear it.

Refusing to hear that we are supposed to be evangelizing even rebel angels to salvation, this being Paul's example of the utter scope of evangelical outreach (in other words if the demons are included, the Gentiles could not possibly be excluded), would thus be parallel to Israel refusing to hear that Gentiles would be grafted into the promises of Israel.

**Eph 4:6;** (God the Father of all): St. Paul says here that there is "one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all", a

standard Jewish description of God Most High's ontological superiority to creation (which Paul gladly recognized among pagan philosophers, too). For some non-universalists, especially among the Calvinists, the issue here is whether Paul is saying God is only the Father of those He elects to save from sin, or perhaps whether Paul is talking about a merely creational fatherhood that has nothing in the least to do with salvation from sin which would be an entirely different fatherhood (though admittedly dependent on the ontological fatherhood). Universalists, and most Arminians, would regard this as a false distinction: God's ontological fatherhood of all is exactly the ground for God's saving love and actions toward all sinners. Calvinists, and universalists, would then however complain that Arminians turn around and (accidentally) deny or throw away this important ontological point when trying to explain why God changes His mind about (or otherwise intentionally stops acting toward) saving some sinners from sin, or is outright defeated in His salvation by some sinners.

(Calvs and Kath's would also complain that most Arms are tacitly denying this salvific importance of universal ontological fatherhood in regard to rebel angels, holding instead after all to a Calvinistic limited election while supposedly denying it. To be fair, this criticism against Arminians only works against those Arms who deny that God ever even intended for Satan to be saved from his sin; Arminians could propose instead that Satan had a real chance to be saved but God eventually gave up on him even though God could have succeeded had He continued, or else that

Satan somehow permanently defeated God's saving intentions and competency -- basically the same principles by which they explain final perdition for some humans. But then Calvs and Kaths would complain that this means the ontological Fatherhood of God has failed or ceased! -- which should be impossible, if we're still talking about any supernaturalistic theism, including any variety of trinitarian theism. An Arminian could only avoid this criticism by ceasing to appeal to the ontological Fatherhood of God as ground for God's saving love and action toward all sinners.)

Is there any evidence immediately or locally around Ephesians 4:6 to point in one or the other direction? The fact that St. Paul insists on this Fatherhood immanently as well as transcendentally is, I think, important: God is not merely transcendentally the personal creator over all, but acts as Father through all and in all: {dia pantôn kai en pasin}. Do the two different ways in Greek of saying "all" mean anything? Not intrinsically, they're both just different forms of {pas}, with {pasin} being the dative form proper to the preposition "in", and {pantôn} being both the genitive form which silently implies "of" by itself and the accusative form proper to the other two prepositions "over" and "through".

The term either way could mean a totality of all, or some of all types. But a denial that the term means the totality of "over all" would be a denial of supernaturalistic theism; and the grammatic construction indicates that each prepositional phrase, not only "of all", is



supposed to apply in reference to both "God" and Father". So it would be very strange for Paul to have meant that there is one God and Father of some of all types, over everything and everyone, through some of all types and in some of all types! The reference should be parallel in all cases, and coherently affirm supernaturalistic theism (if that is a Biblical doctrine which any scriptural trinitarian theist should agree with me about.)

Immediate or local context would have to be very strong to indicate otherwise. But the immediate and local context is about the assurance that Christians ought to be kind and humble and patient with one another in the bond of peace because there is one body and one spirit (or Spirit) and we were called in one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father etc. (Note that this may be personally distinguishing the Father from the Lord and the Spirit, although a confession of one Lord should be equivalent in monotheism, especially Jewish religious monotheism, to a confession of one God and Father. This is one of the evidential texts for trinitarian theism or at least for binitarianism.)

Does that local context mean Paul is only talking about God being God and Father over some, namely over Christians, thus also only "of" some and "through" some and "in" all of some (or some of all types)?

Possibly, but that would be very strange in a confession of religious doctrine based on the

form of the Jewish supreme declaration of YHWH as uniquely superior to all lesser lords and gods by being self-existent and their creator and master. Still, a wide selection of Christians must have admittedly understood at least {en pasin} that way because the qualifier {hêmin} "of you-plural" was added to the text early across a wide family of text types.

(A slightly earlier and just as extensive family of texts don't have "in all of you" only "in all", including the only papyrus copy of Ephesians. Many early and later universalists cite the passage without "of you", including Origen, Gregory Nyssus, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Eusebius the historian, and Didymus the Blind, plus Athanasius who at least strongly admired Christian universalists, but so does Augustine and Jerome. On the other hand, they were originally universalists as Christians and admirers of Origen along with several other universalists like GregThaum and Didymus, whom they continued to admire after rejecting Origen, so that preference may come from a phase of theirs. At any rate Metzger and the UBS editors argue that there is more reason to add {hêmin} as clarification than to delete its original occurrence. It might be reasonably replied that early universalists managed to use their prevalent influence to remove the term from the text, but that would require acknowledging Christian universalists were both early and doctrinally influential in the Church. Which they admittedly were, but non-universalists tend not to know it or prefer to admit it. Insert irony as appropriate!)

We can at least see from the addition of {hêmin} as clarification (or from its omission by conspiracy, if my reader prefers), that without such a clarification being explicitly or tacitly made, the verse would imply from the strength of its grammatic construction that God operates as Father, not only as God, in and through all persons, in parallel to God being authoritatively over all persons. And that, theologically, would add up to universal salvation (as the one hope of our calling into which we were called, per verse 4) .

As Calvinists acknowledge, whomever God operates in and through as Father is someone God intends to save from sin; and this operation is presented as being parallel to God's authority and ontological power as Father emphasizing the assurance of God's eventual salvific success (sooner or later as God sees best fit to bring it about in concert with His overall planning) .

But then, if God's authority and ontological power over the total whole is being appealed to in verse 6, by grammatic construction we would normally regard this same totality being referred to in the extended claim about God being Father in all and through all: total scope of intention and action to save (as Arminians typically recognize, if not always here) as well as total authoritative and potent assurance of salvation (as Calvinists typically recognize, if not always here) .

The only way out for Calvinists, ironically (since this is what they normally strive to affirm and protect over-against challenges from Arminians), is to deny that Paul is really appealing to God's authoritative ontological potency over all creatures totally in verse 6: since that would mean Paul was referring to total intention to save from sin in other details of verse 6!

Arminians must on the other hand deny that Paul was really talking here about the scope of God's intention and action to save sinners from sin, but was only limiting his discussion to Christians (which would not work well in Arminianism with Paul's connection of this statement to the "one hope in which we called" back in verse 4, because Arminians especially stress and protect the hope that God intends and acts to save all sinners from sin -- you can be sure that God means to save you not maybe you); or else they may claim Paul was switching back and forth between God being authoritatively over only some as Father but acting in and through all as Father (which would mean appealing to the greatness of God in salvation under-against a lack of God's greatness as Father. Which, at best, would not be much of an assurance of God's intention to save all sinners!)

These gymnastics are not all grammatically impossible, although a division of God and Father in application to the various prepositional phrases would be grammatically impossible in this case; and a Calv or even an Arm might argue that the local context of Paul talking to and about

Christians is plausibly strong enough evidence to take one or another route. My observation is that they would each be doing so against the importance of salvific assurance (original persistence or scope) that each is trying to affirm and protect.

(Despite my criticism here, I hope my reader will at least appreciate that I'm trying to be fair in favor of at least a possible non-universalistic interpretation based on at least some proper interpretative principles. I am not merely proof-texting "God and Father of all" as though that simply solves everything in favor of universalism.)

An observant reader may have noticed I haven't yet looked at immediate and local context in the other direction, after verse 6. (Somewhat further prior, at Eph 3:14-15, Paul bows his knees before the Father from whom every or the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name!) I do believe that this other contexts weighs in favor of the hope we are called into as Christians, which we ought to be using our different spiritual gifts to promote not only among ourselves but evangelically among those not yet Christian -- which no Arm or Calv would disagree about in principle, I suppose. But I also believe it weighs in favor of that hope being for eventual universal salvation.

The grammatic and other contextual issues are far more detailed than for this verse, though, so please refer to my comments on Ephesians 4:8-10.

**Eph 4:8-10;** (descent of Christ into hades) (salvation of rebel angels) (scope of God's salvation) (assurance of God's salvation) (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless): If Ephesians 4:8-10 refers to post mortem salvation to even some degree, that would lend subsequent contextual weight to Eph 4:6 referring to God being both God and Father of all not only in the sense of being authoritatively over all persons (including those currently rebelling) but also authoritatively through all and in all persons (including those currently rebelling), with the parallel implication from the ontological importance of God as unique self-existent Creator of all that God can and will potently bring about reconciliation with those sinners whom He is Father through and in. (There are however some other contextual issues which might weigh toward a more limited application of verse 6 to only current Christians, or neutrally to all eventual Christians which might be a final selection out of all sinners. Please see comments on Ephesians 4:6.)

Some opponents argue that since "lower" in "lower parts of the earth" is in the comparative and not the superlative, and since the word "of" (for "of the earth") is not in the original Greek, then Paul must have only been referring to the Incarnation, with the ascent being the Ascension.

First (and this is going to take a while), it's true that the word "of" doesn't appear in the Greek, but Greek has no word corresponding to "of" (in this sense) and instead signals that meaning by genitive grammar -- and {tês gês} is

genitive. "...of the earth" is an entirely standard and uncontentious translation. So this doesn't read that Christ descended to the "lower earth", i.e. compared to heaven, but to the "lower parts of" the earth. Which implies a descriptive comparison (if not a contrast) between lower and higher parts of the earth. For which there would be no need, and which wouldn't make sense, if Paul was only talking about the Incarnation. But it makes good sense if Paul is at least talking about Christ being buried. But then, which captives is Christ leading out from among the dead ones where He was buried?

Granted, a descent in Incarnation fits with the theme of a descent/ascent or humiliation/exaltation Christology which first describes Jesus coming to earth, then ascending to heaven, but so does a descent in Incarnation and then suffering in the Passion to the grave -- a theme which no Christian of any stripe denies. By the same token, so would descent into spiritual hades (not merely a physical pit/sheol/grave) fit that theme (much moreso to save His own condemned enemies there!), as an ultimate humiliation in which Christ paradoxically exalts. Why we should stop with such a theme only at the Incarnation and not include at least the Passion and Burial?! But if the burial is included then the concept of Christ rising not merely "from the dead" in a general sense but "out of the dead ones" (which is the sense of the Greek) becomes more important.

In attempting to argue that the phrase "in[to] the lower [parts] of the earth" refers only to

the earth as a lower place compared to heaven, opponents may try to claim that the genitive fits a rare situation, of which there are at least two others in Ephesians, where in English translation it switches place with another noun. The intended effect would be that Christ descended to the earth of the lower(s), or to the earth of the lower parts, suggesting that the Earth was the portion of the lower parts Christ descended to.

However, the fairly clear example of this effect at Eph 2:14 doesn't feature a prepositional phrase followed modified by a genitive phrase. That makes a difference because the debated phrase at 4:9 reads pretty straightforwardly {eis ta katôtera [merê] tês gês} "in(to) the lower [parts] of the earth", not simply "the lower [parts] of the earth". If it was the latter, Paul might (but not certainly would) mean "the earth of the lower [parts]", although that would be an odd way for Paul to talk about earth under heaven (though to be fair Ephesians is stylistically unique in any case!) -- but grammatically it's harder to switch the noun of the genitive phrase with the noun of a full accusative prepositional phrase: "in(to) the earth of the lower parts". It's true that 2:14 involves an accusative noun switching place (in English meaning) with a genitive noun, but not from within its own prepositional phrase: "the midwall" is simply the object of the verb, not an object of a preposition as at 4:9.

The same is true at 2:15, which reads literally "nullifying the law of the commandments": it could read instead "nullifying the commandments



of the law" (and probably was intended to mean that, where "the Law" means "the Torah"), but {ton nomon} 'the law' is simply a direct object to the verb, not the object-noun of a prepositional phrase.

Much less do instances where English translators move around phrases and terms from their printed order to synchronize with English word-meaning orders, count as examples of this concept. 6:16, for example, puts the verbs, the direct objects, and the genitive description of one of the direct objects, in very clunky places by English grammatic standards, requiring that the phrases and terms be moved around from their printed order to make sense in English: literally "you-shall-be-able all the darts of the evil-one the ones being-firery [or those having-been-set-on-fire] to-extinguish", but in English grammar "you shall be able to extinguish all the set-afire darts of the evil one". But unentangling the goofy Greek word order doesn't require a genitive noun to switch grammatic functions even with a direct object, much less with the object of an accusative or dative preposition.

6:17 again involves untangling weird Greek order in the words and phrases, although not nearly as crazed (by English standards) as in verse 16: literally "and the helmet of the salvation receive, and the sword of the spirit which is a declaration of God", which doesn't need much shuffling to fit English grammar construction "and receive the helmet of salvation and [receive] the sword of the spirit which is a declaration of God". Where does a genitive noun

switch places in grammatic function with any noun there in the translation??

But: even if legitimate parallels could be found in Ephesians for switching a genitive noun with an object of an explicit but different kind of prepositional phrase, that wouldn't mean this verse features that sort of intended meaning. Various levels of context indicate the genitive noun should (maybe) be switched (in English) with the direct object in two other verses; otherwise we would read those verses the way the grammar indicates! The contextual argument would have to be solidly established first here, too.

Second, while it is true that the adjective there is the comparative version of "low" (with grammatic modifications to make it fit the accusative noun "the parts" for the prepositional phrase "in the parts" {eis ta merê}), the only other time this adjective is used in the NT is at GosMatt's account of Herod's slaying of the children two years and lower. Which is obviously an example of the term referring inclusively to all portions below a level: the point to Herod's slaughter was to pre-emptively kill every boy two years old and under.

Third, there are some early respectable Greek and other language transmissions of the text (including its only known papyrus) which do not include the {merê}, leaving the direct article "the" (in plural and accusative form) to be the object of the preposition "in"; thus "in the [things]". With the comparative adjective this would be translated "in the lowers" or "in the

lower-things". Or putting the whole phrase set together: "in the lowers" or "in the lower-things" "of the earth". Whether copyists added "parts" to clarify, or omitted it as being redundant to the meaning, is unclear; but either way it distinguishes some "lower" location or extent relative to "the earth" more generally. In fact, using the comparative adjective as a noun in such a way was one way to talk colloquially about hades! -- a colloquialism still retained in the Greek speaking Eastern church over the centuries.

Fourth, the prepositional phrase for "the lowers" or "the lower parts" (depending on whether the noun there was original to the text) is "{eis} the lower [parts]". {eis} usually means "in" or "into", or by extrapolation from "into" it could mean "to". But any translation departing from the basic meaning of "in" ought to be justified by context. Unless there is a good contextual reason for thinking otherwise, the phrase would indicate a meaning of Christ descending in or into the lower parts of the earth. That sounds like burial at least; and of course that would open up the possibility of applying the phrase as a standard Jewish euphemism for where spirits of those who died (especially rebel spirits) reside. Which also happens to be how the early church routinely read the phrase, even by people who denied post-mortem evangelism for anyone other than righteous OT heroes.

Fifth, comparison of 4:8-10 with Eph 1:21-2, to try to argue that Christ was only taking evildoers prisoner, not freeing prisoners, should

include more of the surrounding context, at least as far as Eph 1:18-23. This explicitly talks about Christ descending to rise from out of the dead ones, not merely descending to Earth to rise in the Ascension. (That portion of Ephesians is far more famous for being a Christian universalism main text anyway; see comments on it elsewhere.) Even if the reference to the dead ones (plural) is discounted as mere style, or only as referring to dead bodies instead of actual dead persons (although then the parallel contrast reference to "heavenly ones" wouldn't seem to refer to actual persons either!), this is still by any reckoning a reference to Christ descending not merely to Earth in the Incarnation but descending to lower parts of the earth where the dead are. Which fits a translation of Christ descending "in(to) the lowers" or "into the lower parts" "of the earth" in the verse under dispute, 4:9. Paul goes on to say in verses 1:22-23, that the Father under-sets all {panta hypetaxen} under the feet of Christ and gives Christ to the out-called (probably meaning the church here) as head over all {kephalên huper panta}. Headship always implies (later if not sooner!) a proper coherent relationship to those under the head, and the relationship in this case is not merely to the ecclesia but to {panta}, all. It is as the head of all that Christ, Who (very emphatically) fills complete the completion of the all in all (verse 23), is given to the Church (over which Christ is also head of course) by the Father. And who is also included under this headship that shall complete the completion of the all in all? Every {archês} and {exousias} and {dunameôs} and {kuriotêtos} (every original leader and authority

and power and lordship) and every name that is named not only in this age but in the age to come. No doubt since these spiritual powers are still rebelling and so are not yet under the headship of Christ in proper subjection to Him, much less completed to the emphatic extent of completion by Christ, such promises would be an example of assurance by prophetic promise: the fulfillment is as certain as if it was already fulfilled. And not incidentally, Paul's point back at the end of chapter 1 was to reassure Christians and teach them to understand (what they had apparently not understood yet but which would be revealed to them eventually) the total extent of the hope of God's calling, the total extent of the glory of His inheritance to the saints, and the total extent of the surpassing greatness of His power into us {eis hêmas} the ones who believe in accord with the energy of the might of the strength of Him! Just as the Father had the strength to raise Christ out of the dead ones, so He shall have the strength to do all those other things, too. But those other things explicitly include bringing the rebel powers under the headship of the Son so that God may fully complete them, too. If Ephesians 1:21-22 is supposed to be conceptually related to 4:8-10 (which I strongly agree it is), then we are told in more detail what the goal of the campaign was, that it shall certainly be accomplished, and that (not incidentally) the descent of Christ wasn't merely to the earth but to the grave, even to the place of the dead ones, just as His subsequent ascent was to the place of the heavenly ones.

Sixth, an opponent may argue that the Psalms source (Psalms 68:18) that forms the background of 4:8-10, indicates that Christ has taken prisoners after some sort of campaign, not freed those who once were prisoners.

But Psalm 68 does very explicitly feature God freeing prisoners in the Day of the Lord to come (which Paul is comparing in principle to the original descent of Christ): the Psalm starts out with hope of the day to come when YHWH shall destroy the wicked and lead out the prisoners into prosperity leaving the rebellious to dwell in a parched land! (verses 1-6) That is exactly the context of verse 18, where God ascends on high leading captive His captives! -- which shall result (as verse 18 also says) not only in God receiving gifts among men from those who are His followers at His coming, but even also from the rebellious so that "YaH God" may dwell with them!

It would also be worth observing that in extended context (indicated elsewhere in the OT), those people who are being saved by God from imprisonment by the rebellious were put into that situation by God in the first place as punishment for their own rebellion.

I certainly allow that the specific events in view by David are most likely the institution of the millennial reign before the general resurrection (of which the OT has a lot to talk about), and so the rebels who repent (despite being left in the parched places deprived of their prisoners) could be survivors of God's militant wrath against them (with Egypt sending

envoys, although other prophecies indicate she will hold out a while due to faith in her river against punitive drought for continuing to rebel, and with Ethiopia -- pagan at the time of the Psalm's composition of course -- quickly stretching out her hands to God, 68:31).

Even so, "God is to us a God of deliverances, and to YH God belong escapes for death" (verse 20, difficult to interpret or even to translate). And while God shall bring back someone from Bashan (historically a land not only of super-pagans and enemies of Israel but also ruled by Og last of the Rephaim, one of the descendents of the Nephilim, at the time of its conquest and total slaughter by the armies of Israel) and from the depths of the sea -- the latter of which is certainly one of the poetic ways of describing places where rebel spirits are imprisoned, and given the ancient context of Bashan in connection with rebel spirits slain and imprisoned by God, namely the Nephilim, so would "Bashan" in this case -- in order to shatter them in blood and feed them to dogs (which must refer to a continuation of their punishment)...

...nevertheless, there are indications even in Psalm 68 (vv.15-16) that the mountain of Bashan shall become the dwelling place of God, despite Bashan being also the mountain of many peaks which is envious of the mountain of God.

(The physical territory of Bashan is somewhere in what became Gilead and eventually Samaria; which matches with Ezekiel's prophecy that in the coming millennial reign of YHWH on earth a new

city and sanctuary complex will be built, along with the restoration of Jerusalem, 30 miles north of Jerusalem for YHWH to reside and for many of the sacrifices to be reinstated. In any case, even though the territory of Bashan shall be desolated by God's wrath, especially in the Day of the Lord to come, it shall eventually be made fruitful again by God, as its name itself implies.)

And if the rulers of Bashan/the depths of the sea are the same rebels who were imprisoning the people God rescues from imprisonment -- where God Himself had sent them as punishment for their own sins -- then even Psalm 68 indicates that those rebels shall give gifts to God eventually in order for Him to live with them. Which may be why Psalm 68, after mentioning God bringing them back from the depths of the sea to harshly punish further, states that "they", same pronoun referent, have seen the procession of God into the sanctuary: which is at least related to (if not exactly the same as) the temple at Jerusalem for which kings will bring gifts to God (v.29).

Seventh and finally, an opponent may draw attention to an Aramaic Targum commentary (probably contemporary with and even prior to the epistle's composition) on Psalm 18. The Aramaic commentator interprets the Psalm as applying to Moses the prophet (instead of to the Messiah, much less to YHWH) suggesting that the Psalm describes when Moses ascended into the skies at Sinai to learn the words of the Torah and give it as gifts to men, "tak[ing] captivity captive" while doing so. (This phrase and ascending to



heaven do not appear in Psalm 18, but there are other things in it which could amount to those concepts, and other parallels to Eph 4:8-10 as well as to the end of Eph 1 for that matter are not lacking.)

The argument would be that since there is obviously nothing in the Targum's use of the phrase ("taking captivity captive") to suggest that Moses went to Hades and freed a load of prisoners, that means Paul has taken over this language to express Christ's own fulfillment of Psalm 18, with equally no parallel idea of a descent into Hades.

That, I answer, might depend on whether any of his readers ever heard Paul teach that the righteousness out from faith regards Deuteronomy 30:12-14 as referring, not to Moses bringing the Torah from Sinai (much less bringing the Torah from across the sea), but to Christ descending from heaven and coming up out of the swirling depths (i.e. the Abyss) from among the dead! (Rom 10:6-8) But admittedly, even if they had heard Paul teach that before, they might not recall it, and so might not connect Paul's teaching on this to Christ's descent in the lowers of the earth here in this epistle.

In conclusion, regarding Ephesians 4:8-10: there are some curious things to be said in favor of why the early Church often interpreted those verses to refer to Christ's descent into hades to defeat Satan in what he regards as his most secure fortress, and even to raiding hades to

bring out penitent prisoners (with some conceptual variations for what that should mean).

However, despite my counter-criticism above, I am actually willing to grant that a raid into hades was not what Paul was primarily focusing on here, but rather was trying to talk about the propriety of gifts to be used by Christians for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ; so that, holding to or walking in or speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into Him Who is the head (namely Christ) from Whom the whole body, being fitted and held together through every supplying joint, according to the working-measure of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

But if (as I think) Paul was at least alluding to the salvation of sinners by Christ from even hades at 4:8-10, then while I would still agree this wasn't what he was mainly talking about, I would also think the idea makes a strong topical contribution to what the building up of the body in love involves: total scope and persistence from us (following God's lead) in leading sinners to God's salvation from sin; the gift of hope even for those in hades; the promise and assurance that Christ shall save sinners, wherever they are, as surely as He Himself rose from the grave out of the ones who are dead.

This ought to have been an important part of what we were proclaiming and heralding all along, some as apostles, some as prophets, some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints of the work of service to the building up of the

body of Christ -- until we shall be attaining "the all", in the unity of the faith and of a mature man's true knowledge {epignôseôs} of the Son of God, in measure of the importance (or stature or primacy) of Christ's complete fulfillment!

Anything less than such a total victory, can only be a lesser hope, a lesser assurance, a lesser proclamation: a lesser gift from God.

Followup: St. Paul is the one who changes the wording from "you-led captive [blank]" (as if Jehovah "led a captive" somewhere) to "he-lance-catches" "lance-captiveness" (as a concept, as in Rev 13:10, where anyone in favor of aichmalôsan shall be put into aichmalôsan, and similarly anyone who shall be killing with a sword must be killed by the sword).

Paul also changes the phrase, "you-received gifts from-the-man even-also ones-rebelling" to {edôken domata tois anthrôpois} "[and] gives gifts to persons". (The Ephesians text is stable in transmission, except for a trivial question of whether or not {kai} is included as a conjunction, and maybe the grammatic form of {edok-}.)

The Greek OT is different again (at Psalm 67 instead of 68, verse 7 in modern reckoning), with God (ho theos) coming home or being brought home to live in a house alone, while leading out prisoners in a heroic way (a manly, meaning a mighty way!), even the ones still rebellious (embittering) dwelling in the graves!

The Psalm does talk about God giving gifts to men, specifically the gift of release from captivity; and if God is receiving gifts from captive rebels, i.e. rebels He put into captivity (per the Hebrew), and even heroically brings rebellious prisoners out of the graves, then Paul would be doing a valid midrash of both versions (Hebrew and Greek) to describe that as putting the whole concept of captivity itself into captivity, giving that as a gift to persons.

Naturally this has some connection to whether or not Paul is talking about bringing people out of hades, and if so then whom.

(Note the trinitarian apologetic connection, by the way: the Christ whom Paul says does this, is YHWH Himself, {ho theos} in Greek, in the Psalm.)

Eph 5:13-14; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): All things become visible by the light when they are "exposed" by the light, for all that which makes things visible is light. For this reason He (God, or perhaps "it" the scripture) says (broadly referencing Isaiah 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1, compare Rom 13:11) "Awake, sleeper, and rise out from the dead ones, and Christ will shine on you." [Note: check those contextual refs for useful connections!]

"Exposed" is a word {elegxon}, also translated "reprove", for active moral rebuke with a hopeful purpose of leading the rebuked one to repent and be restored to communion. For example church

discipline (similar to synagogue discipline) at Matt 18:15. Related by topical application (via synagogue punishment) to {kolasis}; and just previously at 5:6 Paul describes the same action as "the wrath of God coming upon the sons of disobedience". Paul has also just said (v.11) that we should even be exposing the unfruitful deeds of darkness rather than partaking or participating in them.

The prophet-for-hire Balaam ended up leading Israel astray, but before then his madness was checked by the donkey vocally exposing him (2 Peter 2:16) whereupon he did what was good for a while. Herod was exposed by JohnBapt in regard to seducing away and marrying his sister-in-law (Luke 3:19) which John was calling him to repent of. Those who do evil refuse to come into the light, fearing that their evil will be exposed (John 3:20); but the Holy Spirit shall be exposing the world (John 16:8). Paul (1 Cor 14:23-25) thinks the most ideal evangelical worship would be for all believers in a congregation to be either prophesying or interpreting in languages so that if an unbeliever or plain person should enter, everyone will be examining and exposing him, and so the hidden things of his heart becoming apparent the unbeliever or agnostic will be falling on his face and worshiping God, reporting to others that the God really is among the congregation. Sinners should be exposed in the sight of all, so that all may be led (equally) to fear (1 Tim 5:20); but exposure and rebuke should be combined with entreaty with every patience and teaching (2 Tim 4:2). Exposure of those who contradict is

combined again with entreaty by sound teaching as the duty of an elder/presbyter/administrator (priest/bishop) at Titus 1:9; and in verse 13 the Cretans (popularly known as the worst kind of pirates, enemies of all humanity) are to be exposed {apotomôs}, severely, as in the kindness and severity of God in Romans 11, so that (as in Romans 11) they may be becoming sound in faith. We should be entreating and exposing with every injunction (Titus 2:15) while speaking of how the saving grace of God, the glory of the savior and of the great God of us, Jesus Christ, gives Himself to all humanity for us so that He should be redeeming us from every lawlessness and be cleansing for Himself a people to be zealous about Him for the best actions. The Hebraist directly reckons exposure to be part of the hopeful disciplinary punishment which he speaks of in (at least) the first half of the 12th chapter of his Epistle, and at Heb 12:5-6 he quotes the Proverb 3:11 (also found in Job 5:17) "Do not disregard lightly the discipline of YHWH my son, nor faint when being exposed by Him; for those whom YHWH is loving, He is disciplining, and He is scourging every son whom He is accepting (or receiving)." Similarly Christ is exposing and disciplining (same word for hopeful punishment in Greek) those He loves so that they will repent, which at Rev 3:14-22 means the Laodicians who are so rotten with pride and sin that He is about to vomit them out of His mouth; yet He stands at the door and knocks, and encourages them to overcome sin. Thus when YHWH comes among ten thousand of His saints to do judging against all, He is exposing all the irreverent concerning all their irreverent acts

in which they are irreverent, and concerning the hard words which irreverent sinners speak against Him -- who are people whom Jude (v.15) otherwise sounds like he expects, from his language, to be hopelessly punished! But the terminology for "exposure" means otherwise.

Phil 2:9-11; (post-mortem salvation) (all things gathered finally under Christ) (God and honest loyalty): Paul cites and reiterates Isaiah 45:23, identifying Christ as YHWH by reference, the point being that Christ as YHWH will receive this total victory and loyalty.

Paul isn't talking about the name of Jesus merely being proclaimed to all those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, but about all those in heaven and on earth and under the earth bowing their knee and confessing with their tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Is God supposed to accept a false bowing of the knee?! -- a worship in less than love and truth?! To clarify what he is talking about, the apostle translates the Hebrew verb {shâba} -- the primitive root for completion (from which the Hebrew word for seven is also derived), and which implies at least nominal allegiance and intended honesty (by metaphor it came to mean 'to swear an oath', as in swearing seven times, or swearing with an intention to complete, or swearing in emphatic honesty) -- as {exomologeô}, out-like-lay(say).

This is not a term of ambiguity -- no more than {shâba} is in Hebrew! This is a term to describe strongly positive agreement and alliance with whoever the confession is made to. Confession can have a wrong object, of course: the term is used to describe the strength of Judas' agreement (and probably an oath of promised fulfillment) with the Sanhedrin to deliver Jesus to them (Luke 22:6). But God Most High (including as Christ) is never the wrong object for confession and alliance! The same term is used to describe Christ's allegiance to the Father at Matt 11:25 (paralleled at Luke 10:21); it is used to describe confession of sin to God (and to each other) in true repentance at Matt 3:6 (paralleled Mark 1:5), Acts 19:18, and James 5:16. It is the term used by Christ when He says that He will confess the name of those who overcome their sin before His Father in heaven. Paul uses the term at Rom 14:11 (referencing the same verse from Isaiah as here) to warn Christians that we should not judge our brother or hold our brother in contempt, for we all shall stand and give an account of ourselves to God. (Relatedly, verse 9, "For to this end Christ died and lives, that He might be Lord both of dead-ones ({nekrôn}, plural) and of living-ones".) And one chapter later he uses the term again (quoting from Psalm 18:49) in the context of Gentiles coming to praise the Lord and rejoice with His people when God arises to rule over the Gentiles, as a consequence of which the Gentiles shall hope in Him.

The whole context of the term, everywhere else in the NT, involves glorifying God for His mercies,



praising God loyally, repenting of sin, allying one's self with God (or with the Sanhedrin by contrast in the case of Judas' betrayal), giving thanks to God, or in other ways acting in honorable cooperation with God in an honest and trustworthy oath.

So why here, at Phil 2, when the total scope includes all those on earth and even under the earth, would the term now include grudging hypocritical unloving submission to mere power?! (cf Phil 3:21 afterward, where the exertion of Christ's power enables Him to conform all things to His glory in submission.)

It is true that Isaiah 45:24-25 continues with "They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.' All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. In the LORD all the descendents of Israel will be found righteous and will exult."

Yet those who say this of YHWH include those who used to rage against Him but don't anymore, now being ashamed of having done so after coming to Him. That includes formerly rebel Israel, who will not be found to have been righteous -- they certainly weren't, and were punished to the death by God for their injustice and treachery and idolatries -- but who shall be made righteous by God. All the descendents of Israel, means all the descendents, those who were good and those who were bad. (There is no contrasting "but" in the Hebrew at verse 25: it goes straight from stating that all those who raged at Him -- which must include rebel Israel first and foremost -- shall

be put to shame, to affirming that all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory in the Lord. The "but" is an interpretative addition by the NIV and some other translators, because those translators decided that the two statements ought to contrast one another.)

The first part of the prophecy involves rebel Israel being saved by God, repenting of their sins, and being restored by God; the second part of the prophecy involves God offering the same salvation to the pagans, calling them to gather and reason among themselves as to whether there is another God other than He, a righteous God and a Savior. "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is no other!" That is the preceding context for God's oath, using the same term for 'swear' that is used shortly afterward to describe every tongue swearing allegiance to Him, that every knee will bow to Him, ever tongue swear to Him, and those who do (which is all persons inclusively) shall say of God 'Only in YHWH are righteousness and strength'. Which is why those who used to rage against Him shall be ashamed for having done so.

Nor does the shaming of someone by God indicate necessary hopelessness: there are repeated examples in the scriptures indicating that God at least sometimes shames people with the goal being for them to repent of their sins and be reconciled to God!

(Incidentally, an earlier part of this same prophecy promises that Cyrus the pagan tyrant shall come to know God although he has not known

God. Cyrus died still a pagan. Less incidentally, this same prophecy includes one of the places where God pronounces woe on those who question God's competency or purposes in fashioning His children as a potter creates pottery from clay. The surrounding context indicates on one hand astonishment that God is calling the pagan Cyrus as one of His messiahs to help save Israel, and on the other hand that God has not abandoned His sinning children but shall reconcile the pagans with the Jews and shall bring all people to loyally worship Him -- even the ones who used to rage against Him! Be that as it may.)

It is true that this prophecy in Isaiah as it stands (strong hints about Cyrus aside) might only refer to those who survive the coming of YHWH, not to those who died in the process. But then Paul expands and clarifies the principle to include even those persons currently "under the earth", which by Jewish poetic typology can only refer to those who have died.

Phil 3:21; (all things gathered finally under Christ)(God and honest loyalty): Paul talks about the exertion of the power whereby Christ is able even to subdue all things to Himself -- it's the same power with which Christ will transform our lowly body into conformity with His glory when He comes again from heaven. The two concepts are thus parallel: the subjection of all things must involve conforming them to His glory.

Col 1:19-20; (all things gathered finally under Christ)(salvation of rebel angels)(scope of

salvation) (assurance of salvation) (post-mortem salvation): God reconciles all things to Himself, whether they be in the heavens or in the earth, making peace through the blood of His cross. These are the same "all things" "in the heavens and on earth" which Paul says back in verse 16-17 were created by Christ, and for Christ, and before which Christ existed, and which hold together or continue existing in Christ; and Paul explicitly includes in this set of all things, whether in the heavens or on the earth, all things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- explicitly the same "domain of darkness" rulers which Paul says in verse 13 that the Father has delivered himself and the Colossians out from, just so that there can be no confusion about who and what Paul means by the term. Consequently, the reconciliation of all things in the heavens includes rebel angels -- it even cannot really refer to anything else other than to rebel angels!

The only way to deny universal salvation of all sinners (sooner or later) would be to deny that reconciliation refers to salvation of sinners; but Paul goes on immediately in verses 21 and 22 to show that reconciliation applies to those who are alienated from God and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, whom God acts (through Christ's death) to present before Himself holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

The only other way to deny universal salvation from this would be to claim this reconciliation, though presented as complete from God's

perspective, may ultimately fail; and Paul does also go on to warn that people can fall away from the hope of the gospel instead of remaining steadfast in it. Obviously so long as that happens someone cannot also be presented holy and without blame and beyond reproach before God! But I wouldn't want to be the person who denies the hope of the gospel by saying that falling away (by for example denying the hope of the gospel!) can and will somehow prevent the completion of something, reconciliation and salvation from sin, which God from His divine perspective regards as already surely complete and successful. Or rather, I used to deny that as an Arminian, but I came to see how bad an idea that is!

To put it more positively: Arminians insist on keeping the hope of the gospel by affirming and not denying the utter total scope of God's reconciliation (though Arminians have trouble admitting this includes all things in the heavens, whether thrones or rulers or authorities, which are alienated from God and hostile in mind engaged in evil deeds); and Calvinists insist on keeping the hope of the gospel by affirming and not denying the assurance of complete salvational victory implied by how God regards the reconciliation; and so both sides criticize one another for denying the hope of the gospel in one or the other way, going so far as to warn each other that by such denials they are not continuing steadfast in the faith and are moving away from the hope of the gospel which Paul has been made a minister of.

And I think both sides have a good case.

To this I can add, if it was necessary, that Paul does not exclude Christ's reconciliation of all things "under the earth" either -- not only does he talk about this in other places, such as Phil 2:9-11, but he talks about it here at verse 18 when he goes beyond even all the high Christology he has just been talking about and says that Christ is the leader or beginning, the archê, as the first-born out from the dead ones (though this grammar tends to be obscured in English), which is a reference to Christ's resurrection as all commentators agree, so that He Himself may be coming to have first place in everything. Paul connects this explicitly to Christ being the head of the body of the church; and elsewhere, such as Ephesians, Paul even more directly states that Christ shall become the leader and head of all things.

This, not incidentally, provides a strong answer to unitarian Christians and those non-Christians who think Paul is somehow denying Christ's full divinity by calling Christ the "first-born" of every creature (verse 14), even out from among the dead ones. This must either simply contradict Paul's strong inclusion of Christ in fundamental deity (by which and for which all creation is created and by which all creation holds together or continues existing), by saying Christ himself is also only a creature after all, though the first created creature; or Paul is describing Christ's inheriting authority and privilege over all creatures. (Which of course unitarians can also claim, but the point is that such an idea also fits in trinitarian Christianity.) But the

term goes beyond even that, indicating a special solidarity with all creatures, even with the rebel powers whom Paul insists are also for and by Christ! It also points toward God being the common Father of all rational creatures, and not in any mere sense of being the creator of all but in the sense of all rational creatures sharing in the sonship with Christ. (Which to be fair is a point that modalist and unitarian Christians also want to stress here, though in rather different ways.)

The "holding together" term in Greek, {sunestêken}, can also describe someone causing a group of persons or things to stand together; so Paul may also be describing the resurrection of all dead persons here.

Even if the full assurance of evangelical victory is discounted here, however, for not being clear enough, this testimony connects precisely with Paul's emphasis in Romans 5:10, that if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved into His life! (Nor are total evangelical scope assurances missing from Romans 5, even if he doesn't mention rebel angels so explicitly there; but that's for another commentary.)

1 Thess 4:13; (counter-evidence against universalism): this verse is sometimes cited that pagans have no hope as pagans, although if that was true God would not be able to save any pagans from their sins! In context it's a comparison of

personal expectations about what comes after death: pagans themselves don't hope for anything better and so grieve, but Christians at least have hope for themselves and so shouldn't grieve, since (among other things) that's a bad witness to the pagans!

Moreover, Calvinists and Arminians grieve over lost ones who have died, having no hope for them, so if the context is going to be ignored this ought to be testimony in favor of Christian universalism and a warning that hopelessness for those who died pagan is itself pagan!

1 Thess 5:3; (punishment not hopeless): "whole-ruination" is used by St. Paul here along with the birth-pangs of a woman to describe the coming problems of the wicked in the Day of the Lord to come. But birth-pangs of a woman are typically used as a hopeful though extremely problematic situation, especially by Paul. (see also 2 Thess 1:6-10, and 1 Cor 5:5.)

1 Thess 5:5; (counter-evidence against universalism): sometimes this verse is appealed to by Calvinists as evidence of two distinct groups of people, the sons of darkness whom God has no intention of saving from their sins, and the sons of light who are not of the light nor the darkness (thus who ought to be soberly watching for the Day of the Lord, v.6). However, in 1:9 St. Paul said that his Christian audience had once been among the sons of darkness themselves. So that group cannot be an impermeable separation: God does save at least some sons of darkness into being sons of light.



**2 Thess 1:6-10;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (post-mortem salvation) (everlasting not everlasting) (punishment not hopeless): this is one of the Big Guns commonly shot against any idea of the eventual salvation of all sinners from sin, especially since it's the strongest such statement made in the surviving epistles of St. Paul. (The legitimacy of 2 Thess is often rejected nowadays, even by some conservative Christian scholars, but I accept it and all the canonical epistles as legitimate.) These verses have numerous complex issues, however, which will take some time to unpack.

Usually this saying is debated between proponents of eternal conscious torment and of annihilation, although both sides naturally consider it strong testimony against the salvation of these sinners from sin.

Let me start by conceding a point that is sometimes brought into the dispute: there is no distinction between the uses of {apo} in this sentence. The whole-ruination comes from the Presence/Face of God (a Hebraism referring to the Angel of the Presence Who was YHWH Himself, the Visible of the Invisible, in the OT) and from the glory of His strength. No one would ever bother saying that the whole ruination comes away from the glory of His strength! -- and rhetorically the two prepositional phrases stand in parallel unity anyway (the "glory" being another Hebraism for the Visible Presence of God, the Shekinah.)

At the same time, if someone insists on translating the first {apo}, or both its usages, as "away from" so that those who {tisosin} the {dikên} of God do so "away from" His presence and "away from " His glory (instead of "from" His presence and glory as a result of His presence and glory); then they should either read total annihilation from this, or else interpret their translation so that the omnipresence of God is not denied in the eternal conscious torment -- unless translators are content to deny the omnipresence of God (and thus deny a doctrine of even mere supernaturalistic theism, including orthodox trinitarianism)!

This naturally leads into a closer examination of verse 9 which is the key verse under contention. In Greek (with a stable textual transmission) it reads, continuing a sentence from the previous verse:

hoitines dikên tiousin olethron aiônion apo  
prosôpou tou kuriou kai apo tês doxês tês ischuos  
autou

The second half of the sentence has already been discussed, although it will have a further part to play in the account of the interpretation soon: from {apo prosôpou} onward means "from (the) face of-the-lord and from the glory the strength of-him". (In English we would usually change "the glory" to an adjective to describe "the strength", and that's a legitimate translation.)

The first five words of the verse are the crucial center of the meaning, and why people have generally interpreted the translation to be one of St. Paul's few statements in favor of hopeless punishment.

The first word, {hoitines}, is a referent plural pronoun, "anyone-who-plural". Thus it cannot refer back to Jesus Christ in the preceding verse, even though as the closest referent noun that would otherwise be a reasonable first inference. The closest and contextually most probable matching grammatic reference would be to "those not obeying the gospel of the Lord of us Jesus Christ". (To which I will note that one's larger-scale interpretation of this verse will depend on what one considers to be the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! Be that as it may.)

That second word, {dikên}, is simply a simple form of the word "justice" (though not the special compound form also commonly used, {dikaïosunê}) with the grammatically proper suffix for its logical place in the sentence.

Yet many translators don't want to call it justice. The New International Version calls it "punishment"; ditto the Revised Standard Version. Green translates it as "penalty", as does the New American Standard and the Holman CSB. Knoch's literal concordance, though, translates it more directly: justice.

The whole paragraph, going back a few verses, is saturated with references to justice: the afflictions endured by the church are a display

of God's "just judging" ({tês dikaias kriseôs}, and note that "crisising" is here applied to people who all translators agree are God's people being saved by God). It is a just thing {dikaion} with God to repay the ones afflicting these people with affliction (and also to repay the ones being afflicted!) Those who do not know God shall receive {ekdikêsin}, out-justing (usually translated "vengeance").

"Those who do not know God and those who do not obey the good news of our Lord Jesus" shall have justice dealt out to them by our Lord (in verse 8) when He is revealed from heaven in flaming fire (verse 7). So it makes a lot of contextual sense that Paul continues to talk about justice in verse 9.

God was the verb-er of the justice previously in Paul's paragraph; but here "those not obeying the gospel" are the doers of the verb, and justice is the object of the verb. In other words, Paul is saying "those" shall-be-verbing "justice". That verb is the unusual term {tisousen}, and its meaning is highly important to the proper interpretation and translation of the sentence. But because the verb is unusual -- and because the usual New Testament applications of other forms of this verb would not fit a hopeless punishment interpretation, and even would strongly argue for the expectation of the salvation of the punished -- I can foresee a reasonable appeal to establish surrounding contexts first and then check to see how most reasonably to fit this term into the contexts. So I will come back to this word later.

In English we would skip over the next term, {olethron}, to put its adjective {aiônion} or "eonian" (the adjective form of "eon" or "age") first. "Eonian" sometimes describes things that go on forever never-endingly (especially when referring to God and God's intrinsic characteristics), and sometimes describes things that had a beginning or have had an end. So since its meaning varies, it has to be determined by context -- except insofar as the object which "eonian" describes comes uniquely from God, which is certainly true here. (There may be a few exceptions to that observation, but not in the New Testament so far as I recall.)

This happens also to be important for reckoning this testimony in trinitarian apologetics! The term "eonian" itself is one indicator that Paul is identifying the person of Jesus as God Most High, even though Paul also distinguishes between the persons of "Jesus" and "God" in some real and significant fashion (such as in verse 1 of this same chapter).

Moreover, Paul is personally putting Jesus in the action of ultimate judgment ascribed only to YHWH in the Old Testament, not to any lesser lord or god.

And that isn't only a generalized observation. Paul is referencing a specific portion of scripture here: the judgment of YHWH in the day of YHWH's forthcoming appearance, described in Isaiah 2:10: "from the terror of YHWH and from the splendor of His majesty"; also paralleled in

verse 21 as "before the terror of YHWH and the splendor of His majesty". (Similarly, shortly prior to 2 Thess 1:9, in verse 7, where Paul is speaking of the Lord Jesus being revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, he is referencing Zechariah 14:5b where the prophet says in regard to the same situation, "Then YHWH my Elohim [one of the plural name-titles for God] will come and all the holy ones with Him.")

This Isaianic prophecy extends from chapter 2 through the end of chapter 5. It criticizes the unjust and oppressive Jewish rulers and population, although especially the rulers. YHWH declares that they shall be (in effect, although the exact term isn't used) wholly ruined in the Day of the Lord to come, at the coming of YHWH among them.

This is not the end of their story in these chapters, however! -- although this can be obscured by the fact that Isaiah does not report things in sequence. He starts with the end result, for example, chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, where the mountain of the house of YHWH will be established as the chief of mountains, and all the nations shall stream to it to be taught YHWH's ways by YHWH, so that they may walk in His path; and YHWH will act as arbitrating judge among the nations so that they will live in peace with one another ever afterward.

It is in context of looking forward to this day that Isaiah calls Israel to stop their injustice and their idolatries and repent and come back to walking in the light of YHWH. People, especially

the egotistical leaders, who refuse to do so, will be humbled and abased so that YHWH alone will be exalted in that day. A repeated theme in chapter 2 (verses 10, 19, and 21) is that doers of injustice will try to hide in caverns from YHWH's appearance; but they will also throw away their idols (verses 18 and 20) -- possibly into the same caverns (with the moles and the bats!) where they themselves attempt to hide.

In the second half of chapter 3, Isaiah switches metaphors and begins to speak of rebel Israel as daughters of Zion who are proud, seductive adulteresses, who shall be humbled in fashions analogically parallel to the more masculine humbling imagery elsewhere in the prophecy. The outcome of this, however, is more fully reported: defeated rebels shall appeal to the righteous to save them and to take away their reproach. And notice: the righteous remnant, "everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem", the holy ones "who are left in Zion and remain in Jerusalem", servants adorned by the beauty of the Branch of YHWH (a reference to the Messiah, thus to Jesus), are called the "survivors" in distinction from the rebels pleading for salvation! (That's in verses 1 through 3 of chapter 4.) The rebels pleading for salvation, like desperate women after a battle begging to be made the indentured servant concubines of the conquerors, did not survive the coming terrible splendor of YHWH!

In other words, this part of the vision isn't looking at however many of the unjust survived the coming of YHWH, now pleading to be included - - although some prophecies do look in that

direction since the principles are similar (and even in this prophecy not all the unrighteous died immediately). God is showing Isaiah something that will (also) happen after the general resurrection: the defeated rebels have been resurrected and are now pleading with the righteous survivors.

Nor shall the pleas of the defeated rebels be rejected! YHWH shall wash away the filth of the rebel daughters of Zion (referring to both men and women with that recent analogy), who were slain as impenitent rebels during His coming. He shall purge the bloodshed of Jerusalem from their midst {en pneumatī kriseōs kai pneumatī kauseōs} in a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning. And yes, this "crisis" as the Greek Old Testament translates the original Hebrew, is the same "crisis" (down to the same grammatic form) which St. Paul was talking about in 2 Thess!

The result will be that the pillar of daysmoke and nightfire (as in the presence of YHWH during the Exodus, the same presence by which the rebels were originally slain) will be a shelter from the storm and the rain and the heat. (Chapter 4 verses 4 through 6. Chapter 5 goes back to the theme of coming punishment for rebel Israel and does not mention salvation of the rebels again.)

In this context, Isaiah 2 verse 9 (preceding verse 10, referenced by St. Paul in 2 Thess 1:9) should not be translated "But do not forgive them", as for example in the New American Standard Version. The primitive verb there, which means to lift and has a wide variety of usage in



the OT, should be interpreted in a sense parallel to other portions of the same chapter instead: do not lift up the humbled proud again to their former status of exalted rebellion. (For example chapter 2 verse 22, "Cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for in what should he be esteemed?" )

In any case, the context of Isaiah 2 through 5 indicates that the fate of rebels wholly ruined from the presence of YHWH is not hopelessly final. Even the proudest rebels are shown in a process of preliminary repentance (though not yet seeking salvation) by throwing away their idols; other proud rebels seek repentance, including by petitioning the victorious righteous survivors, and receive reconciliation with YHWH; and the whole prophecy begins with a portrait of broad repentance among all the nations in the day of YHWH to come: which by narrative and thematic logic must necessarily be subsequent to the punishment related afterward in the chapter, resulting in loyal fellowship with YHWH where no such fellowship previously existed, and peace among the nations under YHWH's fair justice.

So, unless the apostle Paul is completely changing (not just expanding) the contextual meaning of his Isaiah reference, he's talking about a situation that is expected to lead to the repentance and salvation from sin of those who -- unlike the "survivors!" -- are wholly ruined by YHWH in His coming judgment of avenging fire!

This isn't something that should be swept aside. Not only is it directly relevant in a positive

way to the intention and result of the judgment of 2 Thess 1:9 (and its immediate contexts), it also is in just the same proportion relevant to trinitarian apologetics. Saint Paul's specific allusion to Isaiah 2 demonstrates that in calling Jesus "Lord" Paul very certainly means "YHWH", not some lesser lord or god.

This also gives us a clear contextual rationale for how to translate "eonian" this time: it means less than never-ending; and considering the strong connections to the punishment coming from God's unique presence, it most likely refers to the {olethron} coming uniquely from God.

(Although it could also refer to the {olethron} being specific to the special coming eon in which it occurs.)

I have been using the term "whole-ruination" so far, since that is a fairly literal translation of {olethron}. Sometimes this is translated "extermination", or in some other excessively destructive way; and that's fair enough, too. But does the term itself intrinsically point to a hopeless final situation?

Well, St. Paul himself doesn't think so! He uses the exact same term in a very certainly hopeful sense at least once elsewhere, namely 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 5. Paul condemns the flesh of his opponent among the Corinthian church, the Stepmom-Sleeping Guy, to whole-ruination (same term) so that the SSG's soul may be saved in the day of the Lord to come: the exact same day which Paul is talking about here in 2 Thessalonians 1:9!!

Paul also uses the same term at 1 Thess 5:3, as part of his birth-pangs analogy of the pain coming to the wicked in the Day of YHWH to come. But a woman's birth-pangs, though they can be dangerous beyond even painful, are not typically regarded as intrinsically hopeless; Paul himself typically regards birth-pangs as hopeful, such as at the famous description of the cosmos afflicted by sin in Romans 8.

It could be replied that Paul was handing the SSG over to Satan so that his body would be wholly-ruined compared to his spirit, and that Paul makes no such distinction at 2 Thess 1. The comparison with a punished super-sinner being saved in the same Day of the Lord where super-sinners are being olethron'd, though, would still be curious; and the apparent contrast would only work if Paul not only denied the resurrection of the body that died (which instead he affirms) but also the resurrection of the wicked at all. For if the wicked are resurrected then they get a new body anyway and that which was olethron'd (as even might happen to the body of the righteous over enough time or in specially catastrophic circumstances) is effectively restored not permanently annihilated. This is borne out incidentally in the Isaiah ref, where the penitent wicked plead for acceptance with those who, being righteous, "survived". Moreover, if the wicked souls were annihilated they couldn't come to honor the justice of God as a result. (Beyond which, this would involve Paul mixing metaphors at cross-purposes when in 1 Thess he

describes the torment of olethron'd sinners as birth-pangs.)

On the other hand, an argument could be made completely the other way around: that by later evidence in 1 Cor 5, Paul only excommunicated the SSG and so wasn't referring to the whole-destruction of physical flesh at all but only spiritual {sarx}, the fleshly urges of sin both in pride and sensuality (which the SSG certainly exhibited).

I discuss this option in my notes on 1 Cor 5, as well as the theory that Paul reconciles with the SSG in 2 Cor and instructs his congregation to do the same. Certainly the SSG was excom'd, and he might still be alive to reconcile with in 2 Cor (though that assumes 2 Cor was written subsequently, which not all scholars agree with for various reasons). But if Paul had only expected the olethron of the SSG's spiritual sarx, he wouldn't have handed the SSG over to Satan for the destruction of the SSG's sensuality and pride! -- nor would he have contrasted this with the result of the SSG's spirit being saved in the Day of the Lord to come. And the SSG as presented in 1 Cor does not seem the kind of man to be suffering horribly (per 2 Cor's pity on whoever it is) from merely being excluded from a fairly small, culturally reviled group, rejected (as Paul says earlier in 1 Cor) by both Jews and Gentiles as nonsense or worse. Moreover, both of Paul's scriptural refs in 2 Thess 1:6-10 (to Zechariah and to Isaiah) feature evildoers being slain; and while Paul does compare the olethron of evildoers in 1 Thess 5:3 to birth-pangs (which

shouldn't be dismissed as evidence of his hopeful expectations about the goal of the olethron), he cites either Jeremiah 6:14 or 8:11 (or both, as they are verbally very similar) where pagan armies are being summoned to destroy Judah. And note that handing the Stepmom-Sleeping Guy over to Satan would be parallel to that!

Consequently, I think it is safer to regard the olethron as being at least potentially fatal -- Paul could be reconciling with the SSG in 2 Corinthians and yet still have expected the SSG to die when writing 1 Cor (which indeed might still have happened) and not to be reconciled until the Day of the Lord to come (though that may have happened after writing 2 Cor). But Paul does expect the man thus olethron'd to be saved in the Day of the Lord to come if not earlier.

Even without that definite evidence of term usage, though, I would still regard 2 Thess 1:9 as talking very certainly about the same situation as Isaiah 2 through 5, which is not only hopeful for the sinners who are so destroyed (compared to the righteous survivors) but reveals the end result to be their eventual salvation from sin: a total sweeping victory of salvation for and by God Most High! -- even though the same chapters also hint it'll happen in waves, so to speak, with some sinners holding out or trying to dodge longer than others.

I really do not know any other way in which it could be truly said, that those wholly-ruined in the second coming of our Lord could even possibly

come to VALUE His justice, up to and including  
the justice of His ruination of them!

Obviously, most translators have no clue how that  
could ever happen either, if universalism isn't  
true! -- which is why we rarely see even the  
common term for "justice" translated accurately  
here in this verse!

But, even though Isaiah indicates rebels  
eventually come to value the justice of eonian  
punishment (though he doesn't directly say they  
"value" it), why would I think that's an  
important concept here in 2 Thess 1?

Now it's time to talk about that highly unusual  
remaining word, {tisousin}.

Like everyone who aren't themselves experts in  
Greek, I have to depend heavily on people who are  
experts in Greek, most of whom are not  
universalists by the way; but sometimes when  
digging around I find evidence that ideological  
context is dictating translation instead of  
exegetical context dictating ideology. This is  
one of those times.

Everyone (so far as I can tell) agrees that the  
word {tisousin} is a third person plural verb  
form, indicating future action by the doer of the  
verb; and everyone seems to agree it is derived  
either from {tinô} or from a rare alternate  
emphatic form {tiô}; but there's some debate  
about which of those it's derived from.

The problem is that {tinô} means to pay in the sense of valuing or honoring. A slightly modified form of it, {timê}, shows up numerous times in the New Testament in several cognates. As the verb {timaô}, it always means to honor or to value; in an adjective form it always describes its objects as valuable; and its noun form indicates 'value' as a concept. Consequently, it can also refer to payment, but it doesn't mean merely to pay. The New Testament authors had an entirely different word for that, {apodidômi}.

Tinô and its cognates are definitely and clearly used everywhere else in the NT (with two debatable exceptions I'll mention in a minute) for valuing or honoring something in a positive way (unless maybe it's phrased in a negative fashion, a'tino-something, which this word is not.) Someone can honor the wrong things, of course, but it's the object that makes it wrong, not the verb. No one in their right minds would say you aren't supposed to value or honor the justice of God!

Tiô would mean to value or honor more strongly. But because {tisousin} is found only one time in the whole NT, and because that one time is here in 2 Thess 1:9, **and** because people already think on other grounds that there is no hope for those people being wholly ruined (which would be a reasonable inference from extended context elsewhere if that was solidly established, but which would render this verse useless as strong exegetical evidence for such a position); then translators have a debate over whether this word is supposed to be derived from {tinô} (which

would clearly make no sense) or from {tiô} -- which would make even less sense but it's very rare so who knows maybe some rare reversal-meaning-by-emphasis was attached to it (by Paul or whomever he learned it from).

Now, there are some pagan Greek authors, who use the term this way along with "justice" for punishment, and those authors may or may not be thinking in terms of hopeless punishment. But no one denies Paul is talking about some kind of punitive effect here; what I'm challenging is whether the punishment being described is hopeless (whether ECT or annihilation ether one).

But just as Paul could in theory be using a hopeful punishment term from surrounding pagan society for an actually hopeless punishment; by the same token, even assuming the surrounding cultural context always promoted "value/honor justice" as a hopeless punishment, that doesn't mean Paul is necessarily following suit. Paul could just as easily be thinking something like I do when I see the word "retribution" used for hopeless punishment: real re-tribut-ive punishment is about bringing the punished one back into loyal tribute to proper authority. Which, not incidentally, is also what Paul's scripture citation turns out to be about!

The only other times a cognate of the word {timê} is used for punishment, are in Hebrews 10:29, {timorias} a singular noun being used as a genitive "of punishment"; and in Paul's testimony about his oppression of the church in Acts 22:5 and 26:11, {timôreô} which literally means



'value-lift-guard'. (The same suffix, Oreo, is used as the brand name for a popular chocolate cookie which eaters frequently value-lift, too, in order to eat or lick the crème in the center guarded by the shield of the round cookies!)

Paul's behavior in oppressing the Church before his conversion, fits the notion of remedial synagogue punishment testified elsewhere: in extreme but not-yet-capital cases, the Jews would punish someone, hoping the punished person would recant their sin and come back to communion with the congregation. The punishment might be to within an inch of their lives such as the 39 lashes, where 40 would be a legal execution, but it wasn't supposed to be an execution as that would defeat the intention of the punishment! (The verb is active at 26:11 where Paul talks about actively punishing the Christians; and passive at 22:5, where the Christians are being punished. Paul himself regularly suffers synagogue punishment during his Christian missionary work.)

The context of Hebrews 10, meanwhile, cites Deuteronomy 32, where the whole point of the vengeance of God is to vindicate His rebel people, or (in a word) re-tribute them, bringing them back into tribute to Him: which He prophecies will succeed, even after the people have been so destroyed that they are "neither slave nor free" (a poetic way of describing total destruction to the farthest possible death).

This is also important because sometimes in debates about Christian universalism, the topic

comes up about whether "timoria" was used for hopeless punishment in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture (contrasted to "kolasis"). Both terms are used in the New Testament, but by context "timoria" turns out to involve hopeful punishment every single time, and "kolasis" by context turns out to involve hopeful punishment at least sometimes (such as with the sheep and the baby goats!)

Keeping these things in mind, the proper translation for 2 Thess 1:9 would be nothing worse than "paying honor" to the justice of God; and any true payment of honoring God's justice would involve coming to truly value the justice of God (even if that involved punishment against one's self). Remember also that the form of the verb indicates that the subject of the verb (those who do not obey the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, thus being wholly-ruined by the Lord) shall in the future be acting the verb. They aren't receiving the action of the verb, they are doing the verb. This is exactly why some English translations prefer "earning" or some other active verb; but the word here doesn't mean "earning" either. It means to actively pay for something valued by the payer. But in this case what shall be payed by sinners is quite simply and literally the {dikên}, or justice, specifically the justice of their own eonian whole-ruination by God.

They couldn't actively "pay" such justice, of course; but they could come to actively value it, which is not only the base meaning of the term anyway, but is also what happens eventually in

the prophecy from Isaiah being referenced by Paul's phraseology: the sinners being punished by YHWH's judgment are not only being cleaned from their filth and bloodshed in the fire of His judgment (washed by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, as it explicitly says in Isaiah 4:4, which on any trinitarian account must refer to the action of the Holy Spirit), but also come to value His judgment of them.

So "value", in context, is a good way to briefly and accurately get across the meaning (even though the term itself means to pay honor, or to value something enough to pay for it.)

The rather schizophrenic fashion in which translators regard this term can be exemplified by Thayer's lexicon for its cognate {timoria} which gives punishment only as its third meaning, the more primary meaning being "to render help" or "to assist"! That is because both meanings happen to be Biblically true in the same Biblical usages. The Greek of Prov 19:29 is another example; the term is used in context of verse 25 where scoffers reject discipline but receive it anyway so that they may eventually become wise; wise men receive discipline in order to become wiser! This is one of the scriptural appeals for the synagogue beatings such as Saul of Tarsus gave and then had to receive later as Paul; and it has a lot of topical relevance to Heb 12, where God punishes those He loves in order to help them -- even though no one likes it at the time! Thus there is also a direct lexical connection between Heb 10's use of {timoria} in punishing the worst kinds of sinners, and Heb

12's hopeful punishment of those whom God intends to save from sin.

In summary: those who refuse to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall come to value/pay the justice of their whole-ruination by the Lord (YHWH) Jesus at His coming, a very positive, not negative result for them. Paul uses "whole-ruination" in at least one other place, 1 Cor 5:5, to describe the physical death (or at least the punishment) of a highly immoral false teacher thus handed over to Satan, so that his soul may be saved in the Day of the Lord to come -- the same day Paul is talking about here! So the term does not necessarily mean hopeless punishment; and if those being punished come to value the justice of their punishment -- which is how the terms would be typically translated aside from bias toward hopeless punishment, and which is exactly what indisputably happens to at least some sinners similarly punished by the presence of YHWH in the Isaiah prophecy St. Paul is referencing -- then their whole-ruination will not be everlasting either.

Having said all that: while I do think the testimony here goes far in an unexpected direction opposite to the expected testimony for hopeless punishment, I don't think a total scope of salvific intention is mentioned here or back at Isaiah (even though the holy mountain prophecy might imply it). So while I do think it testifies to the punishment being hopeful, and the salvation of the rebels being certain despite the punishment, and even that the salvation for some rebels will be after the general resurrection

(with lake of fire connections), I wouldn't go all the way to universal salvation with these verses. But clearly their testimony fits very easily with Christian universalism.

As an addendum, concerning 4 Maccabees 12:12 and its contexts; the language of which has some relation to 2 Thess 1:6-10.

anth' hôn tamieusetai se hê theis dikê  
puknotr(i)ô kai aiôni(i)ô puri kai basanois, hai  
eis holon ton aiôna ouk anêsousi se.

"...against about-whom the divine justice vaults (like in a storeroom or secret treasure chamber for valuables) you to both more-frequent eonian fire and also torment-testing (which as a dative indirect object both receive "you" the accusative-form object of the action of "vaulting"), into the whole eon; they will not let go of you."

The next verse starts a new sentence decrying hopeless torture by this evil ruler as savage. Thus God shall punish you (the evil torturing king) both living and dead; the verb for punish being timôrêsetai, which carries an implication of bringing the object of the verb to properly honor/value the one doing the verb.

Whether the author of 4 Mac, or the Jewish martyr he is narrating, personally understood this as hopeless or remedial punishment, I wouldn't want to hazard a guess; but the terms do allow the concept that the evil king, being punished for hopelessly torturing prisoners to death like a

savage, will be placed as a cherished item (the term there is typically positive in valuation) in a prison to face God's justice of God's fire and testing, which unlike the king has a goal of bringing the punished one to value God and His justice (the difference being that the king threatens them with hopeless "savage" punishment unless they repent and join him). But the king won't be able to escape his punishment through the whole eon, unlike the martyr who will escape by death (even throwing himself onto the frying pans) rather than joining forces with the king.

**1 Tim 2:3-6;** (all things gathered finally under Christ) (scope of salvation) (certainty of salvation): St. Paul argues that his readers/hearers should even pray for the pagan kings (who would otherwise be considered the tyrant oppressors), on the ground that God wills for all persons to be saved and to come to a realization of the truth. Most non-universalistic soteriologies, whether Calv or Arm variants, acknowledge that God's will shall certainly be done here in regard to half of this prayer: all persons (and not only all human persons!) shall come to realize the truth. But then, if this (which Paul connects directly to salvation from sin) shall be certainly accomplished, and if God wills that the other shall be accomplished, and if (as Paul continues immediately afterward by saying) Christ is a ransom over all things (plural, which in context must refer to personal sinners) -- then it seems like a very broken theology to deny that God will fail to accomplish His will on such an important deed!

Calvinists tend to reply that God may have a decreed will and a secret will, or anyway two wills about a topic; and this can be a reasonable reply, and one which Arminians and Universalists also can accept both in principle and (sometimes) in practice. For example, God would prefer that at least some sinners not sin, yet actively and authoritatively allows sinners to sin. Calvs would take this a bit further and argue that God prefers the non-elect to never be capable of anything other than sin, which is why He chooses never to even provide them the ability not to sin, much less lead them out of unrighteousness; but in any case God authoritatively chooses (and so wills, in that sense) that some creatures should be allowed to make unjust contributions to history. Thus Calvs and Arms may both argue, in somewhat different ways, that God might prefer (Arminians) or decree (Calvinists) that all people ought to be saved; yet be foiled in that preference (Arms) due to His greater will for creatures to be rationally free to choose to be finally unrighteous, or to have a secret will (Calvs) that in fact some sinners shall never be provided any ability or opportunity at all to be saved from sin (so that unrighteousness will be guaranteed according to various theories of what God accomplishes by the existence of unrighteousness).

However, to have two completely antithetical wills on the topic of the fulfillment of fair-togetherness (dikaiosunê, righteousness, justice) between persons, would be for God to choose a position that contravenes His own active self-existence as an interpersonal union fulfilling

fair-togetherness with one another. It would literally be to choose to bring about final injustice! -- which is why it is sin when we creatures do the same thing!

Nor can this result be dodged by appealing to verbal grammatic differences in the term we translate "will", for at least four reasons.

First, even if that was possible the final result would still be the same, namely a doctrinal contravention of trinitarian theism (though admittedly that wouldn't bother non-trinitarian theists).

Second, the term here, {thelô}, is the present active indicative verb form of the noun {thelêma}, which is the same noun for "will" at Ephesians 1:11, where God is working {energeô} (a present active participle) everything according to the counsel (boulê) of His will: an energizing will which is exactly what Calvs appeal to (in exactly this verse) for predestined assurance of salvation! A possibly different term for 'will', {prothesis}, or 'preference' or 'purpose', also occurs at Eph 1:11, perfectly in synch with the 'will' by which Christians assuredly receive the inheritance, by which all people shall come to the knowledge of the truth, and by which God wills all people to be saved. So either the term {thelêma} is that stronger version of 'will' which Calvinists appeal to for assurance of salvation, or Calvinists have been wrongly appealing to a weaker will for testimony of predestined assurance of salvation.



Third, in explaining why it is important to pray even for the salvation of all persons, Paul continues on to say that Christ is a ransom for all (thus also the one Mediator for all between God and man), which in itself obliterates a supposed difference between God's intention for some sinners compared to others. And, less obviously, Paul introduces that part of his argument with the observation, "For there is one God", in parallel with the observation that there is one Mediator between God and Man; and when Paul says this in other epistles while discussing salvation, such as Rom 3:29 and Gal 3:20 (compare also with his evangelism at the Mars Hill philosopher forum in Acts 17:22-34), he more explicitly means to insist that God is not the God of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles, one God (and one Messiah) being Savior over all. To foist an elect / non-elect distinction back into this solidarity of intention would be similar to saying Jews and Jews alone, not Gentiles, are elected by God to salvation.

Fourth, as noted above, the same active will for which God works all things in concert to achieve, results in all persons certainly coming, sooner or later, to a knowledge of the truth; which is generally acknowledged by both Calvs and Arms, though each would say that not all persons are brought to a 'saving knowledge'. But Paul is clearly talking about salvation in parallel with knowledge of the truth; if one is sure to be accomplished, the other should be expected in proportion, and at the very least he must be talking about 'saving knowledge' of the truth.

A hardcore Arminian, who denies any salvational security for believers in this life, might be able to avoid the strength of this testimony, where the scope of saving intention is connected to the assurance of result; but only by also denying that God, the Living Truth Himself, will ever succeed in bringing all people to a knowledge of the truth. Softer Arminians who affirm God will surely save from sin whomever properly convinces Him to do so (in distinction from Calvinistic original assurance of God saving some persons from sin according to His plan), would appeal (though with subtle and important differences) to the same assurance promises implied here and stated in Eph 1:11 (and elsewhere), and certainly would agree with the scope of intention (just like harder Arminians); so either they must give up any assurance of God's victorious purpose in salvation (becoming harder Arminians, so to speak), or accept that God shall surely succeed in bringing about His intention to save all sinners from sin, in parallel with them coming to the knowledge of the truth.

In short, the "will" to save all sinners here in 1 Tim 2, is the same "will" that shall bring all sinners to a knowledge of the truth here in 1 Tim 2, and the same "will" that shall accomplish salvation with original assurance at Eph 1:11. The key way out would be to deny that God shall surely succeed in bringing sinners to even a condemning knowledge of the truth, without which any condemnation would be inept at best. So far as the assurance of condemning knowledge is acknowledged to be certain, however, God's will

to save sinners from sin should be acknowledged as equally certain.

To put it another way, all good actions are acceptable to God, but Paul says that first of all he urges Timothy and Timothy's congregation to plea for, petition for, pray for, and give thanks on behalf of all men, even for the pagan kings and overlords (literally "hyper-ogres" in Greek!) And why is this especially good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior? Because God our Savior wills, *thelmô*, all persons to be saved and to come to the knowledge, the *epignosis*, the full over-knowledge of the truth - - for which purpose God has provided the one Mediator, Christ Jesus, upon Whose humanity Paul focuses (instead of His divinity as Paul does elsewhere), precisely to emphasize God's will to save all persons.

Breaking the scope of this competent will, on the other hand, leaves a vapid hole for why Paul would emphasize the humanity of Christ here (leading various unitarian Christians, not incidentally, to cite this verse as evidence that Paul must have been trying to emphasize that Christ was only human or at least only some kind of lesser lord or god!) To deny this full scope of God's potent will to save all sinners, in our doctrines, is at least tantamount to refusing to work with this Godly will; at the very least, such a denial cannot be specially good and acceptable to God our Savior.

(This is all aside from strong indications of Christian universalism before Eph 1:11 itself; see comments on Eph 1.)

As an addendum, how often is {thelêma} or a cognate of it used to talk about assurance of salvation from sin? At least this often:

The Son gives Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil eon according to the {thelêma} of our God and Father. (Gal 1:4)

For your sanctification is the {thelêma} of God. (1 Thess 4:3)

By this {thelêma} we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. (Heb 10:10)

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the {thelêma} of God, shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. (1 Peter 4:19)

The Son prays, and teaches us to pray, that the {thelêma} of the Father shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt 6:10)

The Son's food is to do the {thelêma} of His Father in heaven and to accomplish His work. (John 4:34)

"This is the {thelêma} of Him Who sent Me: that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day! For this is the

{thelêma} of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eonian life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." John 6:39-40

It is the same {thelêma} by which the Son wills in praying to the Father that "they also, whom You have given Me, [may] be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me." John 17:24

Is doing this {thelêma} of God, agreeing and cooperating with it, important for a Christian as a Christian?

"Whoever does the {thelêma} of My Father Who is in the heavens, he is My brother and sister and mother." Matt 12:50

"Not everyone who says to Me [the divine double address of] 'Lord, Lord!', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the {thelêma} of My Father Who is in the heavens." Matt 7:21 This is right before throwing those people who were also doing attesting miracles in His name, and by His power, into the outer darkness where the wailing is and the gnashing of the teeth.

So I am most certainly not going to deny or denigrate the Father's {thelô} that all persons shall be saved! -- no more than I am going to deny or denigrate God's {thelêma} that those He intends to save shall surely be saved! That includes not denying or denigrating God's {thelêma} of salvation for those whom He throws into the outer darkness for not doing the

{thelêma} of God yet.

Fortunately, refusing to do the {thelêma} of the Father in salvation and then going out and doing it anyway, as evangelical Arminians and Calvinists both regularly do and support and pray for, is something the Father justly counts as doing His {thelêma}. Matt 21:31 Still, I wouldn't want to be the one who knew God's {thelêma} (Luke 12:47) to assuredly save all sinners from sin and did not act in accord with His {thelêma} on either the scope (1 Tim 2:3-4) or the assurance (Eph 1:11). For the {thelêma} of God is good and well-pleasing and perfect -- though admittedly it takes a transformation by the renewing of the mind to approve of it. (Rom 12:2) It certainly did for me.

So then do not be foolish, but understand what the {thelêma} of the Lord is. (Eph 5:17)

**1 Tim 4:10;** (counter-argument against universalism) (scope of salvation) (certainty of salvation): St. Paul here makes a distinction between the living God being the Savior of all persons, and the living God being {malista}, very much so, or especially, the Savior of believers. Non-universalists have read this as meaning God definitely does not save all persons, but is only an impotent or inconstant Savior of them (intending to do so but failing or choosing to quit for some reason); or God is only the Savior of all persons in potential strength (being able to do so if He chose but He doesn't choose to) -- broadly the Arm and the Calv interpretations respectively (with their Catholic predecessors

either way). The verse is even quoted as positive evidence against universal salvation being true, the idea being that Paul would not have made any distinction if he had expected God would really save all sinners from sin (and that kind of salvation is certainly the context).

However, whenever the term is used elsewhere in the scriptures in a comparative sense, it always everywhere else fully includes the prior general group with some kind of special emphasis on a limited group.

Paul's congregation grieves over his departure but {malista} over his prediction that they would not see his face again (Acts 20:38).

Paul is brought before all the audience by Festus, but {malista} before King Agrippa, to be heard and judged so that Festus will have some information to send on to the Emperor (Acts 25:26).

Paul answers that he considers himself fortunate to make his defense before Agrippa, {malista} because Agrippa is an expert on disagreements among the Jewish parties (Acts 26:3).

Paul writes to the Galatian congregation that they should do good to all people while they have an opportunity, and {malista} to those who are of the household of the faith (Gal 6:10).

All the saints greet the Philippian church, {malista} those of Caesar's household (Phil 4:22).

Onesimus should be received by Philemon no longer as a slave but as a brother, {malista} to Paul, and how much moreso to Philemon (Phm 1:16).

Paul warns Titus there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, {malista} those of the circumcision (Titus 1:10).

Peter affirms that God knows how to keep the unrighteousness under punishment for the day of judgment, and {malista} those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires (2 Peter 2:10).

Nor does this fully inclusive emphasis change in the Timothy epistles! Paul wants Timothy to bring the books when he comes, {malista} the parchments (2 Tim 4:13); a supposed Christian has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever if he does not provide for his own people, and {malista} for his own household (1 Tim 5:8); the elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, {malista} those who work hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17); for we labor and strive (in evangelism) for this reason, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, Who is the Savior of all men, {malista} those who believe (1 Tim 4:10).

At worst, the term simply indicates that those who believe have some kind of honor or pre-eminence or authority among the general group of all persons, whom the living God is the savior of -- but the term definitely does NOT exclude the general group as being unreal somehow!



It isn't technically impossible that Paul might take a term he himself uses elsewhere in uniform agreement with other authors and speakers in NT Greek, and use it in a way that means something different this time. But there would need to be a strong argument for the change by appeal to the immediate or at least the local context. And the local context would be 1 Tim 2:3-6, where Paul emphasizes both the scope of evangelism and its actively willed success (both of those being reasons why we ought to cooperate with God by praying for the salvation even of "hyper-ogres"!)

Unless an argument can be strongly made from local context otherwise, however, the term {malista} itself, in its grammatic deployment here (compared to other examples), would be immediate grammatic evidence in favor of the salvation of all people being certain: Paul's assurance that God is especially the Savior of those who believe is a how-much-moreso emphasis.

If someone wishes to reply that this statement, which Paul says is faithful and worthy of all welcome, and for which he and his fellow-believers were toiling and being reproached, is actually only a "profane and old-womanish myth" (4:7), and that it is "withdrawing from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons in the hypocrisy of false expectations thanks to a cauterized conscience" (vv.1-2) by somehow involving abstaining from foods or forbidding marriage (v.3), as though affirming God can and will save all creatures does not thank God for every creature of God and as though we are thus denying the truth that

every creature of God is ideal and nothing is to be cast away but rather (where necessary due to sin) made holy through the Logos of God (Who is Christ) and by {enteuxis} or "pleading" (vv.4-5) -- the same word used by Paul back in 1 Tim 2 to refer to evangelising and praying for the salvation of even hyper-ogres, and which is never used elsewhere in the New Testament except for seeking the salvation of someone...

...then someone is welcome to try that, I guess, and I have seen people try it before. But I personally wouldn't recommend the attempt.

2 Tim 2:25; (counter-evidence against universalism): a common standard translation reads that the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth and may come to their senses (escaping) from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Non-universalists may appeal to this verse as evidence that someone may only possibly perhaps come to do the will of God someday, or even that God may only possibly perhaps act to lead a sinner to repentance at all. (Arm and Calv versions respectively.)

But grammatically, the adverb {mêpote} usually refers to the preceding verb, not to the subsequent one. In this case the preceding verb is one of disciplinary punishment, {paideuonta}, the same term used for disciplinary punishment

from the first half of Hebrews 12 (which is explicitly intended to bring people to repentance whom God intends to save from their sins). Paul uses the same term in 1 Tim 1 to talk about handing Hymenaeus and Alexander, among others, over to Satan so that they'll learn not to blaspheme; a punishment he regards in 1 Cor 5 (for the Stepmom-Sleeping Guy) as being hopeful for he expects the man's spirit to be saved in the day of the Lord to come even if the man's flesh is wholly-ruined (same term as in 2 Thess 1:9, where the goal in Greek is for those punished to come to positively value God's justice even in wholly ruining or destroying them.)

So this isn't normal everyday "correction". It's like the synagogue punishment of the forty lashes minus one: something someone should do reluctantly and only if absolutely necessary, but still with the goal of bringing the person to repentance and restoration, and with any possible {praotêti}, gentleness or meekness, in doing so.

Consequently, the grammatic and topical context does fit the usual application of the adverb being applied to the preceding verb (for disciplinary punishment) rather than to the subsequent verb {dô} (may be giving). In that case, the fronted emphasis of the verb could be a strong affirmation that God is giving to them repentance and knowledge of the truth, as a rationale for why a servant of the Lord must not be fighting but must (in a binding way) be gentle toward all, patient in bearing evil in meekness,

even if perhaps disciplining the ones  
antagonizing-themselves.

To be fair, it may be possible for the adverb to apply to the subsequent verb, so I'm not saying the NKJV's translation as quoted is necessarily wrong on grammatic grounds. I'm just saying, normally the grammar would go the other way, and the preceding context does certainly allow the normal usage.

Titus 1:2; (everlasting not everlasting): Paul is writing to Titus in the expectation (or hope) of life eonian which the not-lying God promises before times eonian. The first eonian could be translated "eternal life" accurately enough (since the life will be eternal), but obviously the same adjective {aiônios} (with proper grammatic suffixes either way) cannot still mean eternal or even really lasting more generally a few words later. Consequently it is practically never translated into English as "before everlasting times" or "before eternal times" or any other similar way. Note also that this is another example, like Romans 16:25, of eonian being used two similar yet ultimately different ways in close comparative context -- not exactly contrast, since unlike the eonian times of Rom 16 these times haven't or are not yet coming to an end. But still, it's evidence that the same term can and should be translated two different ways sometimes even when the same terms are near each other; which is important for acknowledging that the case for Matt 25's eonian life vs eonian punishment (and "the fire the eonian" nearby)

depends on the context, not on an inherent meaning for the adjective.

Titus 2:11; (scope of salvation): the grace of God has appeared to all persons bringing salvation, or bringing all persons salvation, depending on how the grammar should be read. There are several textual variations for "bringing salvation" here, divided between the term being a second verb for the grace of God ("has appeared" and "is bringing salvation" "to all persons") or an adjective describing the grace of God ("the grace of God", "to all persons" and "bringing salvation", "has appeared".) "All persons" is in dative form, but there is no direct object so it isn't an indirect object (for any variation of "bringing salvation" since "salvation" is not a direct object here either way), thus the usual translation into a prepositional phrase "to all persons". A Calvinist would tend to prefer "has appeared to all persons, bringing salvation" since those two actions might be regarded as not necessarily both applying "to all persons". An Arminian would tend to prefer "bringing salvation to all persons" as adjectives of "the grace of God"; obviously a Kath also would, and then would apply the Calv/Kath success to the Arm/Kath scope of salvation. But the preferred Calv wording wouldn't necessarily exclude an Arm/Kath scope. The text variations seem pretty evenly weighed in all directions (per the Nestle-Aland -- the UBS forgot or neglected to mention it). While the verse cannot thus be weighed in favor of direct testimony to scope, this should help explain why a reader may find Calv and Arm apologists (with

Kaths occasionally following Arms) discussing the verse with two different translations.

Though a grammatic puzzle doesn't decide the meaning in this case, the immediately preceding context shows Paul insisting that bondservants should properly subject themselves to their masters for this reason, because the grace of God has appeared, either to all men bringing salvation, or bringing salvation to all men. Paul's rationale would be weakened if he only meant "all kinds of men" in the sense of having tacit exceptions. True, Paul couldn't have meant for a bondsman to obey wicked orders from an evil master, but it was to the wicked, not to the good, that Christ appeared bringing salvation, giving Himself to redeem them from every lawless deed (in which Paul includes himself and Titus and the church more generally), purifying for Himself a people for His own possession (Titus 2:14). The immorality of a master, in other words, cannot be in itself a parallel to some tacit exception of some men from all kinds for whom Grace appeared unto salvation; for "we were once also disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for persons appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we had done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs of eonian life according to hope." (3:3-7)

Regardless of the grammatic puzzle, the context points (even if not decisively) toward a full scope of God's intention and action to save all persons from sin.

Titus 3:9; (counter-evidence against universalism): "Shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Torah, for they are unprofitable and worthless." Amazingly, some non-universalists think the discussion of whether God originally and continually acts toward saving all sinners from sin, unto eventual victory, is a "foolish controversy, unprofitable and worthless". But none of them would consider their own halves of such gospel assurance (the assurance of intentional scope on one hand, the assurance of original persistence to victory on the other) to be foolish controversy, unprofitable and worthless! -- though admittedly they might regard each other's special gospel assurance as such! And yet not so much as to shun controversy on those matters themselves, since each side must oppose the other on such matters! Similarly, none of them regard a profession and defense of one or another kind of final unrighteousness and non-salvation from sin, to be a foolish and worthless controversy. Certainly St. Paul regards such topics to be important, seeing as how he has just finished a writing a few dozen verses on the scope and goal of God's salvation of sinners from sin through Christ.

**Heb 2:1-3a;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism) (salvation of rebel angels): (NASB) "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to the things that have been heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which was at the first spoken through the Lord?" (And confirmed by those who heard, and by God in various miraculous ways.)

Non-universalists tend to read this as though it is saying the just repayment or recompense is hopelessly final; but obviously it doesn't say that. This doesn't mean non-universalists are necessarily cheating here, only that they're reading into the meaning what they think is supremely established elsewhere, and that would be a proper procedure. By the same token, of course, if God's punishment is supremely established elsewhere as being successfully remedial, then universalists are just as proper to read a hopeful punishment here.

Less trivially, non-universalists sometimes cite this against universal salvation in principle as being itself not only damnable but hopelessly damnable after some point, per Arminianism. Per Calvinism the details of the damnation don't really matter, for God never intended to save the non-elect from sin anyway, but will eventually bring the elect to salvation regardless of any errors of belief. But then the non-elect can never be in a position to "drift away" into



damnation! -- so strictly speaking a Calvinist can only consistently read this warning as applying to the elect and thus to a hopeful punishment (though still one to be avoided.)

This naturally leads to the question of what the so-great salvation is, from which we (the Christian audience of the Hebraist) may drift away by neglecting it.

This so-great salvation, {têlikautês sôtêrias}, evidently has something to do with a word being talked or being spoken by angels being confirmed, and {pasa parabasis kai parakoê} every transgression and disobedience getting or obtaining an in-just reward (or {misthapodosian}, hire-from-giving), which we shall consequently not be escaping if we neglect salvation of such proportions.

Now, there was an old Jewish tradition based, sort of, on Deuteronomy 33:2, where YHWH comes forth from a thousand holy ones to give the Law to the people; and the Lord is certainly the one, in the next verse of Heb 2, Who has spoken the original salvation, the salvation from the beginning, that anyone is getting or obtaining. But considering that the Hebraist started his epistle in chapter 1 emphasizing how much vastly greater the Son is than angels, by virtue of being God Most High, even called {ho theos} "the God" by the Father, it's a little odd that he would talk about the Torah or Law being spoken by angels. Of course, in giving the Law, YHWH was acting as the Angel of YHWH -- which led to major controversies between Jewish scholars in the 1st

Christian centuries even aside from how Christians were interpreting such things -- so possibly the Hebraist is using a divine plural for angels here and referring to the Visible Presence of YHWH, the Angel of the Face.

But another title for this visible presence of YHWH in the New Testament, is {ho logos}, the Word; mostly by John, but also at least once each by Paul (Romans 10, where the Word originally referring to the Law in Deuteronomy, is interpreted as Christ descending from heaven and ascending from the swirling depths of the abyss) and Luke (GosLuke 1, where Luke has been not only checking previously written accounts but also interviewing eyewitnesses and deputies of the Word) .

That could mean the Hebraist is talking about Christ being spoken or talked about by angels, and being confirmed; certainly elsewhere Christ (as YHWH) is Who comes to pay every transgression and obedience with a just reward!

Beyond that, in Hebrews 1:6, the author says God has prophesied in Psalm 97:7 that all pagan gods shall worship the Son, using an expression that indicates genuine servitude (like a dog licking the hand). This isn't always used for a divine object, but only rarely is it used for a mocking or insincere worship (such as when the Roman soldiers mocked Christ before the crucifixion), and the context definitely excludes this since the Psalmist says the rebel gods doing this shall thus embarrass those who worship them now, while the Hebraist calls them "angels of God".

How great is God's salvation then? So great that even rebel angels shall repent and return to loyally proclaiming the Logos!

Consequently, if we neglect a salvation so great (per the greatness of Christ in chapter 1) that even rebel angels shall reconcile with God, how shall we escape the coming just payment by this same Logos for every sin and transgression?

The rhetorical answer is that those who neglect a salvation which even rebel angels can and will accept, are sinning even worse than them, and shall not escape the coming just payment for their sins and transgressions.

Similarly, as the Hebraist will go on to talk about in much greater detail, if we insist on lesser judges, we neglect the greatest judge and the greatest salvation provided by the same judge Who both condemns and saves, the Living Word of God Who is active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the divisions of soul and spirit, able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart, from Whose sight no creature can hide, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him (4:12-13).

Relatedly, though, if we insistently deny that the greatest Savior saves even rebel angels, then we are neglecting, or in the Greek, {amelêsantes} actively not-caring, the salvation of such a proportion.

As with several other such warnings (and with more to come in this epistle), it actually rebounds against and judges the one who judges such judgment to be hopelessly final.

Heb 2:8; (all things gathered finally under Christ): after the typical citation of all things being put under the feet of Christ (and having spent the first chapter extolling the ultimate power and authority of the Son in the Father), the Hebraist clarifies that we do not yet see all things put under Him. This only makes sense if there is a sense in which all things are not yet under Christ despite all things being already under Christ's omnipotent power and authority. The obvious meaning is that not all things are yet willingly subjected to Him. But the promise is that all things eventually will be.

Heb 2:14; (counter-evidence against universalism): Christ through His death destroys him who has the power of death, namely the Devil. The question is whether this destruction is hopelessly final, either as ECT or as annihilation, or whether the destruction is similar to that from Christ's parables where the same term is translated as only "lost". The verse itself doesn't indicate what kind of ruin it is, nor whether the ruin is hopelessly final.

Heb 2:16; (counter-evidence against universalism): some Calvinists will appeal to this verse (with Christ taking hold of the seed of Abraham but not angels) as evidence that God does not even intend to save some sinners from sin. Since the preceding context was about the

Son becoming a human, not merely becoming an angel, the contrast between taking hold of humans and not taking hold of angels may only be intended to emphasize that becoming an angel is not enough.

More to the point, however, a major theme of the Hebraist is that Christ is far superior in salvation to other religious options (particularly those advocated by the Jewish philosopher Philo, apparently by comparison); Chapter 1 talks about Christ being superior in nature to any angel (even being YHWH and {ho theos} in nature with the one and only God though personally distinct compared to the Father), and Chapter 2 up to this point has been about Christ being truly a man. The terminology at 2:16 can mean "to raise up", another way of saying to resurrect or raise from the dead, and the Hebraist has certainly been talking about this just immediately prior. The topic then would be that just as Christ is no mere angel (per chapter 1), Christ came as a fully flesh and blood man who could die and be raised, not as an angel. Abraham's "seed" after all tends to refer prophetically to Christ.

If, however, "Abraham's seed/descendent" is pressed to mean those whom God saves from sin (unlike Christ Who needed no such salvation), the obvious reply is that the seed of Abraham cannot only refer to Abraham's descendants after the flesh (an exclusion which is denied elsewhere in the scriptures), but rather to the spiritual seed of Abraham. And since God can raise sons of Abraham up out of the stones as He chooses, the

category cannot be any simple reference to an exclusive group elected by God to salvation from sin.

Yet even then, by virtue of the Abrahamic covenant mentioned in Galatians (and later in Hebrews), all rational creatures come spiritually under the category of being heirs of Abraham, thanks to their Creator voluntarily incarnating as the descendant of Abraham. So again it is not by raising up an angel that God saves sinners and overthrows Satan who has the power of death, but by raising up the Seed of Abraham Who creates all things, even the rebel angels whom the Hebraist cited earlier in chapter 1 as coming to praise the Son.

See also comments about the Abrahamic covenant in Galatians and Hebrews.

**Heb 3:7 - 4:16;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism) (punishment not hopeless): this section is often cited as evidence that some sinners, punished and slain by God, shall never be saved from their sins, for according to many translations they shall never be entering God's rest.

To some extent, the interpretation of this part depends on interpretations of other parts of the epistle: if other parts (as they do) indicate God's punishments are always hopeful and shall certainly succeed in their object of bringing the one who is disciplined back into fellowship with God, then these can be no exception and the

statement about not entering into rest must apply either to a temporary punishment, or to a permanent loss of some reward but not loss of salvation from sin.

As with many (or all?) such warnings in EpistHeb, this is aimed directly at whatever Christian congregation the author is writing to. In this case, don't be like those people, or you'll be punished the same way.

If the punishment being talked about here is hopeless, then this throws a wrench into the Calv gospel assurance of salvation for whomever God intends to save from sin -- an assurance Universalists promote just as much -- and also a wrench into the softer assurance promoted by many Arminians that once someone has convinced God to save them from sin He'll remain convinced and not change His mind or be defeated (by the sinner or by other sinners) later. This is a main reason why hardcore Arms stress this epistle so strongly: they see clearly enough that real Christians are being warned, not fake converts, whether Calv non-elect or otherwise. (In fact there is no point warning the Calv non-elect to shape up or else: their version of the non-elect have never had any ability or even any hope of ever doing good in the first place, by God's choice.) And since the hardcore Arminians regard (most of) the punishments in EpistHeb as hopeless (not the blatantly hopeful ones in most of chapter 12 of course), then they infer that anyone right up until the last minute of life can lose or forfeit their salvation from sin. There is no guarantee God will bring anyone through at

all! -- other than a generalized promise that God does finally save some sinners from sin (who knows, maybe even you, though statistically speaking probably not), and an expectation that some people from the Bible have certainly been saved. Which by the way is an important detail we'll be getting back to.

And yet, smack in the middle of what appears to be a long, detailed warning that no one can be sure God will ever save them from sin, so "therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it," (4:1) comes the promise of 4:3: "For (or in some manuscripts 'therefore') we who have believed, enter that rest, just as He has said, 'As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest', although His works were finished from the foundation of the world."

It even looks like the assurance of entering into God's rest, an assurance connected with God originally finishing His saving work, is compared to the assurance that others did not and won't enter into God's rest! -- which is directly connected to the warning not to fall away and so be lost, which looks like a strong denial of any such assurance of salvation!

In one way, this looping puzzle of statements can be cleared up if the punishment isn't hopeless: the assurance of salvation from sin remains, but what is lost is salvation from punishment.



That's reasonably straightforward enough, except that this would seem to require some distinction between types of salvation, with one (salvation from sin into righteousness) still being assured (whether only for those God originally elected, or only for those who convince God to elect them, or for everyone eventually); and the other (salvation from punishment) not being assured. But instead it's all about "entering into God's rest", which looks like one kind of salvation, not like two kinds.

Now at the very least, Arminians and Calvinists (and their Catholic predecessors) should be able to agree with Universalists that the Hebraist does talk at least once in some detail about hopefully remedial punishment from God on people He intends to save from their sins and whom He hasn't given up on (at least yet), and hasn't been defeated (at least yet) in His intentions to save them. That's in the first half of chapter 12. So the idea of losing one's salvation from punishment yet not (at least yet) one's salvation from sin, isn't foreign to what the Hebraist is teaching. The question is whether he's talking about that here, or not. It's even technically possible he could be talking about hopeful (though still scary and severe) punishment elsewhere, yet talking about hopeless punishment here; so unless we solidly find from elsewhere that God never hopelessly punishes people, we can't in fairness simply point to evidence of hopeful punishment per se and say therefore this is hopeful, too. The obvious example being what I just said: practically all non-universalists everywhere acknowledge hopeful punishment in the

first half of chapter 12, yet still think this is talking about hopeless punishment.

By the same token the other way around, even if hopeless punishment is solidly and decisively testified elsewhere, this could turn out to be hopeful punishment after all, and that wouldn't count against those other scriptures testifying to hopeless punishment.

Still, again to be fair to non-universalists of any type, since hopeful and hopeless punishment aren't mutually exclusive in themselves so that only one kind can exist, every other scriptural testimony (including here in the Epistle to the Hebrews) could be about hopeful punishment from God, and yet in theory this could be the one solid and decisive testimony in favor of hopeless punishment.

Yet, all Christians, and even all non-Christian Jews, should already know from the most obvious possible example, that whatever it meant, or means today (for as long as it is called "Today"?), for those who rebelled in the wilderness wandering not to enter into God's rest, symbolized by not entering into the promised land, it cannot possibly refer necessarily to a one hundred percent hopeless punishment.

Because Moses shared that punishment.

He rebelled, too. And he didn't enter into the promised land.

As far as entering into the promised land, or not, stands as a metaphor for entering into God's rest, Moses didn't enter into God's rest.

And no Christian (or Jew) anywhere, at any time, thinks Moses has lost his salvation, or worse was one of the non-elect whom God never even intended (much less ever acted) to save. To say the very least, Moses certainly didn't look very permanently damned when visiting Christ on Mount Hermon at the Transfiguration! (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36.)

Well, maybe Moses, and Miriam, and Aaron, and Moses' wife and family, etc. etc., were special case exceptions, and the Hebraist was talking about the general majority result, using them as the example.

Even if that's true, they still stand as definitive evidence that whatever the Hebraist is talking about is not in itself an ironclad hopeless punishment.

So, having approached the topic from several preliminary ways: what is the Hebraist saying and talking about?

To start with, in Greek it doesn't say "they shall never enter into My rest".

Instead, it's a qualified rhetorical exclamation: "If they shall be entering into My stopping--!"  
The end, period.

Now, that could be read as an unstated hyperbolic exclusion: if they ever do enter into His rest, then... something-something-unmentionable, which since that unmentionable-whatever isn't going to happen, neither will them entering into God's rest. "I'll be damned if they'll be entering into My resting!" or something of that sort.

However, whenever this phrasing is used elsewhere in the New Testament (though that isn't often), it isn't used as a hypothetical hyperbole. It's always predictive.

One example is GosJohn 6:62, the day after the feeding of the five thousand, and after Jesus' own disciples are having trouble digesting (so to speak) His numerous statements about "munching" His flesh. He replies with, "This is snaring you? If you should be beholding the Son of Man ascending where He was formerly--!" And then having stopped there without finishing the sentence, Jesus goes on to explain what He meant (sort of) in whole sentences.

But in His exclamation He was making a predictive comparison: if you are doing this now, what will you do when this occurs?

The point is lost if the event never happens!

Jesus says something similar almost a year later, shortly after the feeding of the four thousand. Having sailed down Lake Galilee to the region of Dalmanutha (apparently near where the Romans would slaughter many Jewish patriots, turning the waters red with blood), the Pharisees and

Sadducees come out to discuss things with Him (interfering with the disciples' attempts to restock with supplies), testing Him, and inquiring to have Him show them a sign out of heaven to prove that God agrees with His claims and His teaching.

But sighing in His spirit, He answers them saying, "Why is this generation seeking for a sign!? Truly I tell you, if there shall be given to this generation a sign -- ! A wicked and adulterous generation is seeking for a sign; but a sign will not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah." Mark reports the first part (GosMark 8:12); Matthew reports the second part (GosMatt 16:4).

Of course, it's possible that one or both Gospel authors, or their source(s), have rephrased one way or the other, and Jesus didn't say both things, but both things are equivalent in meaning and so equally represent what Jesus did say (probably in Aramaic). Either way, the phrase predicts a sign will in fact be given, just like Jesus' stumbling disciples will in fact see Him ascending where He came from (even though that doesn't happen in GosJohn's narrative.) Jesus might (and probably does) mean, "You're asking for a sign, but even if I give you one you still won't believe. In fact you're going to get one, and you still won't believe." He certainly complains elsewhere along this line, both in GosJohn and in the Synoptics! Anyway, Jesus can hardly be swearing they won't get a sign, just like Jesus can hardly be swearing His disciples won't see Him ascending where He came from.

There is a subtly but crucially different form, which Jesus uses during the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem (GosLuke 19:41-44), when He approaches the city and weeps over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace -- ! But now they have been hidden from your eyes." And as a result the city will be destroyed by armies someday.

The obvious difference is that this is a past incomplete hypothetical, not a future incomplete. If they had known (in the sense of intimately accepting, like in conjugal union) what made for peace, things might have been different, but they didn't, so they'll have a disastrous war instead as punishment from God. Even then, in a similar "O Jerusalem" lament a few days later, Jesus prophesies that they will accept Him eventually and, like those they mocked, give Him the blessing of Him Who comes in the name of the Lord, even though He and they reject each other now, as He leaves the Temple. (GosMatt 23:37-39. See comments on that scripture.) So they will eventually intimately accept what makes for peace, in contrast to their rejection now. But admittedly the incomplete hypothetical here isn't predicting the hypothetical: it couldn't, it's talking about a past not a future hypothetical. And how the Hebraist quotes Psalm 95:11 throughout this section of EpistHeb, takes the form of a future hypothetical, not a past one.

Now, does the fact that other future hypotheticals in the New Testament end up coming true after all, necessarily mean this future

hypothetical will end up coming true? No, not necessarily; but it's an interesting comparison which shows that the language in the original Greek isn't as iron-nailed shut as English translations tend to make it appear!

If, as here, a negative is being contrasted with a hypothetical positive, the negative would have to change to unlock the hypothetical positive.

In this case, the negative is rebellion: hardening our heart, going astray in our heart, not intimately accepting ("knowing") God's ways. And remember, the Hebraist is warning you and me, the Christians reading the epistle, the people of God's pasture and the sheep of His hand (as the Psalmist puts it)! A little more specifically, perhaps this means rejecting what the Psalmist started his psalm praising: that God, Who creates and sustains all things (even the sea, which in Jewish poetic imagery tends to stand for the prison of rebel angels), is the rock of our salvation! -- which ought to be a symbol of assurance, that God can and will competently save whomever He intends to save (just as Calvinists also agree, not incidentally). And yet the Psalmist warns, as the Hebraist quotes, that we, who are the people of the rock of our salvation, should not test the Lord with our rebellions.

But if we have hardened our heart, then by God's gracious provision, we can make our heart contrite again, or God can and will pulverize (make contrite) our heart for us!

Consequently, the Hebraist calls us to {parakaleô}, to call one another to stand beside each other, to hold firm, as partakers in Christ, the beginning of our assurance to the end.

What assurance? Whichever or both of which gospel assurance is true, the boast of our hope (as the author puts it in 3:6): the assurance that God as the righteous rock of salvation shall certainly save from sin whomever He intends to save; the assurance that God as the righteous creator even of the sea and all that is in it, and the maker of Moses by the way (as in 3:3-4) who in his own rebellion did not enter into the rest of the promised land, intends to save all sinners from sin; or both assurances (Calv and Arm respectively) together!

Certainly, even those who entered into the promised land did not, thereby, enter into God's rest; "For," as the Hebraist says here (4:8), "if Jesus (or Joshua) had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that." So in fact, as the example of Moses himself also shows, the salvation of those who fell in the wilderness was not locked out, or accomplished without them.

So the call to come stand beside goes out, against which we should not harden our hearts. How long is that offer good for? For as long as it is called Today! (3:13) Not only the day of the wilderness, but also the day of the Psalmist. Not only the day of the Psalmist, but also the day of the Hebraist. (Who wrote that psalm or this epistle isn't strictly known anymore.) Not only the day of the Hebraist, but also the Day of



the Lord to come, "the sabbath rest of the people of God". "The One Who has entered His rest, and has rested from His works, as God also did," sends out the call to stop hardening our hearts and come beside Him!

Is the offer of salvation from punishment good for that long? No; it wasn't for Moses, either. But if the Hebraist (and other inspired authors, and Jesus by inspired report) indicate that God's punishment leads to repentance, salvation, and righteousness (all from God, not originating by the works of creatures, even though we're expected to actively cooperate), then this section of the Epistle to the Hebrews still fits with that theme, even with its warning to Christians already partaking with Christ.

For (as it is written in 4:15-16, and 5:2, which the two-natures doctrine of Christ, fully man and fully God Most High agrees with) we do not have a high priest Who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One Who has been tempted in all things as we are, being able to deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since He Himself made Himself subject to weakness, yet without sin (unlike other high priests who had to offer sacrifice for themselves as well).

In conclusion then: the Hebraist isn't talking about a situation where those who rebelled and died outside the promised land were then hopelessly punished, although he is warning Christians (in his day, and today, "for as long as it is called Today", so to say) not to harden our hearts against so great a salvation (see also

comments on Heb 2:1-3a), lest we fall into God's punishment like those who fell in the wilderness. But to treat that punishment as being hopeless; or to treat God's salvation in (and as) Jesus as only partially offered, or as only partially competent, and moreso to insist on such a weaker salvation, is to harden our own hearts: thus the warning to us, the Christian readers who are already the flock of God and partakers in Christ.

It is practically one of Jesus' test-riddle parables from the Synoptic Gospels (according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke). How we regard those who fell in the wilderness is the crux of the test. If we regard their punishment as hopeless, ignoring the example of Moses (who is mentioned prominently in these chapters, even as leading those who came out of Egypt to fall, though the Hebraist doesn't explicitly remind his readers he also fell and didn't enter the promised land!), we end up in looping contradictory warnings apparently to us but not really to us, or apparently undermining the confidence of our salvation which the Hebraist goes so far to stress that he connects it to an oath from God that could but doesn't necessarily mean those who fell in the wilderness won't be saved; just as Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later, yet who fell at the end after all -- unlike Jesus Who died sinless in voluntary self-sacrifice, and Who is as greater than Moses as the builder of a house is greater than the house -- the builder of all things, including Moses, being {ho theos} God!

The promise to enter the rest, remains for as long as the call to come stand beside the One Who rests from His work goes out, and for as long as the call to repent of our hardness of heart goes out: for as long as it is called "Today!"

Then what shall we who partake of Christ legitimately fear? That while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of us may seem to have come short of that promise. How could we possibly come short of that promise? Not by failing at last to enter the rest ourselves, but by, in our hearts (not as a matter of mere doctrinal error) being un-caring about so great a salvation and the assurance of salvation from the beginning to the end.

That is why Calvinists properly point to these verses (even though they seem to be aimed at warning legitimately elect Christians of a punishment Calvs regard here as hopeless), not only in affirmation of the gospel assurance they promote and protect (the original and all-powerful competency of God to surely save sinners from sin), but in warning lest this assurance be denied!

That is also why Arminians, especially of the harder sort (who think anyone can lose their salvation), also point to these verses, not only in affirmation of the gospel of scope (more established elsewhere of course), but in warning lest this assurance be denied!

And that is also why Arms and Calvs have hot disputes over which assurances should be

professed and not denied, in relation to these verses.

But that is also why Christian universalists should respect and acknowledge and not deny both the gospel assurances promoted and protected by our fellow Christian brothers on both sides -- even though they each oppose and deny each other's assurance (and criticize each other, sometimes hotly, for doing so.)

**Heb 6:1-8;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (persistence of salvation) (Abrahamic covenant) (punishment note hopeless): non-universalists, especially the harder core Arminians (for reasons which will be soon seen), appeal to these verses not only as evidence of hopeless punishment, but even (putting together verses 1 and 3) as evidence that {krimatos aiônious}, eonian judgment, is one of the foundations of the original things of Christ. (The grammatic form looks a little different than usual because it's in genitive form. The more specific translation would be "the foundation... of eonian judgment".)

This does certainly mean that a right understanding of eonian judgment is a proper rudiment of Christianity, along with things like faith in God, repentance from dead works, the resurrection of the dead ones, baptismal teaching, and the laying-on of hands (all listed along with eonian judgment).

The Hebraist goes on as a somewhat parenthetical aside (though necessarily related to other

teaching of his elsewhere in the epistle), that he will try to bring his readers on to mature teaching, if God permits, but he can think of something which would get in the way of that, even though he is persuaded that he need not worry about such things regarding his beloved congregation or readers (v.9) even though he's going to talk about this potential bar to maturity for a minute.

Only those who repent (from dead works, presumably, per v.1) can be brought on to maturity. But is there something which can hinder us continuing to repent from dead works? Yes: crucifying to ourselves the Son of God again and holding Him up to infamy. More literally, that last phrase means making a display of Him on the cross; which isn't about honoring that sacrifice with a crucifix representation, but is combined with the idea of crucifying Him to ourselves, as though we are Pilate or the Emperor executing a rebel in the most shameful fashion. Obviously if someone renounces Christ like that, they can hardly be progressing on to more mature doctrines! And such a renouncing is even worse if they have already been enlightened, and have been tasting the freely given gift of the heavenly one, and have even been combining partakers of the Holy Spirit and tasting the best declaration of God.

Yet even such a person who has been partaking of the Holy Spirit already, and even doing miracles with the powers of the coming age, can fall to the side, and renounce Christ as a rebel deserving a cursed death, holding Him up for

scorn. Similarly (as the Hebraist continues), land which has been drinking the rain coming upon it, but which starts bringing forth thorns and thistles (even if it has been previously bringing forth crops fit for those for whom the field is being farmed), is disqualified (the passing test is taken back, {adokimos}), and near a curse of which the completion or finishing will be burning.

Near the curse of burning, not quite there yet. Repentance can still happen, but naturally it cannot happen while the person is still crucifying the Son of God to himself: it's a presently ongoing action.

St. Peter is the obvious example, a man empowered to do attesting miracles when sent out by Christ near the mid-point of His earthly ministry, who partook of the Lord's Supper and so came into the new covenant instituted by Christ, who briefly went so far as to curse himself in denying Christ and holding Him up to infamy! -- but he quickly repented (as did the other disciples and apostles, even the suicidal Iscariot in a way) and after the infamy was done, Christ sought and reconciled him.

So far, then, there is a punishment coming even to those who have been cooperating with the Holy Spirit, if they renounce Christ as a criminal rebel, so long as they continue to do that. That means the situation isn't hopeless for them, perhaps yet, but on the other hand neither is someone intrinsically safe from falling away into a consummation of burning.

This, as you can see, is a serious point of contention, since Calvinists and softer Arminians (and their Catholic predecessors) insist (respectively) either that those whom God has chosen for salvation from sin can never fail at being saved, or at least once God has been properly convinced to persist for a person He will make sure the person never is finally lost. This is especially relevant to Calvinist soteriology, which says (and I agree they properly say) that the Holy Spirit would never act in a good way toward a person (as 6:4 certainly shows the Spirit doing) without that being an assurance by all the Persons of God Most High that He intends to save that person from sin, and moreso will surely succeed.

But then, this is only a soteriological problem for anyone if the Hebraist is talking about even a risk of someone being finally lost in unrighteousness. If the author isn't talking about hopeless punishment after all, even in talking about {to telos eis kausin} the completion in burning (using a term related to cleaning, not incidentally), then there is no problem: no one on any side denies (especially where they accept the first half of Heb 12) that God can and does punish people hopefully, as part of instructing a child into maturity, with an intention of saving them from their sins. And is there a contrast here between spiritual maturity and spiritual immaturity? -- yes, there explicitly is!

Put another way, a proper understanding of eonian judgment, which shouldn't have to be laid down again (using a term for explosively spreading seed, by the way, like throwing out seed in a field), resolves an apparent conflict here between assurance of salvation elsewhere and (apparently) a warning that salvation isn't assured after all.

And in fact, the Hebraist goes on shortly afterward (v.11-12a) to be "yearning for each one of you to be showing," in a public way (though not the same verb root as holding Christ up for scorn), "the same diligence toward the assurance of the expectation to the completion," the same completion which is burning for those in impenitent rebellion.

And what is that assurance of expectation? Just what every Calvinist knows and agrees about! God promises, swearing by Himself since He has nothing greater to swear upon, that He shall be blessing Abraham with whatever may bless him! (v.13-15) Thus God intends more superabundantly to exhibit the immutability of His counsel to the inheritors of the promise. Which promise? The promise of the Abrahamic covenant (which the Hebraist will be talking about in later chapters as part of the mature doctrine of strong meat), to bring all Abraham's descendants into righteousness. This covenant was made between God and God (thus "an oath by two immutable matters" as the Hebraist puts it, "in which it is impossible for God to be lying"), Father and Son, the Son standing for Abraham as the incarnate descendant of Abraham, thus showing God's



intention to bring all rational creatures, who can only descend from God, even from the Son, into the covenant of Abraham's descendants. Consequently, the covenant cannot be broken by Abraham or any of his descendants, so long as the Son, though sinless, voluntarily dies as a dedication to keeping the covenant in effect.

This is exactly why, consequently, (vv.18-19) "we who are fleeing for refuge, may have a strong consolation lying before us, to lay hold of the expectation," which can be translated as "the sure and certain hope", "which we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and confirmed"!

This is also why the hardest core Arminian can point to the first half of chapter 6 as evidence that no matter how Christian someone legitimately may be, that Christian can still dangerously fall into divine punishment; and why the hardest core Calvinist can point to the second half of chapter 6 and say, don't be dull! (v.12) -- God assures us with the greatest possible assurance that we cannot be lost but will surely be saved!

That's because salvation from sin is not what is at stake in the threat of eonian judgment, a threat which can and in some cases will be seriously carried out, as God sees rightly fit to do, on impenitent sinners.

But if the "finishing" is "in burning"? If someone is saved but as through fire, then that burning doesn't lead to a hopelessly unrighteous "finishing" (and anyway God the Most Righteous and source of all righteousness, cannot have

unrighteousness as His goal for the telos, the end, the completion, the finishing.)

And again, if someone is baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit, even with fire, there is no distinction from God's side between "acquiring the fire" (as charismatics like to say) and being salted with the unquenchable fire of Gehenna. Nor is there any distinction in God's one purpose for baptizing with Himself, the one eonian fire. The distinction is completely with the creature's choice of response, in cooperation or not, with the fire. But the goal of the fire is to lead the creature cooperation, and back to repentance from dead works and to faith in God.

Still, there are admittedly only hints of this here by extended context. I am only showing that a Christian universalism based in other contexts can and does fit perfectly well here, too, resolving Calv and Arm disputes on the chapter while including and promoting both of their characteristic gospel assurances.

See also commentary on Heb 10 and Heb 12, as well as commentary on previous chapters.

Heb 7:12-18; (everlasting not everlasting): the "everlasting" priesthood of Aaron is abolished in the priesthood of the Messiah Who is established "not after the law of a carnal commandment but after the power of an endless life", the preceding priesthood of Melchisedek being a figure for the coming Messianic priesthood (as promised in Psalm 110:4).

**Heb 9:9-10;** (everlasting not everlasting): the Hebraist declares that the sacrifices, even the ones declared "everlasting" as typically translated in English, only counted until the time of Reformation (or {di-orthôsis}). Note that non-Christian Jews reject Christ upon one such ground, that He abrogates things God declared to be everlasting! In effect, that's same ground lodged by ECT proponents and annihilationists against universalists, that some terms used as "everlasting" in one context don't mean that in another.

**Heb 9:27;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (covenant for salvation): a verse commonly quoted against hope of any post-mortem salvation (universalistic or otherwise). "Just as man is appointed (literally "laid up") to die once, and after that, judgment..." Opponents say that an extra chance after death must be speculated to be something extraneous to this verse, but so is hopelessness of the judgment: the verse itself does not indicate that the "crisis" {krisis} is hopeless. One way or the other there are more details in which light the verse should be understood, including elsewhere in EpistHebrews.

The local preceding context itself is about how previous high priests, even if they kept off judgment for the people by sacrificing something other than themselves, still were mortal and died. By contrast, Christ sacrifices Himself to put the covenant of salvation in effect, since a covenant is never in force while the one who made it lives but is valid only when the one who makes

it dies (9:16-17) -- which is why those who could not live after dying sacrificed other lives belonging to them in representation of themselves. And yet Christ lives eternally to put that covenant of salvation in effect: a covenant God makes with Israel, which Israel is supposed to keep, but which the Son (acting as the perfect Israel, the perfect prince of God) perfectly keeps and puts into effect.

Thus the contrast by comparison: just as it is appointed for men to die once and after this a crisis (for those men, since they cannot come back to life under their own power), so Christ (verse 28) also having been offered once to bear the sins of many (which in other contexts means "the sins of all", as any Arminian would agree) shall be seen a second time, apart from sin, by the ones awaiting Him into salvation.

Consequently, the judgment or crisis mentioned by the Hebraist at verse 9:27 is contrasted explicitly to the superior salvation from sin that Christ promises by His covenant, sealed by His dying and rising again: men die once and then are in crisis -- a judgment from God (including as the Son) due to our sin -- but Christ (the Judge Himself) dies once and lives again to save sinners from our sins! Which is exactly why Christians should eagerly await His second coming when He shall be seen by everyone! -- even though that will also result in crisis-judgment for many people.

And what is the covenant that Christ puts into effect by dying and yet living? The Hebraist

talks about it at 10:16, quoting Jer 31:33, "This is the covenant that I will make with them, after those days, says YHWH" (referring to the days of Israel's punishment for her sins and the coming Day of the Lord). "I will put My laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them. And their sins and their rebellions I will remember no more." "Now where there is forgiveness of these things," comments the Hebraist, "there is no longer an offering for sin."

If the Father and the Son do not keep acting in solidarity with that covenant They have made with each other, as a promissory to the covenant YHWH will eventually make with penitent Israel after their days of punishment, then They are breaking covenant with each other, which would put Them on par with sinners who break their covenants with God. A mere static establishment isn't enough, just like a promise to keep the covenant isn't enough for a human: They have to perform, and to keep performing. And the Hebraist emphasizes that this covenant which will be made by God with penitent and previously punished Israel in the Day of the Lord to come, was first put into true and perfect effect as a covenant between Son and Father with the death of Christ (the Son being faithful unto death for the Father, and the Father being faithful beyond death for the Son).

To cease seeking, or never to seek, to bring about salvation of sinners from sin, would be for the Persons of God to break covenant with each other on that topic, too.

(See also comments on Galatians 3.)

This has a lot of connection to why and how the Hebraist continues on into (what we now call) chapter 10 with a discussion of why Christ is superior to high priests; and a big part of the Hebraist's argument is similar to the previously-mentioned argument made by Paul in some other places (notably in Galatians): Jesus sacrifices Himself as a descendant of Abraham to keep up Abraham's side of the Abrahamic covenant, for the sake of all descendants of Abraham (which are all rational creatures since God Incarnated as a descendant of Abraham) who have rebelled and thus broken the covenant which Abraham intended to make but which God graciously spared him from actually going through with, meaning the Father and the Son made the covenant between themselves.

That means the covenant (of the promise, unlike the Mosaic covenant) cannot be broken by anyone's sin (because Abraham didn't actually participate, so the covenant was only about Abraham and his descendants, between the Father and the Son); it can only be broken by either the Son or the Father, neither of Whom are ever going to break covenant with each other.

But because the Son stood in as a descendant of Abraham, for Abraham and all of Abraham's descendants (i.e. every created person, numbering as many as the stars in the sky or grains of sand at the sea, poetically speaking), if any person sins then the Son is the one who pays for that sin, requiring the death of the Son despite Him being sinless Himself (because that was the type of covenant made, passing between hewn animals to

show that if either party breaks the covenant they'll be slain like the animals).

But since the Son is sinless Himself, the point of dying wasn't to satiate the wrath of God, but rather to keep the covenant: the covenant between Father and Son only breaks if the Son refuses to sacrifice Himself for the sins of other people. And the promise given was that all Abraham's descendants would be led finally into righteousness.

That means the passion on the cross, among other things, is an enacted assurance that God intends to fulfill His promise to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants (who are all persons created by God, thanks to the Son Incarnating as a descendant of Abraham): the promise being to reconcile all things to God which need reconciliation, whatever those things are, whether things in the heavens (i.e. rebel angels) or things on the earth (rebel humans for example) or things under the earth (currently dead humans and even slain rebel angels). And if we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son (as Paul says in Romans 5), [u]how much moreso shall we be made alive into His life![/u] In other words, there is no reconciliation that ends with permanent sinners, or with annihilated sinners, or with people no longer sinning but somehow not sharing in God's own eonian life.

[Note: the following was an earlier analysis; should be compiled into the above eventually.]

First, a quick check of the textual apparatus to see if there are any notable variants... nope! That always helps simplify things a bit.

Next, a quick comparison of Green's Textus Receptus with the UBS (since this could theoretically show an alternative in the text that the UBS editors thought was too insignificant to mention--though they're very broad about what might possibly count as a significant variant, by the way--but which turns out to make an interesting difference that might be genuine. I've only ever seen one case where this happened, namely in regard to one of the Synoptic Temptation scenes, but y' never know...

🙄) No differences at all in the textual compilation.

Next, cross-checking Green's two literal translations with Knoch's Concordant Literal translation. (Knoch appears to have been working from a textual compilation closer to the UBS than to the somewhat more inferior and textually later TexRec--long story about why the so-called Textus Receptus should only be considered a secondary resource--but every once in a while he agreed with the TexRec.) Along the way, I'm looking for some key words and cognates that I've learned translators have a tendency to obscure.

v 27: kai kath-hoson apokeitai tois anthro\_pois  
hapax apothanein meta de touto krisis

(The underscore after the 'o' designates a long omega, not a short omicron. The 'o' in either case sounds like the 'o' at the beginning of



those words; or like the 'o's at the start of ocean and omelet respectively. The hyphen after {kath} is my way of representing in English letters that the word is a shortened version of {kata} taking a variant form in front of a word beginning with a hard breathing {h}. It isn't really the word {kath}.)

Nothing jumps out as a key word, although as usual I note that "judgment" is literally "crisis" in our language. (That's where we got our word from.)

Not an especially easy translation. The final phrase is easiest: {meta} is "after", {de} is a weak generic conjunction between clauses or sentences ("yet", "and", "now", weak "but", that kind of thing). {meta} needs an object noun or pronoun after it; that's the pronoun {touto}. The fact that {de} splits the prepositional phrase is unusual and probably signifies that {meta} is supposed to be emphasized. {krisis} is just what it looks like, "crisis". In English we would represent the blunt use of the term (without an introductory article "the" yet obviously meaning something more important than just any ol' crisis) with something like a capitalized letter. So, "{de} after this, Crisis". (Not "after this crisis", in the sense of "crisis" being the object of the preposition "after".) Or as translators more commonly put it, "after this, Judgment". Adding an English "the" to "Crisis" would be okay, to help with translating the emphatic use of the word. Underlining or italicizing "after" for stress purposes would be a good idea, too. As to how {de} should be

represented in English, that'll depend on how this phrase is itself used in the surrounding context.

{tois anthro\_pois} is a prepositional phrase built from the plural of "the persons" or "the humans". That part isn't difficult; but what could end up being a total guessing game for translators is the fact that there is no Greek preposition! (Nor is this the special prepositional form that means "of something" and needs no prepositional terms like, for example, "of". 😊)

{kai} is a super-common conjunctive term; basically like {de} but stronger. Not only can it mean everything {de} could mean, but it can also be combined with various terms later in the sentence to create a comparative conjunction. The good news is that another comparative conjunction form is being used in this sentence, so {kai} is (most likely) just a conjunction connecting the thought with the previous sentence somehow. The bad news, is that another comparative conjunction form is being used in this sentence. (In Greek this is bad news because their comparative conjunction forms tend to inspire insanity. 😊)

{kata} (which looks like {kath} next to that {h} word) is one of those words that's just annoying. 🤬 It literally means "down", and is sometimes actually used that way, but more often it's used in some idiomatic way to mean any of a bunch of rather different concepts, including "against" or "in accord with". (Notice, two completely different meanings, though the general rule is

that in a genitive prepositional phrase it means the first and in an accusative phrase it means the second. You have to ignore, that in English descriptions of those phrases you'd expect the meanings to be switched around, with the "genitive" being connected to the meaning "in accord with" and "accusative" being connected to "against". And... now you are insane. Sorry. 😊)

{hoson}, danged if I know. But everyone seems to agree that when combined with {kata} it makes a phrase that in English would mean something like "as" in the first part of a comparative: "as" this, "so" that. The "so" part of the comparison will come later. Which, not-incidentally, hasn't happened yet in verse 27; which means that it isn't a whole sentence. It's got to be put together with verse 28 (at least). We'll get to that in a minute.

{apokeitai} is the first word that looks rather interesting (instead of just annoying like {kath-hoson}.) It's a form of a verb with a built-in prepositional prefix (that's a very normal occurrence, btw), and literally means "from lie" or something of that sort (where by "lie" they mean "lay down" not "tell an untruth"). You may recall in Tom's discussion of {apo} back in the previously linked thread and its prequel, that {apo} can mean "from" in an explanatory way, like "from the power of His face", or it can mean "from" in a negatively directional way, like "away from the power of His face". (As in, "getting the hell away from the power of His face!" 🤖) Which, btw, is impossible for someone to do in regard to an omnipresent entity. Just a

reminder.)

In this case, {apo} almost certainly has to mean "away from", not "from" in an explanatory sense; this compound verb is only used three other times in the NT, and each other time clearly has that kind of contextual meaning. In fact, it can be a rather positive meaning!--Paul has a wreath of righteousness "layed away" for him by the Lord, the just Judge, Who will be paying it to Paul (and to all who love the Advent of the Lord) in the day of the Lord to come (2 Tim 4:8). A similar expectation is layed away in the heavens, for Paul's Colossian congregation, in Col 1:5. The lazy servant in GosLuke's parable of the minas does something similar, expecting to get let off from having to work with the resource he was given by his master (Luke 19:20): he's laid it away from himself until later.

In all three other cases, the connotation is that of saving up something (as we would put it in English) for somebody; something pretty positive and good in all three cases. (The lazy mina guy gets zorched because he was expressly told to go out and do business with his resource, representing his Master in public until his Master's return; not keep it safely secure somewhere in a napkin. But from his perspective, one of his excuses is that he was keeping it safely secure for his king. The king notes that he could have put the thing in a bank to safely draw interest instead!--the implicit point being that what the steward really was doing was trying to keep his delegated mina for himself, where he would have power over it.)

So what (possibly or even probably good) thing is being saved up (or laid up, as we might say a bit more archaically in English)? And for whom?

{tois anthro\_pois} Well, there's the "for whom": mankind (or derivative persons more broadly). Notice that we've also now answered the question of what kind of preposition is being implied (but not actually written in Greek) here.

{hapax} This is the adverb "once". It means one time, in a historical (or at least narrative) sense, although without necessarily excluding future repetitions. (Context may indicate that this is excluded, of course.)

{apothanein} And there's the "what", which is being saved up to be given to mankind. It's a compound word built from {thanat-}, or death; {apo} or from; and a timing suffix. It's a fairly common word in the NT, and what's more interesting to me is that the built-in prepositional phrase "from die" is so common. It's probably a turn of phrase deriving from an older use where what's happening is coming from a god of death (i.e. Thanatos). The suffix, I'm told, indicates that this shall be happening.

So, not yet translating the conjunctions, we have something like: "{kai} as it is laid up for men once to be dying {de} after this, Crisis..."

So much for the basic translation. Nothing too striking there compared to standard translations, but I wanted to go through the effort step by

step for illustration purposes. 😊 One subtle result of being picky like this, though, is that dying once might be considered a good thing reserved for men.

As it stands, the verse may be witnessing against things like the Greek (and related) versions of reincarnation.

Now, for the next level of context. The opening conjunction {kai} tells us that it's probably worth paying attention to what was happening previously. (Which is best to check on anyway. 🤖) The previous context is about how Christ is superior to the High Priest of the earthly Temple, in that He enters into the heavenly Temple once to do for all what the earthly high priest has to do over and over every year (and every day, in a way--the yearly day of Atonement was for sake of those sins not covered by the normal sacrificial routine.) Also, instead of sacrificing something else, Christ our great High Priest sacrifices Himself.

The Hebraist thus draws a comparison between what we would expect if Christ has to offer Himself as a sacrifice every year over and over, i.e. that He would be put to death every year, and what actually happened, which was that Christ ({epi} or "above" the {suntelia} or bringing-together of the {aio\_no\_n} or ages) has now once been revealed for the putting away of sin through the sacrifice of Himself. (v. 26)

Verse 27, which the question was about, now is

seen to be explicating this (although we still don't necessarily have a conjunctional translation for {kai} yet): as it is laid up (or reserved or saved up) for men once to be dying, {de} then Crisis... then verse 28. Which reads something like, "so Christ having been once offered for (or into) the bearing sins of the many, a second time without sin will appear to these expecting Him: for salvation!" (Knoch includes a later textual emendation at the end, "for faith". But even Green's TR doesn't have this.)

This gives us a translation for {kai} now, too: it means a strong "now" in a sense kind of like "therefore". And the verse we call Heb 10:1 follows suit: "For the Law having (emphatically) a shadow of the coming good things, not itself the very image of those things, year by year they (the priests) offer continuously the same sacrifices, never having the power of the ones drawing near to be perfecting." (Which means that the {de} must be a parallel conjunctive "and".)

Personally, I recognize a number of allusions to the Angel of the Presence (the visible YHWH, image of the invisible YHWH, spoken of in Hebrew as a plural singularity--cf chp 1 of EpistHeb) coming to the Temple for the final redemption of sinful Israel. Other readers may not.

But the point in any case is that verse 27 is not being stated for the primary purpose of dogmatizing that people die once and then are judged in the Crisis--although that is also being stated, so it shouldn't be ignored. The notion of

the verse is being stated for purposes of a parallel comparison/contrast very similar to that of St. Paul in other epistles: Christ dies like other men, but whereas for other men, who are sinners, death leads to Crisis, for the sinless Christ death leads to the salvation of those whose sins He sacrifices Himself to bear. He does not come to be judged for His sins; but rather as the sinless Judge to put away sin and to save the sinners for whom He gives Himself in sacrifice.

Or as 1 Cor 15 (among other Pauline statements on the topic) puts it: just as in Adam all men die, so in Christ all shall be made alive.

**Heb 10:26-39;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (punishment not hopeless) (warning against non-universalism): "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. [...] For it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" If Hebrews 6 is one of the big guns shot against the hope of final salvation from sin, this is an even bigger gun, often combined with the former chapter, and reasonably so because the topics overlap so well. By the same token, any conclusions specially due to the extra detail, will count back in the proper interpretation of Heb 6.

Once again, like Heb 6, hardcore Arminians appeal to this chapter as evidence that it doesn't matter how far into the life of Christ someone



might be, they can still permanently lose their salvation from sin and be permanently damned instead. Calvinists, and softer Arminians (who acknowledge God's victorious persistence but who unlike Calvs think someone has to properly convince God to persist before He'll persist), naturally argue against this by various methods (including by testimony in this chapter which we'll get to presently); but if the punishment isn't hopeless, and actually aims at a sure and certain salvation from sin after all, then much of the dispute can be immediately resolved.

To start with, who is being warned? People who have already "received the knowledge of the truth" (v.26); and just in case someone doesn't recognize that phrase as involving salvation (as in 1 Tim 2:4 for example, where the context definitely involves salvation in regard to "coming to the knowledge of the truth"; also 2 Tim 2:25, where God grants "repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth"), the Hebraist goes on in verse 29 to say that such a person has already been sanctified (or at least is being sanctified) by the blood of the covenant! This isn't aimed at those pagans or non-Christian Jews over there, or even at people superficially in the church who were only pretending to be sanctified. (See also comments on Heb 6.)

It is true that the Hebraist feels pretty sure, or at least has good hope (as also in chapter 6) that his congregation is not among those who shrink back to destruction ({apôleian}, a cognate of a standard term for being lost or punitively unmade), in whom the soul of God has no pleasure

(vv.38-39), and so he exhorts them not to throw away their confidence (v.35). But he does clearly treat them as though they can throw away their confidence rather than enduring to the end so as to receive the promise (v.36).

So how are these who are already being (or have been) sanctified sinning? And why is such a sin so great?

If, after being sanctified and receiving the knowledge of the truth (and drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having a heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and having bodies washed with pure water, 10:22), we go on sinning willfully? Then obviously there is trouble.

Note that these are people who have previously been delivered from an evil conscience! And yet they are continuing to sin, not being troubled in their conscience (or not yet) about this for some reason. And this isn't an accidental or incidental sin, this is some kind of continuing willful sin.

Naturally, so long as they continue to do this, no sacrifice remains for them; which implies that if they will stop, and repent of their sin, the sacrifice will apply again. Which sacrifice? The sacrifice of the Son of God, which by doing whatever they are doing they are trampling underfoot. And there at verse 29 the Hebraist gets more specific: such a person is regarding as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he

was, or is being, sanctified, and has thereby insulted (or blasphemed) the Spirit of grace.

Well, obviously, so long as someone regards the blood of the covenant as unclean, trampling down the sacrifice of the Son of God, and thus blaspheming the Spirit of grace, that person is certainly not going to be saved from God's punishments! Again there are obvious parallels to Hebrews 6: so long as they are holding up Christ to scorn, even crucifying Him again and this time to themselves, they cannot be renewed to repentance.

And yet, as Calvinists and softer Arminians will properly stress in reply, the Hebraist has not long previously (back in 9:14) stressed that the blood of Christ Who {dia pneumatos aiôniou}, through His eonian Spirit, offered Himself without blemish to God, shall surely ("how much moreso") cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God! Whereupon, not incidentally, he goes on to talk about Christ as the mediator of the new covenant, specifically referencing the Abrahamic covenant made not actually between God and Abraham (except by proxy) but between the Father and the Son, with the Son vouching for Abraham as the descendant or seed of Abraham.

So if the Hebraist (and St. Paul in Galatians) is stressing that the covenant cannot fail or be broken by the sin of any of Abraham's descendants (which by the incarnation of the Creator Himself must be all rational creatures, not by physical descent but through Christ), so long as Christ

dies for any sin in order to ratify the covenant and keep it in effect -- then how can anyone say that the covenant will be finally broken and Christ's sacrifice be made of no effect?!

Because the problem, as each side is aware when critiquing the other side, is that each side is claiming (even using this scripture as evidence!) that the covenant between Father and Son will be of no effect one way or another.

Arminians complain that Calvinists make the scope of God's covenant between Father and Son to save sinners of no effect; thus God does not effectively apply the covenant to all rational creatures only to some of them despite God sending His Son to be a propitiation not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world.

Calvinists complain that Arminians make the assurance of God's covenant between Father and Son to save sinners of no effect; thus the Persons of God are either beaten by sinners in bringing the covenant to fruition, or else one or both Persons choose to quit bringing the covenant to completion even though God could succeed if the Persons of God just kept at it. Calvs also complain that in order to get any assurance (which some Arminians just deny outright anyway), Arms think God has to be convinced to either put the covenant into effect at all or else to not quit on the covenant, when in fact Christ stands as surety by the promise between the Persons given gratuitously between One Another. (Calvs also complain that many Arms tacitly or explicitly exclude any rebel angels from God's

intention to save, meaning those Arminians are actually Calvinists in regard to non-election after all! -- while also denying the surety of God's original chosen intention to save whomever He does intend to save from sin!)

But then all sides look at something like the second half of Hebrews 10; and being committed to the idea that, in effect, Christ's sacrifice must surely somehow be of no effect to save after all, they exercise themselves in dispute about who the Hebraist must really be warning instead of themselves -- except for the hardcore Arminians, who acknowledge that the Hebraist is warning otherwise dedicated Christians, including themselves, not to treat the sacrifice of Christ as being worthless -- but who then go on to claim that the threatened punishment involves a result where the sacrifice of Christ is actually worthless to save after all!

Yet the punishment being explicitly referenced by the Hebraist, from Deuteronomy 32, although fierce, and to be avoided if possible (and not by trying to trick God out of it by legal technicalities, nor by someone convincing God not to do it), is the very reverse of hopeless. On the contrary, God through Moses treats it as the only way some sinners will learn to stop sinning.

It is, after all, a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Yet earlier, the Hebraist said (at 3:15) that the problem was falling away from the living God, not falling into His hands; and here again the problem is

clearly falling away somehow, not falling into His hands.

Maybe we (since "we" are being warned here) should check just how well "we" know Him Who said, "Vengeance is Mine! I will repay!" and "The Lord will judge His people!"

So, those being punished for doing this, are still His people; God Himself insists they are, including in the context of Deuteronomy the Hebraist is quoting there, where God vindicates His rebel people by judgment against them where necessary, even judgment to the death (until they are neither slave nor free). Consequently, Calvs are wrong if they claim this judgment isn't being made against people who are really God's people.

But on the other hand, we had better not treat Christ's sacrifice for His people, for all His people, including for His rebel people, as being in vain. If we insist on interpreting Hebrews 10 as warning about a hopeless punishment for those being judged, we ourselves are the ones who will be trampling underfoot the sacrifice of God! Calvinists themselves insist on this point, except limited to the people they think God specially chose to be saved from their sins: to insist that God's disciplinary punishment of God's own people could even possibly result in non-salvation, is itself to trample underfoot the sacrifice of the Son of God!

But again, who, ultimately, are the people of God, in Christ? The prior discussion (going back to Hebrews 6) on the Abrahamic Covenant, tells us

who: every creature created by the Creator Who Incarnates Himself in the line of Abraham, which is every rational creature, no matter how many there may be, as many as the stars of the sky or the sands of the sea: the Father and the Son have covenanted with Each Other (the Son standing in for Abraham as Abraham's descendent) with a promise that cannot be broken by the sin of any creature so long as the Son keeps the covenant in effect by sacrificing Himself for the sin of any creature. Which He does. And that sacrifice is not in vain; God swears upon Himself, the Hebraist says back in chapter 6, since He has nothing any greater upon which to make the promise, so that by two immutable things (the promise of the Father and the Son) we can be assured the promise will be kept, to bring all of Abraham's descendants into righteousness at last.

The warning is just like Christ's occasional warnings in the Gospel reports, that God will be unmerciful to those who are not merciful, and will not forgive those who refuse to be forgiving. To insist such a punishment is itself hopeless, not as a mere mistake in doctrine, but as an attitude of our hearts, is to put ourselves under the same punishment, for insisting that the sacrifice of the Son must be in vain after all.

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Heb 11:20; (punishment not hopeless): although the same author writes at Heb 12:17 that Esau, when he desired to inherit the blessing he had sold for a meal, was rejected and found no place for repentance despite seeking it out with tears; back at this verse the Hebraist reminds readers that by faith Jacob blessed Esau as well as Jacob.

Heb 12:17; (counter-evidence against universalism): see Heb 11:20, and the story of Esau generally which in Genesis is about final reconciliation between a murderous foolish brother and a treacherous Satanic deceiver.

Note that my notes on Heb altogether should be gathered here.

**1 Peter 3:18-20, 4:5-6;** (post-mortem salvation) (punishment not hopeless) (storming hades): the famous descent into hades by Christ to preach the gospel to those imprisoned for stubbornness there since the flood (apparently including rebel angels which had incarnated and died in the flood), so that although judged in their flesh as men they may still live in the spirit in accord with the will of God. (Part of Peter's point is an 'if this then that' comparison: if Christ goes so far to preach the gospel to such super-traitors in hope that they may be saved from their sins, we should be expecting our current persecutors to be judged by Christ as well in both ways!)



Peter has been encouraging his Christian readers to live righteously even if they suffer for it, including the famous verse about being always ready to give a defense {apologian} to every one requesting from us an account about the hope in us with meekness and fear. The meekness and fear apparently apply to our attitude in defending the account of our hope, and is by context intended to imply good behavior on our part such that those who talk as though we are evildoers will be ashamed of having done so. For it is better (3:17), if God so wills it, for us to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Thus the context leads into verse 18 where Christ is presented as the example we should follow, Who also suffered for doing good rather than for doing evil:

Verse 18a: "Since [logically] Christ also previously actively suffered concerning sins..."

Christ also suffered thanks to sinners despite being innocent, although He didn't just accidentally or inadvertently suffer against His will: He intentionally accepted the suffering. This is a bit of a paradox, since suffering necessarily involves reacting to something stimulating the reaction. But Christ knew it was going to happen, and acted in cooperation with what happened in various ways. Why?

Verse 18b: "...the Fair One [or the Just One] authoritatively for the sake of unfair ones [or unjust ones]..."

Christ cooperated with the suffering inflicted upon Him by unjust people, not only "over" them (in authoritative supremacy), but for their sake. By commending Christ to us as our example for patiently suffering unfair treatment from sinners, we're logically expected to do so with the same intention in mind as Christ: for the sake of the unjust ones.

But there is to be no mere us-the-righteous vs. them-the-sinners! For we ourselves were also sinners (as Peter certainly affirms in context, including later in related statements) for whom Christ died authoritatively and intentionally. So Peter continues,

Verse 18c: "[Christ authoritatively died for the sake of unjust ones]... so that He (Christ) may be leading you/us (emphatically) to the God..."

We ought to be actively cooperating with unfair suffering for the same reason, so that those who unfairly cause us to suffer will be led to God, just as we were. We aren't cooperating with Christ if we divorce such suffering (even though it is unfairly inflicted) from that intention and goal. This fits very well with the contexts preceding verse 18, too.

Verse 18d: "...He (Christ) being certainly caused to die in flesh (or to the flesh), yet being caused to live in spirit (or to the spirit)..."

A typical death and resurrection motif/statement; but as verse 19 will indicate, being "caused to

live in spirit" this time means something more like "yet was still alive in spirit".

Verse 19 (which continues the previous sentence from verse 18): "...in which, being gone, He (Christ) also proclaims (or heralds or announces to the spirits in jail..."

"In which" connects directly by grammar to "spirit", so in spirit not in flesh Christ is making a proclamation or an announcement of something to someone. And the proclamation or herald is made in parallel with some other proclamation by Christ (He "also" proclaims). And this proclamation occurs subsequent or consequent to Christ being gone from somewhere.

So Peter isn't referring to something the pre-incarnate Christ did in the past, but to something Christ did after leaving somewhere relative to Peter: "being gone" implies being gone [u]from[/u] 'here'. The term is in fact used for long journeys, and used again for Christ in verse 22 in ascending to heaven. This is also something Christ did while alive in the spirit but not alive in the flesh. So it's something Christ did after death but before the resurrection (which Peter affirms elsewhere -- though being alive in the Spirit can also refer to post-resurrection life of the transformed body, in which case this would have been happening during the 40 days before the Ascension, corresponding perhaps to the 40 days of the devastating water being poured from the heaven and surging up from the depths).

To whom does Christ go a long distance? To spirits in {phulak(i)ê}, in jail or in a place watched by guards.

This term is only used two ways anywhere else in the NT, where although relatively uncommon it appears a dozen times or so. It either means a time of night during which a guard stands watch, or it means a place of imprisonment or captivity guarded by someone technically hostile or in power over the one being restrained. (It refers to a birdcage once in Rev 18:2, but even then the imagery is applied as analogy for rebel or evil or despised things: "[Babylon the great, now fallen, has become] the dwelling place of demons and jail of every unclean spirit and cage of every unclean and hateful bird!")

Any time the term doesn't mean a watch of the night (or shepherds maintaining a protective guard over sheep at night in the Nativity), it always without fail means punitive imprisonment everywhere else in the NT, whether the imprisonment is regarded as fair or unfair.

So unless context here in 1 Peter indicates otherwise (which it does not), then the term should be interpreted similarly here: Jesus has gone in spirit to a jail of spirits to make a proclamation for some reason.

The next question would be what kind of spirits? Are they spirits which were unfairly imprisoned (perhaps like Christians or like Christ? -- the term in the NT often refers to Christians,

Christ, or John the Baptist.) Or spirits which were justly imprisoned?

Verse 20a: "[Christ proclaims or announces something to spirits in jail]... to ones being stubborn once upon a time, a time when He [God or Christ, or both if Christ is God of course] patiently waited, the longsuffering of God..."

So the spirits in jail were ones that had been stubborn to God's long-suffering at some time in the past. "Longsuffering" is a term in both the NT and the OT which always(?) everywhere else refers to God's intention to save sinners from sin and His unwillingness to punish them if possible. (A Calvinist might disagree with that term usage, but an Arminian would not; and even Calvs in my acquaintance realize the term almost always with perhaps only a couple of exceptions refers positively to God's intention to save sinners! Indeed in one debate my Calvinist opponent admitted the term was used everywhere else except the portion under debate -- not 1 Peter -- to reflect God's intention and attitude for salvation! And he was wary as a result about having to claim it meant nothing to do with salvation where we were discussing!)

Another grammatic point is that Peter uses the temporal comparison term {hote} to describe the stubborn rebelliousness of the spirits in prison. Every other occurrence of this term in the NT, including in the Petrine epistles, either clearly involves a known or future-expected difference in condition, or (in a few instances) can plausibly be interpreted that way (or else in a few other

instances is paired with a negative modifier to indicate the situation hasn't changed or isn't expected to). In fact, whenever the term is ever used in reference to sinners in the past by any NT author, including Peter previously in 1 Peter 2, everywhere else the usage always contrasts former rebellion with current penitent obedience and salvation. If Peter uses the term here to talk about sinners who haven't and aren't going to repent (and without the negative modifier which would normally indicate a continued situation), it would be the one time anyone (including Peter himself) overtly breaks the pattern of usage in the New Testament.

At this point it really doesn't matter in principle how long ago that was; what matters is what Christ's intention was to proclaim whatever He did. Which hasn't been directly mentioned yet, although Peter has tacitly expressed it by context earlier (more on that soon). But Peter goes on to explain who these spirits were:

Verse 20b: "[the time when the spirits were stubborn and God was longsuffering patiently with them]... in Noah-days, (while) the ark being constructed..."

The grammar is a bit glitchy here by English (and maybe Greek) standards, but Peter means the spirits were being stubborn back in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

So we're talking narratively about the first rebel humans, or about incarnated rebel spirits, or both. Jewish typology generally regards the

Flood (and so any scary large body of water) as being the prison of rebel demons, and Peter elsewhere certainly holds to the concept of human sinners being put in the prison of rebel angels. These could be presented as an example of how far Jesus goes to proclaim something to rebel spirits in jail: not just recent ones, but as far back as human history goes. And maybe including rebel angels.

Verse 20c: "...in which (ark) few -- this is eight souls -- were rescued-through, through water..."

At the time the ark saved only eight persons -- and they were hardly sinless! Noah's family were, by the double way of indicating "through", catapulted to safety through the violent water that killed the other people (humans and incarnated rebel angels alike).

Note that it doesn't matter overmuch how historical any of that was; the principle is what counts, and Peter is about to use it as a typological illustration anyway. But it's a very unexpected typological illustration: Peter starts talking about how [u]the water[/u], not the ark but the water that killed the impenitent sinners, represents the same baptism by which we are saved into Christ!

And it's definitely the water: the "to which" Peter says baptism is an "antitype" is a singular neuter direct article, so it ought to be referring back to another neuter singular noun or pronoun (or to another neuter singular direct

article standing as a pronoun the way this one does. In Greek "the" often means "this" or "that" or "that which" or "the one" or "those" depending on its grammatic form.) The immediately preceding noun, "water", is a singular neuter (even though it's in genitive instead of dative form, but that makes no difference here as the reason for referring to it changes correspondingly). But "ark" (along with its connected verb, not incidentally) is singular female, not singular neuter! Nor is there another singular neutral topic nearby, before or afterward, to which "to which" could refer.

It's possible that this is a grammatic error on Peter's part; but even if "the ark" was being referred to, it could only stand for an object (a burial tomb?) being baptized by water. The water is still the baptizing subject, and the water is also the means by which (in the story) God kills the rebel humans and angels -- to at least one set of whom Christ is now proclaiming something to them in their jail.

But proclaiming what?

Peter doesn't specifically outright say, which has led to understandable confusion and differences of interpretation. But the local contexts before and after this verse all talk about one thing: salvation of sinners by God. That's how Peter got into this statement in the first place, encouraging Christians to be kind and unresentful to pagans unjustly making Christians suffer despite being innocent of crimes, so that they can be led to God the way



Christ led us to God suffering for us when we were unjust. The comparison is a "greater includes the lesser" type: if Christ voluntarily and even authoritatively suffers to death on a cross to save those unjustly condemning Him, among whom we must include ourselves, we ought to be willing to put up with any amount of social injustice against us, too, for the sake of the people who currently are what we used to be. In fact we can use what happens to us unjustly as an opportunity to give an answer in good conscience for the reason of our hope to those who are currently unjust so that they may be ashamed they have accused us of being doers of evil.

That was how Paul got into discussing Christ going in spirit after being put unjustly to death in the flesh, to spirits in jail who were justly slain and put there by God for being unjust but whom God patiently wanted to save from their sins.

And now, having talked about that, Peter says in 3:21 that the water that killed those sinners is a figure for the water that baptizes us and saves us. The most important way to think of that water, whether the water of the Flood or of our baptism, is not to focus primarily on the putting away of the filth of the flesh (although in somewhat related ways the water did that to the ancient human and angelic rebels just as it does for us), but rather we should present that water -- the water of the Flood being a type of the water of our baptism -- as somehow being part of "the answer of a good conscience toward God". This phrase echoes what Peter said back in verses

15 and 16: how we answer those who unjustly accuse us of evil, in explaining the reason of the hope in us, involves [u]s[/u] having humility and fear and a good conscience. But this answer of a good conscience must have something to do with connecting the water that slew and imprisoned justly punished rebel humans and angels, to the water that saves us in baptism. It also has to be connected to our salvation being accomplished through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (verse 21), which is itself connected (by application of a typical reference) to Jesus dying in the flesh yet being alive in the spirit.

In all this surrounding context, the only concept that makes thematic and narrative sense would be for Jesus to be preaching the gospel to the dead ones as spirits in jail, with an intention that even though they were slain justly in the flesh they may live to God eventually in the spirit: basically so that sooner or later they will be resurrected with Christ into the "eonian life" that Christ always had and which He shares with those who loyally follow Him.

This would of course require that any rebel angels and authorities and powers who aren't yet loyal to Him shall be someday made subject to Him -- including the ones who had incarnated themselves in human prehistory and were slain by God as rebels along with ancient human rebels. But then Peter appends the brief hymn-kerygma about Christ the resurrected One "Who is in the right-hand of the God, being gone into heaven, of Whom angels and authorities and powers are being subjected to Him!" (verse 3:22)

If Christ suffers over us in the flesh for the sake of our salvation, we should take up arms in the same mind and with the same intention as Christ toward the unjust. (4:1a) Peter goes on to talk about how we in Christ already suffer and have suffered in the flesh to cease from sin, putting away our former pagan misbehaviors that we previously indulged in. But Peter was also just recently talking about another group of unjust people who have suffered in the flesh for their unjust behaviors and attitudes. The same goal, from God's perspective, must apply. Does that mean impenitence will be passed by? No, it wasn't passed by for those dead ones, and won't be passed by for currently impenitent people still alive in the flesh; and Christ is entirely ready to judge both the living ones and the dead ones! And so we come to 4:6:

Verse 4:6: "For into this, also for dead ones, a gospel is brought..."

"The dead ones" is in dative form, so it probably means "regarding dead ones" or "for dead ones" not "to dead ones" in a vector action sense. But {eis touto} is an accusative "in" so it does mean "into this" in a vector action sense. (The initial "for" in English is a post-positive {gar}, the placement of which settles some other grammatic issues here, but we'll get to that in a minute.)

But there are some much stranger grammatic issues. Why is "evangelized" a singular third-person verb? Like "he is" or "she is" or "it is"

evangelized? Grammatically it couldn't refer to "the dead ones": they're plural. Yet it's also obvious that the evangel applies to "the dead ones" somehow ("that they may be being etc.", which we'll get to soon). So what is being evangelized?!

The root word for this term involves a gospel (a good message) being announced to someone. So the singular form of the verb is commonly regarded as applying to the gospel itself, not to whoever is being evangelized. However, there are examples such as Matt 11:5 which show that the term shifts into the plural when plural objects ("poor-ones" in this example) are the receivers of the gospel. (When the verb is in a middle voice the tense matches who is bringing the gospel.)

So since this verb is in passive singular, who or what is having the gospel brought to it/him/her? (The third person singular of this verb can work with any gender or neuter.)

"This" from "into this" is the nearest single noun or pronoun; but then that raises a new puzzle: what is "this" referring to? It's a singular neutral pronoun; but there aren't any single neutral nouns or pronouns nearby!

For this reason, translators have tended to supply a reasonable guess as to what "for in(to) this" means: "for this reason"! That does make contextual sense: since everyone shall give an account to Christ who is ready to judge the living and the dead, [u]for this reason[/u] the gospel is announced or preached to the dead ones.

But this interpretation runs into the grammatic problem that the verb ought to be plural if "the dead ones" are the object of the gospel.

And yet, the gospel [u]is[/u] being brought for the salvation of the dead ones:

4:6b: "...so that they may be being judged, certainly according to (or down from) persons in flesh, yet may be living according to (or down from) God in spirit."

"They" can only mean "the dead ones" here. And the gospel is being brought to something so that these dead ones may [u]not only be[/u] judged in their flesh as a result of something men have done, but [u]also so that[/u] the dead ones may be living in spirit as a result of something God has done.

And these dead ones are to be contrasted somehow with "living" ones" whom Christ is also ready to judge. Yet they are also to be contrasted somehow in the sense that the gospel is brought [u]also[/u] to these dead ones [u]not only[/u] to the living ones. We can be 100% sure the general conjunction {kai} not only means "also" here but that the also applies to "the dead ones" not to "In this": because the {gar}, which in grammatic logic starts the whole clause (as our English "For" starts the clause), but which always runs after the initial word or phrase of the sentence or clause, comes after {eis touto}, but [u]not[/u] after {kai}. If the {kai} was meant to apply grammatically to {eis touto} (as some translations put it "For this reason also" or

"Also for this reason"), it would be included in that phrase somewhere, at the beginning or the end (so as not to split the prepositional phrase {eis touto}). In other words, the opening phrase would have read {kai eis touto gar} or {eis touto kai gar}, not what it does read {eis touto gar kai}.

If "living ones" from verse 5 means people already "living according to God in spirit", then the gospel has already been brought to them and they have accepted it (even if Christ is still judging them according to their deeds). So the gospel is brought even to those dead ones whose judgment shall certainly come or has come in the flesh, not for any hopeless purpose but so the dead ones may also be living.

Yet while a reference to judging the living and the dead may involve God (and/or Christ, or God as Christ) judging the deeds of the saved and the unsaved, typically the phrase refers to the judgment of those who are living on earth at the coming of YHWH and also those who have died and so are resurrected to judgment: OT and NT prophetic reports of this coming judgment indicate that those being alive at the time of judgment are not all in God's good favor but may well be judged and punished as rebels!

Peter's phraseology is very similar to that of Paul's in 1 Cor 5:3-5, where Paul judges the Stepmom-Sleeping Guy (as I like to call him) to whole-ruination of the flesh, handing him over to Satan thereby, [u]so that[/u] the SSG's spirit

may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus to come.

When this is combined with an argument from back in 1 Peter 3, on its own exegetical merits, that Christ went in spirit to the jail of spirits rightly slain in flesh and imprisoned for their rebellions, to proclaim something to them with a bearing on their salvation, the probability rises exponentially to a virtual certainty that Peter is talking about the gospel being preached to dead ones in spirit jail here, too. A conclusion strengthened by Peter immediately going on to declare:

4:7a, "Now the completion of all-things has come near."

The spirits who are still rebelling are not completed yet; they are not yet truly submitted to the Son and in the Son to the Father. But Peter, as quote above 3:22, definitely expects this to happen by the power and authority of Christ.

(Notably, the term for "draw near", literally "is at hand" (or more literally in choking or grasping range!), is one of the base-roots for eu-angelion! It is also the word often applied to "the kingdom of God" (or in GosMatt to "the kingdom of the heavens" where he is using an Aramaic euphemism for God).)

But none of this solves the riddle yet of [u]what[/u] (singularly) is being evangelized in verse 4:6! -- nor why it would be put as though

the gospel is being proclaimed in or into whatever-this-is.

Looking back through the preceding context, the first singular neuter noun or pronoun is {h(i)ô} back at the beginning of verse 4:4. In one way that doesn't help much, because that's simply part of another introductory prepositional phrase, {en h(i)ô} "in which"! But that does suggest a connecting chain of ideas. If we can figure out what "in which" applies to, that would be strong evidence of the same thing also applying to "in(to) this" in verse 6.

4:4 has sometimes been translated "Because of this" or "for this reason" or "this is why". That translation works well enough: it would refer back to the fact that Peter's audience (whether Jew or Gentile) used to go do the wanton things the other Gentiles do, thus the pagans now think it strange that the Christians don't run with them into the same puddles of excess anymore. But such a translation wouldn't help solve the mystery.

Another older way of translating the term has been something like "wherein" (as the KJV puts it). That's a little more literal, and so a little more particular, but generally the interpretation of the translation (so to speak) amounts to the same thing as before.

But for testing what the pronoun there (or a direct article "the" being used as a pronoun rather) might be specifically referring to, we may look back farther again. It doesn't refer to



any or all of that colorful list of lusty sins immediately prior, because none of those terms are neuter singular, and the list is itself never described by a term. Unless that term would be "the will of the nations" perhaps, but that seems more of a general thing that leads to such a list as a result.

Yet behold! -- "the will" {to thelêma} happens to be singular neuter! And in fact, the only other singular neuter noun preceding this nearby refers to "the will of the God"!

Now, the will of the God hardly needs evangelization. But the will of the nations sure does!

It also fits the intermediate reference to a singular neuter something, too: it is because of the corrupted will of the pagans/nations/Gentiles that such people not only think it strange that Christians (and righteous Jews, one may suppose) don't run into the same puddles as before, but that such people would also come up with slanders to explain such new behavior rather than being impressed by it!

So just as it is because of the corrupted will of fallen mankind that some such people will insist on inventing infamous falsehoods about those who are seeking to willingly cooperate with the will of God, [u]the corrupted will is what is being evangelized[/u] so that even dead people who are certainly to be judged in the flesh (thanks in significant part to results of evil deeds passed

down by other persons) may also come to live in the spirit despite having been already judged.

As I had previously argued, if 4:6 is properly translated "for this reason", this would be no evidence against 4:6 referring to dead people (even those slain in judgment for their cries) as well as living people being evangelized with serious hope of their salvation. But even if 4:6 is properly interpreted to refer instead to the corrupted will being evangelized, this does not weigh against post-mortem evangelization either. If anything it might weigh at least a little more strongly in favor of it, since when the singular corrupted will ("the will of the nations") is evangelized for the salvation of plural persons ("also regarding the dead ones"), this would imply total evangelization of all people, those who are alive and those already dead and (in regard to the flesh) already judged -- even if, logically and properly, there is more judgment for them on the way so long as they continue in impenitence.

**1 Peter 4:17-18;** (counter-evidence against universalism): An argument against my analysis of the relevant 1 Peter texts commonly appealed to from chapters 3 and 4, could be attempted from more extended contexts of 1 Peter (maybe including 2 Peter and/or Jude), or even from more extended contexts in the NT or even the OT; but there would have to be a principle argument provided to explain why one set of testimony should be interpreted in light of the apparently contrasting set instead of vice versa! Although

in my experience I have found that several such portions, on their own merits without reference to these verses, do not testify to hopeless punishment (or any inadvertently hopeless fate either).

But since not long afterward Peter reminds his readers (4:17-18) that it is the season of the One (i.e. God) to begin the judgment from the house of God, with indications that have been interpreted as hopeless for some people, I will append this sub-part as a consideration of them.

"And if foremost (chiefly emphatically first) from us, what (is) the completion of the ones being stubborn as to the good news of God? Yet/and/but if the just one hardly is being saved (literally 'is being saved toil-ly'), where shall the irreverent one and sinner be appearing?"

Obviously these statements are a how-much-more comparison of some kind. Just as obviously, the comparison is one of difficulty and even more difficulty. And just as obviously, the comparison is that even just or fair ones in the house of God are being saved with difficulty (which the adverb {molia} has to mean), so the unjust and ungodly are going to have an even more difficult time!

So it isn't unreasonable to interpret these verses, in themselves and on the face of it, as indicating that the end-result of at least some people will be hopeless punishment -- and even, due to the stress about the difficulty of saving

even the few fair people, that a large majority will be too difficult for God to save from their sins -- which of course couldn't be a Calvinist position!

But there are some peculiarities.

First, the gist of Peter's statement indicates that even those people who are already morally good are saved with difficulty. The rhetorical point of including them for comparing those who are morally bad would be lost otherwise. But Peter doesn't think that God only saves good people. In fact, in other undisputed contexts of the Petrine epistles (including undisputed portions of the disputed verses previously discussed), Peter emphatically affirms that God goes out of His way to save people who are not yet good!

Second, the "just one" is paralleled with "us" who are of "the house of God". If by "us" Peter means people who are already Christians in the house of God, that would mean God has a hard time saving even Christians He has already saved. A hardshell Arminian might agree with that, the idea being that even a saved Christian may lose salvation from sin to any degree (and be permanently lost); but the logic here would amount to this: that God has a hard time saving even Christians He has already saved, much moreso saving people He has not already saved! It must at least not be impossible despite the harder hardship for God to save those whom He has not already saved, or no one would ever be saved at all!

On the other hand, a Calvinist could interpret "us" and "the just one" as referring to people whom God has originally committed Himself to saving. But then the logic of the passage is broken again: aside from Calvs generally insisting that it is easy for God's omnipotent sovereignty to save whomever He intends to save (the point of tension being a question of when He does so and the extension of the process which He decides upon for His own sovereign purposes), Peter is talking about judgment beginning with and from the house of God. But in Calv soteriology no one begins in the house of God, nor begins by obeying the Gospel -- or they wouldn't need saving in the first place! And the elect are not themselves inherently righteous originally; in fact, Calvinists tend to regard any apparent righteousness before being saved as only a Satanic counterfeit.

This leads to the third point: the logic suggests that by "us" and "the house of God" and "the just one", Peter is talking about religiously Temple-observant Jews who are not yet loyal to Jesus.

This would fit well with a number of other observations (as we'll soon see); the main problem (as the fourth point) is that it would be an unexpected topical jump! The preceding and subsequent contexts for a long way in either direction are about Christians ("us" and "you") being exhorted to keep on being righteous even in the various difficulties imposed by suffering. Why would Peter be jumping now to talking about how judgment is starting with Temple Jews and

going on to irreverent pagans? Nor can Peter be simply holding such Jews up (whom he would have to be including himself and his readers among as "us") as an example, contrasted to his audience, of coming hopeless condemnation from God (if these will be hopelessly condemned how much moreso those others): Peter talks about this group being saved (even if that's difficult), and about this group contrasting with those who do [u]not[/u] obey the gospel of God.

Still, the fifth point would be that interpreting "the just one" and "us" who are in "the house of God" as Temple-observant Jews does fit the previous context of talking about evil behavior as applying primarily or at least emblematically to "the nations". Peter isn't talking to his congregation about rebel Jews being emblematic of unjust ones; yet that happens, too, many places in the NT and also in the OT for that matter! There is even a famous incident in which Peter was directly involved, where a clearly just and fair man, a Jew specifically of the house of God, had trouble entering the kingdom of God.

And this brings us to the seventh and perhaps most important point. I find it interesting that the New American Standard Version translators treat Peter as quoting a scripture from somewhere else, not merely alluding to one -- the text of 4:18 is printed in all caps except for the introductory conjunction {kai}. But the two verses they suggest, Proverbs 11:31 and Luke 23:31, clearly aren't the source of the quotation at all!

There [u]is[/u] however an anecdote in the Synoptic Gospels, in material traditionally understood to derive from agreed apostolic preaching (triple Synoptic sourcing, reflecting material the apostles agreed on as being how they would bring the gospel to the world), in which the apostles (probably including Peter but he was at least present to see their amazement) were stunned that a rich young synagogue chief was having difficulty, despite his clear actions indicating he was a fair man who truly cared about justice, entering the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:17-31; Matt 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30)

When this man, whom Jesus was fond of (Mark 10:21) went away grieving, for he was one with much property and could not bring himself to sell it and give it to the poor (although this may be misinterpreting afterward by the disciples, since the synagogue chief would have likely been troubled even more by Jesus effectively putting loyalty to Himself as keeping the first table of the commandments to love God alone and no one else!), Jesus looked around to them:

[quote="the Synoptic authors, harmonized"]"How sick at their stomach ('ill-foods') shall those who have the money be, entering into the kingdom of God!"

Now the disciples were awe-struck. Yet Jesus answers them, saying again:

"Children, how just like being sick at their stomach it is, for those who trust in money to be entering into the kingdom of the heavens! For it

is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle, than for the rich to be entering into the kingdom of God."

Now hearing this, the disciples were vastly astonished, saying consequently: "But who can be saved??!"

Yet Jesus, looking at them, said, "By people, this is impossible; but not by God. For all things impossible by people are possible with God."[/quote]

If it is hard for even those with all the advantages (whether wealthy, healthy synagogue chiefs or Jewish Christians) to enter into the kingdom of God -- and Jesus even warned Peter and the other apostles, not long prior to this incident, that they themselves would not by any means be entering into the kingdom unless they changed their prideful attitudes! -- the natural reply is that it must be even harder for those who do not have such advantages.

And again, notice how the imagery chosen by Jesus, being nauseous from too much food, fits ironically with Peter's list of sins from "the will of the pagans" back a few verses earlier in chapter 4!

Readers checking the Gospel references for context may also notice that each Synoptic account features Peter specifically answering Jesus in prideful misunderstanding, that they the apostles have (unlike that rich chief) left everything to follow Jesus. But Jesus answers



(Mark 10:30) that while those who do so shall receive back a hundred times now (and eonian life in the age to come), they shall also receive persecutions. Which has been a main theme of Peter's epistle since back in chapter 3!

Many years later while writing this epistle, Peter (who certainly failed much harder than this, before and afterward!) has enough sense to identify himself and his congregation, "us", as being among those who can be saved only with difficulty; but if he is only being humble about that in the epistle, why bring up the comparison with pagan behavior?

I suggest that the comparison with pagan behavior makes the most sense in the extended context of Peter's history (per the Synoptic Gospel accounts), and per the preceding local context of 1 Peter (argued extensively for above, on its own merits), if it is a rabbinic form of allusion to the incident with the rich young synagogue ruler: Peter expects his audience to know the answer to the implied question of "if it is so difficult for people with all the advantages, then how could those other people ever be saved?"

"With mankind it is impossible, but with God all things are possible!"

(Whereas, by contrast, Christianity has traditionally answered the question instead with, "With God it is also impossible!" or else "It is impossible for mankind because God Himself never intended to do so in the first place!")

If God's judgment, then, starts among those already in the house of God, who are being saved laborously, where shall the irreverent one and sinner be appearing, and what will the completion be of those who are being stubborn as to the good news of God?

Their completion, and their judgment, will be more difficult (in some ways). But with God all things are possible.

"Therefore (4:19), let those also who suffer according to the will of God," for God judges even those in the house of God, and them first, "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." Those who volunteer from evil intentions to inflict the suffering of God's judgment will certainly not themselves escape the judgment of God. But they shall be completed, too, though with more difficulty.

**2 Peter 3:9;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (scope of God's intention) (certainty of God's salvation): "[The Lord] is patient with you, not intending anyone to perish, but all to make room for repentance." Some non-universalists appeal to this verse as evidence for hopeless punishment, or at least for hopeless death. But the statement has nothing to say about the death being hopeless, only that it's something to be saved from, and the sooner the better. Calvinists recognize and heavily lean elsewhere on {makrothumia} testifying to God's intention to

save sinners from sin, and they believe (for various reasons both metaphysical and scriptural) that God will succeed in saving whoever He intends to save. But this same "patience" is testified in this verse! -- and Arminians regularly recognize, that this intention includes everyone! A Calv interpretation of makrothumia plus the overtly obvious scope of intention would add up to Christian universalism.

Nor can this be voided by appealing to the "intention" as less than God's chosen will, since not only is it connected with God's {makrothumia}, the term itself is actually {boulomai} which means "counsel", about which Paul and the Hebraist have important things to say regarding God bringing about salvation, as Calvinists are [u]very[/u] well aware in other regards! For example, when Paul expects his readers to ask why God judges evildoers whose hearts God has hardened in Rom 9:19, he imagines them asking according to the principle, "Who has withstood God's intention?" The Hebraist says (Heb 6:17-19), "God, intending more superabundantly to exhibit the immutability of His counsel {boule}, to the enjoyers of the allotment of the promise, interposes with an oath, that by two immutable matters, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong expectation lying before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and confirmed." Again Paul writes to the Ephesians 1:11 that God works everything according to the counsel {boulê} of His will {thelêma} (so that term cannot be used to daff away an assurance of scope or salvation either; see comments on 1 Tim

2)), an energizing will to which Calvinists appeal in exactly this verse for predestined assurance of salvation. Christ Himself, as reported in Matt 11:27 and Luke 10:22, says no one can recognize the Father except the Son and whomever the Son "intends" to reveal Him.

Admittedly, the term (including its cognates) isn't usually used to talk about God's intentions; much more often it's about human intentions. But the few times it happens are occasions highly important for Calvin soteriology per se. So to turn around and deny the strength of the term here at 2 Peter 3:9 seems highly inconsistent, and while not impossible would require strong contextual argument for a weaker application -- though the context seems to reinforce the strength of the term (again) instead. Nor can the weight be avoided by appealing to the negative form of God "not intending to perish", since the contrasting intention is immediately supplied, "that all should make room for repentance" and thus for salvation from sin.

An Arminian could reply that they certainly don't interpret God's patience with certainty of success, and such certainty of success isn't otherwise testified to here; but the typical Calvin reply about secret vs decretive wills can only be undermined by the presence of makrothumia in relation to the scope of God's intention. (See also comments on vv.15-18 next.) Moreover, we know from other verses that we are already perishing now, and yet God can save us from that in any of various ways (even though we'll all

have to perish in at least one way eventually, even if there's a rapture for some of us at some time -- we may not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.)

Perhaps relatedly, Peter goes on immediately afterward to speak of the destruction of the heavens and the earth in very strong terms yet with a positive goal of restoration after the total destruction: "yet we, in accord with His promises, are hoping for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness is dwelling." Calvs and Arms both typically don't regard this as different heavens and earth, but as ones remade after destruction.

This leads some people to try arguing that the term for the destruction of the heavens and earth by fire, {luthêsetai}, is weaker than the term for the ungodly perishing back in verse 7, {apôleias}. That's possibly true, although both are cognates of the same word for undoing or setting free, luo-, from which we get the English words "loose" and "lose". In fact there is no great grammatic difference between the word for perish or destroy (as variously translated) in verse 7, and Jesus talking about saving those who are lost (such as the prodigal son who, though he hadn't actually died in the parable, is also described as having died and come to life again.)

So even if the term in verse 10 used for the heavens and earth being destroyed by fire is weaker usually than a cogante of apoluo- (although since Peter also describes them as {pareleusontai}, which is usually weakly

translated as passing away, but certainly stronger than merely luo-), God can still save from their sins, back into righteousness, those He has apoluo'd. In fact, Peter uses the exact same term, plus an even stronger version of that term (usually translated something like "deluge"), for those slain by God in the flood, back in verse 6! So depending on how the argument adds up from 1 Peter's remarks on Christ evangelizing those imprisoned for stubbornness who were slain by the flood, if Christ evangelizes and saves them after a {kataklystheis} which {apôleto}'d sinners in the flood, He can save any sinners who will be {apôleias} in the fire.

The important thing is that it is not the {boulomenos}, the boulê, of God that anyone should {apolesthai}, as Peter reminds us two verses later (using the same word for destroy or kill being appealed to for its supposedly more hopeless strength), but rather the boulê of God is that {pantas eis metanoian chôrêsai} all should be agreeing into repentance. (And yes that's the same word from which we get "chorus".)

If God sends fires and floods to apolet- the unrepentant even though that is not His boulê, how much moreso shall He accomplish what actually is his expressly stated boulê!

Which leads back around to the main argument. Which is further strengthened (against apparent evidence otherwise) a few verses later where we are warned not to despise God's makrothumia toward sinners but to regard that makrothumia as

salvation, in agreement with what Paul writes to us concerning these things. See subsequent comments on 2 Peter 3:15-18.

**2 Peter 3:15-18;** (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism): here St. Peter warns that although St. Paul speaks things difficult to understand, there are those who twist his words and the rest of the scriptures to their own destruction.

As in just about any theological disagreement, verse 18 is sometimes quoted against Christian universalists. The topic however is explicitly about making sure we deem the {makrothumia} or patience of the Lord as salvation, in agreement with what Paul writes to us concerning these things.

But Peter has just previously said that God in His patience intends all to come to salvation! Arminians quote that verse 3:9 to show the scope of God's salvation; Calvinists quote 3:15 as a warning not to regard the {makrothumia} of the Lord as resulting in less than salvation from sin. Universalists, believing both testimonies, do not then turn around to find ways to twist verse 9 to mean less than full scope, nor to twist verse 15 to mean less than full assurance of success! Consequently, "knowing this beforehand, be on guard, lest being led away with the deception of those who do nothing [{athesmôn} the ones who do not enact, ones who mistreat foreigners or guests, as Sodom did, also thus described at 2 Peter 2:7], you should be falling from your own steadfastness." St. Paul regards

those currently outside citizenship in God's kingdom as guests and travelers, Ephesians 2:11-22.

1 John 3:8; (no more evil): "The one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning. The Son of God appeared [or manifested] for this purpose, that He may destroy the works of the devil." By context the work of the devil is the practicing of sin. (e.g. "The children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." v.10.) We all however were children of the devil in that sense, whether to the smallest degree, and in some sense we thus remain until we become perfectly righteous as God is righteous -- nothing less than that! ("Little children, let no one deceive you: the one who practices righteousness is righteous just as He [God] is righteous!" v.7) If sin is not eventually completely destroyed, so that no one is doing unrighteousness anymore, then a chief purpose of God in the Incarnation and Passion has been finally and ultimately frustrated, whether by God's own decree or (worse??) by Satan or other created sinners doing works of unrighteousness stronger than God's salvation! This must involve either annihilation of sinners without repentance, or universal salvation of sinners from sin. But to destroy the works of even the devil himself is not necessarily to destroy the person of even the devil himself, or else we all would be annihilated instead of saved from our sins. The question either remains open or, by



this testimony, at least slightly in favor of final salvation (not annihilation) of sinners.

[May need more revision] **1 John 5:16-17;**  
(counter-evidence against universalism): As a quick summary, "If anyone sees his brother sinning, a sin not unto death, he should ask and He [God] will be giving him life, to these who are sinning, not unto death. Is there (or There is) sin unto death? -- I say that he should not be asking about that! All injustice is sin; yet sin is not unto death." This translation doesn't say there are no sins that doom a person unto death; only that John is exhorting his readers not to ask about that. Which fits the notion that we aren't in any position (unless maybe we've been given apostolic authority) to know which sins are sins to death or not, so most of us should treat our brother's sins as not being sin unto death. If we ask for his salvation and it's in the will of God for him to be saved from death, God will grant our prayer. If God's will is for him to die, then He won't grant our prayer -- but for sake of charity, and since we aren't apostles, it's better for us to pray in hope for the sinner. The text is neutral about whether the death is hopeless or not; but the text most certainly does not say, even on standard translations, that there is a sin such that a Christian should not pray for a person to be saved from their sins!

It's interesting that the surrounding context, especially afterward, makes it pretty clear that by "brother" John isn't here talking about our Christian brothers but about our non-Christian

brothers; and yet elsewhere in the NT, the examples of sin-unto-death are issues within the Christian family. Non-Christians aren't usually the ones under the threat of that special punishment, Christians are.

The combination of "brother" language to refer to non-Christians, however, might mean that Christians are under threat of being punished as unfaithful and so being treated differently (namely as the unfaithful instead of as the faithful) -- a point that comes up elsewhere in scriptures (such as the Synoptic Gospels and Hebrews) -- whereas the possible change of status is entirely positive for those who start out unfaithful.

It doesn't help that the verses are freakishly difficult to translate anyway:

"If any should be seeing the brother of him sinning sin not toward death [{pros} typically means 'toward', which is why in KJV English it's translated 'unto'], he shall be asking, and He [God] will be giving to-him life to-the ones sinning (shifting suddenly to the plural) not toward death. There-is [or Is...? or Is there...?] sin toward death; [emphatically] not concerning this-there [{ekeinês}, a location pronoun 'there' as a genitive noun object of the preposition {peri} 'about'] I am saying that he should be asking. Every unfairness [or injustice] is sin; yet is sin not toward death."

Should the phrase be a question that I've marked with a bracketed [Is there...?]? It's hard

sometimes in NT Greek to tell when something is being asked instead of stated. I can however tell that the subsequent phrase is clearly about a 'there', as a noun.

I'm inclined to think that switching terms like that, indicates the writer doesn't want the reader to be asking whether there is a sin toward death: "don't go there!" as we would say colloquially in English to someone asking us a question we'd rather they not be asking. This impression is heightened by the final phrase of the set, which could be translated "there-is sin" (with the subject tacit), or "is sin" or "sin [emphatically] is", or even rhetorically, "yet/and is sin not toward death?"

Another reason I'm inclined to think this paragraph isn't talking about a distinction between praying for brothers who aren't sinning toward death and not praying for brothers (or whoever) who are sinning toward death, is because we're clearly taught elsewhere all over the scriptures that any sin is a sin toward death! It is only because of God's grace that any sin does not result in death, whether in the short run or in the long run.

I thus would end up going with the following interpretive option:

"If anyone sees his brother sinning, a sin not unto death, he should ask and He [God] will be giving him life. These are sinning, not unto death. Is there sin unto death? -- I say that he

should not be asking about that! All injustice is sin; yet sin is not unto death."

One of the ecumenical advantages of putting it this way, is that even Calvinists and Arminians (and their non-Protestant equivalents) could, in various ways, accept and apply the translation; typically by topically synching it with the following verses which talk about how those who are begotten in God are not sinning and are not being touched by the evil one despite living in such a fallen world. The third sentence could even be interpreted now to be a Calv prooftext about the sufficiency of God to save Christian brethren, with St. John disavowing even the question of whether a brother could be sinning so that God would give up on him eventually.

But beyond whether a Calvinist could then adduce the result in favor of God's potent competency to save sinners from sin, could a Calvinist adduce the subsequent paragraph, where John is talking about how those who are begotten of God are not sinning or being touched by the evil (one?) despite living in a whole kosmos lying in the evil; to mean something else along Calvinist lines? -- namely that there is no point praying for the salvation of those who are not already being begotten of God, in the sense of those whom God has not chosen to act toward saving?

The concept of the previous paragraph (vv 16-17), on this Calvinistic theory, would be that if we see a person doing sin, whom God has chosen to act toward saving from sin, then even though we know he won't arrive at death (thanks to God)

from doing that sin, we still ought to pray for God to help us cooperate with God in leading our fellow-chosen-one away from sin. (The grammar might work out that way well enough, especially if a 'for' was helpfully interpolated into the translation in one of a couple of strategic places.)

My problems with this are a minor exegetical and a majorly practical one. The (only?) minor exegetical problem is that this would render verse 17 inexplicable as an addition: John already told us there is a sin not to the death (that's presumed already in his injunction, isn't it?) Why is he reiterating it? -- and why bother adding that all injustice is sin? (This is probably why a few late Greek texts omit the negative {ou} in verse 17.) This is aside from the question of whether the smoothest reading of the extant Greek wording allows this meaning, since technically one could interpolate a few words here and there (as pretty much all translations have to do anyway) in order to get the sentences to synch with this meaning.

My major practical problem is that, strictly speaking, the advice is useless -- not because there's no point praying for brethren-who-will-be-saved (since the grammar can be read to indicate, probably correctly in any case, that the point to praying is to ask God how we can help God lead our brother out of sin, in loving cooperation with Him); but because under this kind of theology **WE HAVE NO WAY OF TELLING WHO IS AND WHO ISN'T CHOSEN BY GOD FOR SALVATION FROM SIN!** Even people who by all outward appearances

seem to be professing Christians, and even doing works of miraculous power in His name, may be headed for a condemnation that can only be hopelessly final under Calv (and Arm) soteriology. (cf RevJohn 2:1-7; Matt 7:21-23) Whereas, any of those pagan idolaters over there may be led at the last moment to accept Christ. None of us have any way of knowing; we might even be (self?)-deceived about thinking we are of the 'elect'!

It might be replied that since we cannot know for sure who is and who isn't of the 'elect', then we could pray for everyone and (as the saying goes) let God sort out the bodies. True; but then the Calv translation of the injunction is still useless, insofar as it is read to be saying that we should distinguish between praying for those who are already slated not to arrive at death from their sins, and those who will be so arriving.

Given that the larger local context is about idolatry, one might suppose that the topic of whom to pray for and whom not to pray for is actually limited to those who are not pagans and those who (currently?) are, respectively. This would mean that we are not to pray for pagans to be converted to Christianity; which if anything would seem worse than a more generally Calvinistic application of the principle! -- since in the more general application at least we have no idea really who we are and are not supposed to pray for; but here the application would practically exclude everyone who isn't

already officially a professing Christian except maybe those, like Jews, who are strict monotheists right now. Even Muslims give pagans a chance to convert before killing them!

I also observe that St. Paul, in a couple of epistles (most famously 1 Cor 5 but also 1 Tim 1), hands over to Satan certain rebel teachers who (as 1 Tim puts it) have shipwrecked in regard the faith. (In 1 Tim these are Hymenaeus and Alexander "among others"; in 1 Cor 5 it's the unnamed teacher and Epicurian factionalizer I like to call Stepmom-Sleeping Guy.) In 1 Cor 5's case, this looks pretty certainly like it's to the death; and the phrasing is extreme in either case. It also reminds me of the phrasing in 1 John 5 which might be rendered "the evil one" (a nickname for Satan).

But is their cause hopeless?! Not at all! Paul in each case specifically says he's doing it so that they'll learn better: in 1 Tim 1:20, "so that they may be taught not to blaspheme", and in 1 Cor 5:5, "so that [the SSG's] spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus". Insofar as what they're doing counts as idolatry, Paul can be said to be praying not for them to live but for them to die: he's going further in that sense than the Evangelist in 1 John 5! (Even on Calv interpretation, John is simply saying don't ask for those who are sinning toward death to be given life by God. He isn't saying his readers should pray for them to die!) But Paul's active condemnation, though into death, isn't into hopelessness. On the contrary, he has hope for

them through the condemnation of God.

Taken altogether, then, I have to lean toward rejecting a Calv interpretation/translation of 1 John 5: 16-17; and I certainly don't see how Arminians could do any better with it, even when the translational options are factored in. Whereas, when translational options are factored in, I arrive at a result that synchs up with things I think are being taught elsewhere in Scripture (even on basically the same topic); provides the smoothest use of the Greek as it stands; has some exegetical superiority to other options -- and, perhaps incidentally, fits well enough into universalism.

Put another way, the verse as commonly rendered would be some kind of serious theological problem, but it wouldn't be specially a problem for universalism any more than for Calvinism. Maybe less so, inasmuch as a "sin unto death" isn't treated as being finally hopeless elsewhere in scripture despite arriving at the death.

But when the supposed threat ("sin unto death" is possible) comes packaged with a huge practical problem (it looks like the "sin unto death" is supposed to be observable, and yet both practically and doctrinally speaking it cannot really be observable by us, even if Calvinism or Arminianism is true), then I'm not worried about the claim as a problem against universalism. I start to suspect mistranslation instead.



Can the verses mean that we shouldn't ask God to give life to the willfully unrepentant? I could agree with that easily enough. After all, a basic tenet of orthodox/evangelical universalism is that the only unforgivable sin is the one that is not repented of.

In this case, a sin not unto death would be one that the other person is repentant of but still tends to habitually do, or he tends to fold under temptation, or whatever; but he does know it's wrong and (this is the key point) is seeking to be free of it. A sin unto death, by contrast, would be one the other person is unrepentant of. Not only would such sins be somewhat feasibly identifiable by us as external second-party observers, but it might actually be a sin to ask God to give life (in the sense of the zoe eonian) to someone who persists in being unrepentant! (This should be distinguished from those who are sinning but don't realize yet that they are sinning.)

From the standpoint of universalistic soteriology (as developed elsewhere), what should be prayed for is that God would lead the sinner-unto-death to repentance, encouraging those who still love their sins to repent and drink and wash clean with the water flowing from under the throne of life, freely and without cost (if I may illustrate from other Johannine texts here), so that they may obtain permission to enter the never-closed gates of the city and eat of the tree of life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations.

At the end of the day, 1 John 5 isn't a decisive chapter for any of the three basic soteriology groups. The sin-unto-death verses are tough to translate, and positions already developed elsewhere can be fitted into the various translation options (sometimes into more than one option per soteriology.)

Jude 6; (counter-evidence against universalism): import discussion about contexts and terminology here (contexts indicate the term is a-idios, invisible, not ai-dios, eternal).

Jude, in quoting apparently from a text of the Book of Enoch, includes a difference from Enoch's received text: unlike extant copies of Enoch, where Michael asks YHWH to destroy Satan, Michael does not even rebuke Satan although he asks YHWH to rebuke Satan.

I would interpret this verse in light of an exegesis of Isaiah 24:21-22, and its contexts, especially in regard to how Saint Paul directly refers to the context of those verses in 1 Corinthians 15. The point in question is what it means (contextually) for the rebel angels and kings of the earth who are gathered into the dungeon and confined in prison (as in Jude 1:6 and its contexts) to be "visited" after many days. Does that mean punished (which was already happening?) -- or reconciled and set free? (Which is what the term usually means elsewhere subsequent to being imprisoned, as in this case.)

I would also interpret Jude 1:6 in light of what 1 Peter 3 verses 19, 20 and 22 and chapter 4 verse 6 mean, since the narrative and thematic contexts of Jude 1:6 (and its parallel in 2 Peter) indicate Jude is talking about rebel angels who incarnated before the days of Noah and were destroyed in the flood.

Much more relevantly, I would interpret Jude 1:6 in light of testimony about what happens to the human sinners mentioned around that verse: the whole point there is that false human teachers will share the prior fates of other human and angelic sinners. But if human sinners turn out to be reconciled, that would lend weight to rebel angels faring the same eventually by the same comparison! Since at least one other scripture (in Ezekiel) indicates the inhabitants of Sodom will be reconciled with rebel Israel, slain for being even more sinful than the Sodomites, in the Day of YHWH to come, becoming sisters together under YHWH, then something of a parallel fate would be expected of similarly punished rebel angels.

The whole case for hopeless punishment of the rebel angels here, then, rests on what the Greek term *aidios* can or does or must mean in that verse.

There are at least two (maybe three or even four) different words that those letters might spell in Greek, depending on whether the first two vowels are taken together as a diphthong, *ai dios*, or as two separate syllables, *a idios*. In Unical Greek, or even miniscule Greek, there's no way to tell

the difference by sight; later copyists would have to differentiate by putting a double-dot (like a German umlaut) over the iota or not, to indicate which term they thought the word meant.

If the term is ai-dios, then it means something roughly similar to high brightness (with the second part of the word related to the underlying primitive word behind Zeus, theos, deus, etc.), and is a metaphor relating uniquely to God Most High. By a second metaphor that could then mean eternal, as that's one of God's unique qualities (especially as the first syllable spatially pictures ongoing vertical height). In this sense the word would be a much stronger version of one way to interpret the adjective eonian -- which is much more common in the Greek Old and New Testaments, and is used most often in the NT for eonian life. That would be life from God or from the heart of God or uniquely from God, or a little more colloquially God's own life. Ai-dios would be an even more emphatic way of saying that same thing, thus a very strong way of saying that the bonds holding the rebel angels are divinely from God and uniquely related to God. That might mean they are as eternal as God (in a derivative way of course), or it might be more of an authoritative emphasis. It wouldn't mean the bonds are eternal apart from God; they can only last as long as God keeps them on, but the meaning would emphasize that the bonds have God's strength from God.

The other option, a-idios, has itself two potential meanings! One would be a variant way to say that the bonds cannot be seen.

Another meaning would be a negation of a common use of *idios* in the New Testament to mean "pertaining to one's self", "private" or "separate for one's self", or (by a colloquial extension) to possess for one's self. The whole point of these angels of course is that they went their own way in rebellion against God, and now God has captured them with bonds enforcing the idea that these angels do not belong to themselves but belong to God. However, while that meaning isn't impossible I acknowledge it does seem to be straining the usage of the term in connection with "bonds": God has kept them in not-private bonds? (But the bonds are an unseen prison at least! -- which would seem to be privation!) God has kept them in not-belonging-to-themselves bonds? Yeeeaahhhh, that's true, but it seems a very weird way to say it. One (or both) of the other two meanings would fit more smoothly.

Which leads to the third overall option: that the word is a pun that means multiple things! We can see this at work in the first chapter of Romans where Saint Paul is talking about the *aidios* power of God. The point there is that God is rightfully angry at even pagans because even pagans know something about the invisible God from the manifest display of the visible works aside from His *aidios* power and divinity. Here the word clearly means *a-idios*, a variation of invisible; but it probably also means a variation of *theotes* or divine nature. In other words, philosophical pagans are without excuse because they are in some position to know about God's

divinity and divine power, but even non-philosophical pagans can see something of the invisible power of the invisible God by the visible results which cannot be accounted for otherwise. (We may also, by the way, see a contextual possibility here that the term means public results, not private results, or a-idios, of the unseen power of God! -- even though on analysis I doubt this is the meaning intended at Jude 6.)

It's possible Jude is making a similar rabbinic double-meaning here: after all no one denies that the bonds are uniquely from God and so are going to hold until when-if-ever God frees them. Although that leaves open the question of whether God will ever free them! -- the answer isn't a built-in no by meaning of the term.

But if I had to guess from exegetics whether only one meaning was intended, I would probably go with imperceptible; mainly because the parallel statement in 2 Peter 2:4 definitely uses the term hades (which means 'unseen' and is closely related to the unusual term a-idios) and "pits of darkness" or zophos. Also because, when Jude himself compares the false teachers oppressing the church to rebel angels again a few verses later (v.13), he specifically describes them as "wandering stars for whom the zophos of the skotos (or the "gloom of the darkness") has been reserved into (or for) an eon".

The contextual weight for Jude v.6 meaning "imperceptible" by a-idios, is therefore very strong.

Still, it's certainly possible that Jude rephrased 2 Peter 2:4 in such a way that it also held the meaning of being specially from God. I can't rule that out, and I am not even interested in ruling that out, since I agree with the concept anyway!

The only thing I am pointing out here is that the term does not intrinsically mean the bonds will certainly last forever. At most it means the bonds will last as long as God chooses for them to last, and the contexts of Jude 1:6 (if anyone cares to look) do not in themselves indicate that God will choose for them to keep on lasting forever. Indeed, even on a non-universalist systematic theology, we're told toward the end of RevJohn, in the second half of chapter 20, that God will set these demons free at the end of the Messiah's millennial rule (whatever that may mean in itself), for their final rebellion and defeat right before the same judgment which Jude 1:6 is talking about!

So, in fact, those bonds can and will end. Even if they are replaced with bonds that do not end. But that's a whole other question.

(By the way, that phrase at the end of verse 13, {eis aiona}, has been replaced in very late copies by {eis TON aiona}, into/for the age, probably because that sounded stronger than the rather weak way of phrasing it originally! This phraseology is directly paralleled on the same topic in 2 Peter 2:17 -- except without even a weak {eis aiona}! The term should therefore not

be translated more than "for an age". That would at first glance mean the current age before the day of the Lord to come, the age they're already being bound in. Although, neither would that necessarily exclude them also continuing to be bound in the age to come, of course. Based on parallel contexts, the "into/for an age" probably means they're being kept for the day of the judgment of the Lord, so it wouldn't only mean this age. Neither, however, does it necessarily mean they will be kept in bonds all throughout the subsequent age: the term is much weaker than any fair reading of that from the term.)

On {idios} meaning reflexive possession, one of my concordances shows a lot of such occurrences, with different grammatic suffixes of course. It also forms the root of {idiôtês}, for private citizen in contextual contrast meaning an amateur rather than a public professional, from which by extrapolation of the negative connotation we eventually get the word "idiot".

I gather that the "un-perceive" translation is supposed to be a dative plural masculine adjective form of the root behind the verb {eidô}. Strong #127, for example, immediately after #126 for aidios, uses almost the same construction {aidôs} to mean downcast eyes with reference to the same primitive "seeing" root. Since this is a reference to proper humility, an adjective version of the same term would fit well in describing the chains, or the purpose of the chains, of the rebel angels in Jude (since humiliation of the proud is a common divine punishment theme); but I'm not at all sure a



plural masculine dative adjective version of this term would take the form {aidios} modifying the plural masculine dative noun {desmois} "bonds/chains".

Rev 1:5-6; (counter-evidence against universalism): this is the only time "kings of the earth" are referenced in RevJohn, outside their final mention in Rev 21, where the phrase doesn't explicitly refer to enemies of God. However, the implicit context is that the pagan kings of the earth (particularly the ones oppressing the church in the day of John, but also the ones who will be oppressing the people of God during the coming tribulation) aren't the real kings, Jesus is; and He's king over them, too, even though they don't acknowledge Him (being rebel kings). That's a pretty standard claim throughout the OT (with Jesus == God), and certainly fits the rest of RevJohn up until Rev 21, which references Isaiah 60 heavily (among a couple other scriptures) to indicate those are previously rebel kings now repenting and coming in.

Moreover, those who are faithful now are coming into the kingdom of Christ to be priests; and later also to become kings as well as priests. But those who are already faithful aren't called "kings of the earth" either here or later in RevJohn. Even at Rev 21, the kings of the earth weren't already faithful (per backreference to Isaiah 60), though they're certainly faithful and repentant of their sins now (or they wouldn't be able to enter the NJ where none may come whose

name isn't written in the book of life.)

The detail a couple of verses later in chapter 1, where all the tribes of the earth, even those who pierced Him, will see Jesus and mourn, might or might not be construed as penitent mourning. It certainly means true penitence in Zech 12:10, when YHWH arrives to defend Israel from her final siege, defeating her enemies and sending the (or a) spirit of grace and supplication so that those who had survived the battle up until then will mourn over Him Whom they had pierced as they would over a firstborn son. But God had sent that final battle against them because they had been impenitent sinners up until then; it is only when they see YHWH personally descending to rescue them at last that they repent, and mourn instead of rejoicing -- but God isn't coming to destroy them but to save them.

That isn't "all the tribes of the earth" at that time, only the survivors of Jerusalem. But Rev 1:7 combines the theme and language of Matt 24:30 (including reference to the arrival of the Son of Man to take the throne of the Ancient of Days from Daniel) with Zech 12:10, and the combination is suggestive that all the tribes of the earth will be mourning like the ones who pierced YHWH, due to YHWH pouring out the spirit of grace and supplication. That wouldn't necessarily have to happen all at once, however, if there are details indicating it doesn't, and also details indicating it happens to everyone eventually. (Which there are, and there are.)

**Rev 3:1-6;** (counter-evidence against universalism): here Christ warns the church in Sardis that unless they overcome their sin (waking up and strengthening the things that remain which are about to die), He will erase their names from the Book of Life -- and as Rev 20 teaches, those whose names are not found in the BoL at the lake of fire judgment (after the general resurrection) shall be thrown into the LoF.

Of course if on other grounds the lake of fire (or what it represents) is [u]not[/u] a hopeless punishment, then this cannot be evidence against universal salvation from sin, only evidence against the idea that God never punishes anyone.

But admittedly, being erased (actively erased as the Greek indicates) from the Book of Life, though a metaphorical description for God's judgment of sinners, is no small point: the idea that anyone can be written in the Book of Life and then blotted out, runs quite against Calv ideas of persistence of salvation, and even against soft Arminian ideas of convincing God to secure salvation. Hardcore Arminians (and some similar predecessors among Catholic theologians) would point to this verse as strong evidence that salvation, even once granted, can be finally lost. Even if God never happens to follow through with the threat, so long as the threat is real, and if the LoF punishment is hopelessly final, it must be possible to finally lose salvation.

Calvs and softer Arms would of course point to other verses strongly testifying that once God

chooses (originally or by being convinced, per Calv and Arm theologies respectively) to save someone from sin, we can trust He will definitely get it done, our faithlessness not invalidating the faithfulness of God.

The Sardisians have a name of being living, but they are actually dead (v.1) -- not that all of them are, but most of them (v.4). The others have not found their acts completed in the sight of the Lord's God (by context the Father). (v.2) They are exhorted, then to remember how they have obtained, and hear, and to keep and to repent. (v.3) If they do not, the Lord shall be arriving on them as a thief. (v.3)

The whole context fits the concept that these people do currently (at the time the message was given) have their name written in the book of life, but that the Lord Jesus may erase it (not just blot it out; the term in Greek is literally to erase). And other congregations are given similar warnings if they don't shape up. (The most relevant comparison might be the congregation in Ephesus, whose lampstand the Lord will be moving out of its place if they do not repent. (Rev 2:1-6))

Having one's name blotted out of the Book of Life is parallel with being grafted out of the vine in Romans 11; but Paul stresses that we should not despise those currently outside the vine, for God can graft them back in again, and those currently in can also be grafted out -- for despising those currently grafted out!

Relatedly, Exodus 32 surely implies that that having one's name blotted out is not a hopeless situation (especially compared to the culmination of the Song of Moses at Deut 32). More importantly, almost the last verse of the book of the final OT prophet, Malachi 3:16 (and surrounding contexts) directly shows God adding people's names back to the book of life (called there "the book of remembrance before Him") after His exhortation of repentance to them and their repentance. Admittedly, in terms of narrative logic, this isn't shown happening in-or-after the day of judgment which Malachi prophesied; it's shown happening in Malachi's day. But of course, Mal's prophecy was about the forthcoming punishment of God (in the day of the Lord to come) being very and repeatedly emphasized as intended for hopeful refining. So in effect, the intended result of the day of judgment will be to add names back to the book, just as God added in the names of penitent rebels in Malachi's own day. Malachi testifies that it can be done (in case anyone is unwilling to add up details elsewhere, or to accept St. Paul's testimony on it using a different metaphor of branches being grafted in after being grafted out); and, in effect, that it will be done.

Is there any evidence closer to Rev 3 indicating the punishment isn't hopeless? Well, according to Rev 2:17, there is apparently a sense in which everyone entering into the kingdom of heaven receives a new name from God! In that sense, one way or another we all who are finally saved must have "new names" written into the book, commensurate with the salvational change wrought

in us; which may imply that (metaphorically of course) the names of saved people in the book are always erased and changed to our new names.

More pertinently, the congregation of Laodicia, soon afterward in the same chapter (3:14-22), receives one of the severest rebukes from Jesus in the whole New Testament: it would be difficult to imagine more colorful imagery than to say the Lord is about to vomit them out of His mouth! Yet the Lord also adds, "Whosoever I may be loving as a brother (or am fond of, philos), I am exposing and disciplining." (v.19) The Laodicians, or the significant majority of them, believe themselves to be rich, deceiving themselves when they are actually wretched and poor and blind and naked (v.17). The Lord exhorts them (among other imagery) to buy white garments to be clothed so that the shame of their nakedness will not be made manifest. (v. 18) If they do not, He will surely expose them! -- so they had better become zealous and repent! (v.19) But even if that exposure and vomiting happens, God does not punish them hopelessly, only in hope that they will repent and obtain from the Lord what they need. Thus (as it is written in verse 19) the Lord exposes and disciplines them in love.

And if God does so for them, then by the same principle so for the Sardis congregation: being erased from the Lord's book of life (or the Ephesians having their lampstand moved, for that matter, or having the Lord fall upon them suddenly like a robber), is equivalent to the Lord spewing them (actually vomiting them!) out of His mouth and exposing the shame of their

nakedness. Yet the latter, by direct scriptural testimony, is not a hopeless punishment, and indeed God does so in love to them; therefore, by parallel, being erased out of the book of life is not a hopeless punishment but a loving "discipline" (the same word used by the Hebraist in Heb 12 for a lovingly hopeful punishment, though surely a frightening one best avoided.)

Relatedly, note there are others in RevJohn whose nakedness shall be exposed as part of God's punishment, not least the whore of Babylon (whatever that figure may mean).

Rev 5:11-13; (all things gathered finally under Christ): John in his vision sees the totality of all creatures in creation worshiping the Father and the Son. The language is extremely excessive and inclusive, and on any coherent reading it cannot be regarded as what is already happening at the time of John's vision, nor can it already be happening during the main history of final tribulation before the return of Christ. By necessity it must either be a flashforward to the end result, or it must be hyperbolic rhetoric for poetic effect.

Rev 14:6; (everlasting not everlasting): the gospel itself is called "eonian", but one way or another (by eternal conscious torment, annihilation, or universal salvation) must cease to be preached as it will no longer be needed.

Rev 14:11; (punishment not hopeless): the smoke of their torment (or touchstoning) goes up unto/into/for eons of eons, and they have no rest

day nor night, who are worshipping the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name. Obviously, the question is whether people keep worshiping the beast and holding onto the mark of his name: worshiping is not a static one-time event, as getting a mark might be. Insofar as there are indications elsewhere (of which there are many, including Rev 15:2-4 not long afterward) that people will come out from idolatry (including that of the beast) into faithfully worshiping God, that would eliminate the qualifier "who are worshiping".

Rev 15:2-4; (post-mortem salvation) (all things gathered finally under Christ): John sees a vision with people standing upon the "sea of glass mixed with fire", corresponding to the basin of purification in the Temple, having come out from the Beast and out from his number and out from his idolatry, having become conquerors. They praise God with the Song of Moses as well as with the Song of the Lamb -- the Song of Moses, from Deuteronomy, talks of how all the nations will come worship before YHWH in the day of YHWH to come (John cites Psalm 86:9 and Isaiah 66:23 as well), especially those rebels (and particularly rebel Israel) who shall repent and be vindicated by God after He has destroyed them until they are neither slave nor free. These are definitely not the same as the 144,000 witnesses, who per Rev 14:3 sing a new song that only they can learn thanks to their unique status.

Rev 19; (punishment not hopeless) (post-mortem salvation): Christ wages war unto "fair-togetherness", which would be contradicted if



this wasn't the goal of His destruction of the kings of the earth and their armies. As it happens, the language there is practically an enacted version of the climax of Psalm 23! The kings of the earth (same phrase indicating greatest human enemies of Christ everywhere else in RevJohn) show back up leading the nations into the New Jerusalem as loyal subjects, later in RevJohn after the general resurrection and the lake of fire judgment.

Rev 21:4; (post-mortem salvation) (no more evil): "And God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes; and there shall be no more Death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." One way or another this must refer to a forthcoming situation of the New Jerusalem. Yet the remainder of Revelation shows that Death, sorrow and pain has not yet passed away when the New Jerusalem comes. It must pass away afterward then, and so certainly that God comforts people as though it is already true. In any case, the second death of the lake of fire must also pass away, or else this strongly affirmative language cannot come true: so either annihilation (without sorrow and pain and crying from the survivors who lose loved ones to annihilation???) or universalism, not ECT.

Rev 22:3 says very strongly in Greek that there shall no longer be any curse, using a term (katathema) related to, and paralleled elsewhere by, anathema. (GosMatt uses katathema, GosMark uses anathema, when each discusses Peter cursing himself to deny Jesus.) The idea seems to be at

least that people will no longer be prevented from entering the NJ due to previous circumstances, since people are still under curse outside and unable to come in [u]unless they repent[/u], for which purpose saints go out with the Holy Spirit to invite. In other words, before then some people may have been prevented for reasons other than sin from entering the NJ, but now this will not be a problem. (With the final goal being foreshadowed toward the beginning of Rev 21, until which time those who fondle their sins must stay outside.)

Rev 19-22, and the book at large; see extensive notes elsewhere of course. The idea of YHWH Himself being the river of the coming Jerusalem, is paralleled in Isaiah 33:21, where the Majestic One, YHWH, shall be for us a place of rivers and wide canals, on which no boat with oars shall go and on which no mighty ship shall pass, for YHWH is our judge, our lawgiver, and our king.

In regard to "let the filthy continue filthy and the unclean continue unclean", this is at the least presented smack in the middle of two strong sections exhorting evangelism, so should not be interpreted to mean evangelism is useless or does not even happen! -- all the saved are saved from being filthy and unclean after all (as verses soon afterward specifically say, washing robes clean in the freely given water of life). The saying does indicate sinners, or not all of them, will not be saved 'automatically', but that at least some of them choose to remain dirty (fondling their sins as John colorfully puts it soon afterward) and so must be evangelized to

choose to wash and be clean. It may also be a comparative reference similar to how even the heavens and angels are unjust and unclean compared to God (not even unfallen angels being intrinsically good) and so by an extension of comparison those who repent last may be like vessels of wood and of earth rather than of gold and silver (2 Tim 2:20) -- not to be derided on that account, of course! And still useful in the great house.

The reference to the wicked continuing to be wicked and the righteous to be righteous, strongly echoes Dan 12, where the righteous ones will understand the point of the punishment to be for instruction and leading the unrighteous ones to be righteous; with the wicked continuing to be wicked because they don't understand.

In regard to whether the evangelism is future or present-day: I'm not going to say verse 17 has nothing to do with present evangelism, because any evangelism is principally equivalent: it would be ridiculous for me to say that the invitation of the Spirit and the Bride, to the thirsty, to take the free gift of the water of life, isn't an offer currently being made.

However, the Bride is a term that RevJohn had recently connected to being the New Jerusalem itself, or inhabiting the New Jerusalem (or both in different ways of looking at the same condition). And verse 14 is topically very much connected to verse 17: they aren't washing their robes anywhere other than in the same freely given water of life which flows out of the never-

closed gates of the NJ, and so obtaining permission or the right to go through the gates into the city (however analogical or literal that imagery may turn out to be). Who is it who is outside the city? Outside are the dogs etc. from verse 15.

Now, obviously the situation of verses 14, 15, and 17, already apply and are in operation today (and back in the day of RevJohn's composition, and back beyond that to the days of Jesus' ministry if not even farther in some ways). And those verses are interwoven with things like verse 12 and 16. But those verses are also topically connected directly to the relationship of the New Jerusalem and Christ to those still outside the city, whether impenitent and not coming in, or penitent and coming in.

And that situation isn't only something already happening now; John is seeing that it is a situation that will somehow become more obvious in the future after the visible coming of Christ and the lake of fire judgment and the final overthrow of the Beast and the False Prophet and the Dragon and the Kings of the Earth (whatever all that may involve).

So it isn't a question of whether those things (at least in regard to evangelism) are already happening now: they are definitely already happening now. The question is whether they are also happening then; and the themes and imagery (like the previously rebel kings of the earth repenting and coming in, which has to happen after they're fed to the birds by Christ,

whatever that means, which clearly hasn't happened yet -- and sure hasn't happened yet on a fully preterist reading of RevJohn 😊) do indicate these things will also be happening then except more obviously happening (and more obviously than evangelism after the fall of Jerusalem which seems no more obviously obvious in any way than before the fall of Jerusalem. Besides which, rebel Jerusalem is threatened in RevJohn but is rescued by YHWH and doesn't fall after all, which is a major evangelical witness to the rebels in Jerusalem. Which is also an OT prophetic theme.) Just like now, no one can enter the NJ unless and until (the conditional is actually there in the Greek though usually not translated as such in English) their names are written in the Lamb's book of life -- which other imagery indicates is equivalent to accepting the freely given water coming out from the never closed gates of the city (for slaking the thirst and washing the robes clean) just like the light of Christ by which the penitent kings of the earth will be walking and bringing those who follow them into the NJ.

If it's both now and then, that also fits with the somewhat ecstatic piecemeal fashion in which the revelation ends, with Christ saying "Look I am coming soon" (which hasn't happened yet in the sense He's talking about) and "I have sent my angel to give you this testimony" which is presently happening at the time of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John. The future and the present (and the past, compared to us coming afterward) are being combined in that way at the end; and that's true of future, present, and past

evangelism, too: the "eonian evangel" as the angel was shown proclaiming earlier over the climactic wrath of God.

Rev 22:18-19; (counter-evidence against universalism) (warning against non-universalism): "If any man shall add unto the things written in this book, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." So then, consequently, interpreters ought not to ignore or whiffle away the promises of universal salvation found in this book, not least of which are the sayings about post-mortem evangelism a few verses earlier! -- for of course the charge is often made that Christian universalists are adding to or taking away from what is revealed in RevJohn (or the Bible more generally), whereas we see Arms on one side and Calvs on the other (and their Catholic analogues) taking away one or the other kind of gospel assurance, and taking away post-mortem salvation, and adding in hopeless punishment instead. But what does it mean to be written out of the book of life and out of the holy city? The preceding verses of the same revelation have just shown what that means: the river of life flows freely out of the never-closed gates and the Spirit and the Bride invite those outside to slake their thirst and wash and enter and be healed and fed. To say that this doesn't happen, or that the punishment is hopeless, would be to take words away and/or add them to the revelation, just as much as to say

the punishment won't happen. But the threat may go farther, in concert with some other sayings suggesting as much, that a person may by impenitent sin void the inheritance of special rank in the kingdom of heaven to come; and if the New Jerusalem is a literal city, not only a representation of the Church, those evangelized out of the lake of fire judgment may not be allowed to reside there, though they may visit to be healed and fed.

Notice in regard to wiping away every tear, in Rev 21, that the language goes very far, yet ADNY YHWH says (what Jesus is speaking in RevJohn) in Isaiah 25:8, using the same image of wiping away tears from all faces, that He shall swallow up death in victory; which if anything actually adds to the assurance of Rev 21, that those still fondling their sins in the lake of fire, notwithstanding the promise, shall not be put to endless death or endless dying (annihilation or ECT) but rather that even their death must be swallowed up at last in victory.

\*\*\*note: check reference from Beecher's biography, in his sermon to ousted Baptist universalists, from 2 Samuel, about God being Israel's eternity. \*\*\*

\*\*\* Note: I do not regard statements about Christ's reign on the throne of God (and/or in the right hand of the Father), as being limited by the coming advent of Christ nor by the coming time after the advent when Christ shall give up His kingdom to the Father, although both of these

have been advanced as evidence that even the throne of Christ is not forever (thus neither is the punishment to come.) \*\*\*

\*\*\* (From Sherman notes: ) Torment, basanizo (verb) or basanos (noun), is a word that alludes to the purification of metals, the testing of metals in the fire of purification.

Brimstone, theion, means divine (theo) fire. It referred to sulfur which was burnt as incense for both spiritual purification, to ward off evil, and physical healing. And hot sulfur springs were widely sought for their healing properties. Even today sulfur is the foundational element of many medicines. Thayer's Lexicon, Friberg's Analytical Lexicon, and Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon all agree that THEION is related to purification and healing. And Liddell and Scott notes that the verb THEIOO actually means "to hallow, to make divine, or to dedicate to a god."

\*\*\* the covenantal model of atonement, not to necessarily exclude other models (compiled from notes on Gal 3, Gal 4, Heb 9, and Heb 10.)

On the cross, the Son is fulfilling a covenant He made with the Father to bring all of Abraham's descendants to righteousness, which thanks to the Incarnation of YHWH Himself as Abraham's descendant means all rational creatures are Abraham's descendants (including Abraham himself) for purposes of the covenant. YHWH put Abraham to sleep and stood in for Abraham when making the covenant (meaning at least two persons of YHWH



had to be making the covenant, one filling in for Abraham as his descendant). So unlike the Mosaic covenant which only Israel entered into and which can be broken by anyone who fails to keep Torah (and which can be replaced with a new one later with the Torah to be engraved on the heart figuratively speaking, which is necessary because EVERYONE fails to keep Torah), the sin of Abraham or any of his descendants cannot break the covenant of the promise, entered into by YHWH the Son with YHWH the Father with the Son standing surety for all descendants of Abraham (which thanks to the Incarnation means all rational creatures including Abraham himself and those who existed before Abraham). Only the Son or the Father can finally break that covenant, which isn't going to happen.

But because the Son refuses to break that covenant with the Father (and vice versa), and because the covenant pledged the life of those who swore it to keeping the covenant (meaning God is putting up His own self-existent, self-begetting and self-begotten life, not as a risk but as a surety for fulfilling the covenant promise eventually), the Son voluntarily keeps the terms of the covenant on His side of things and dies for other people who actually sin. Doing that is another guarantee that God will fulfill the covenant of the promise; it doesn't give God an excuse to break the covenant, He's keeping the covenant in perfect righteousness by dying as the representative of the unrighteous.

That doesn't automatically make everyone actually righteous, but it does show how far God is

committed to keeping the covenant and bringing about the promise of righteousness for all Abraham's children (i.e. all rational souls). We're expected to join the Son in voluntary self-sacrifice, too, in a bunch of different ways, but He leads the way as the captain of the atonement reconciling us to God, and He's just as committed to leading us to cooperative righteousness with Himself someday as He was committed to dying to keep the covenant for our sakes -- and just as committed to keep on self-existing for that matter!

So it isn't like standard PSA where God is picced and Jesus volunteers to take God's wrath instead of us and the sinner meanwhile goes scot-free. The Father isn't angry at the Son at all, and we're supposed to cooperatively share in the death of the Son to keep the covenant, which He has already shared (and from an eternal perspective always shares) with us.

Regarding the translation of 5:21 as sin-offering: in the undisputed examples the sin-offering, when mentioned in Greek, is described with the prepositional phrase {peri hamartias} absent from 2 Cor 5:21. So that does lend weight in the direction of not meaning sin-offering.

But then again, the context of Hebrews 10 explicitly indicates (for example at verse 12) that Christ was offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins, therefore as a sin-offering sacrifice (even though He isn't called a sin-offering there). And later at verse 18, when talking about the sin-offering specifically, the same prep

phrase comes up {peri hamartias}.

So on one hand, it is indisputably canonical that Christ is being offered up as the sin offering (and also the Passover offering which isn't quite the same thing, one being burnt outside the city and one being cooked and entirely eaten at a meal), an offering that is itself not sinful but which comes to represent sin being put away and destroyed so that people may become righteous to God; and on the other hand, the terminology normally associated with the sin offering is missing at 2 Cor 5:21.

Beyond all that {inhaaaaale!} 😊, Hebrews 10 continues a line of thought from Heb 9, discussing why Christ is superior to high priests; and a big part of the Hebraist's argument is similar to an argument made by Paul in some other places (notably in Galatians): Jesus sacrifices Himself as a descendant of Abraham to keep up Abraham's side of the Abrahamic covenant, for the sake of all descendants of Abraham (which are all rational creatures since God Incarnated as a descendant of Abraham) who have rebelled and thus broken the covenant which Abraham intended to make but which God graciously spared him from actually going through with, meaning the Father and the Son made the covenant between themselves.

That means the covenant (of the promise, unlike the Mosaic covenant) cannot be broken by anyone's sin (because Abraham didn't actually participate, so the covenant was only about Abraham and his descendants, between the Father and the Son); it

can only be broken by either the Son or the Father, neither of Whom are ever going to break covenant with each other.

But because the Son stood in as a descendant of Abraham, for Abraham and all of Abraham's descendants (i.e. every created person, numbering as many as the stars in the sky or grains of sand at the sea, poetically speaking), if any person sins then the Son is the one who pays for that sin, requiring the death of the Son despite Him being sinless Himself (because that was the type of covenant made, passing between hewn animals to show that if either party breaks the covenant they'll be slain like the animals).

But since the Son is sinless Himself, the point of dying wasn't to satiate the wrath of God, but rather to keep the covenant: the covenant between Father and Son only breaks if the Son refuses to sacrifice Himself for the sins of other people. And the promise given was that all Abraham's descendants would be led finally into righteousness.

That means the passion on the cross, among other things, is an enacted assurance that God intends to fulfill His promise to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants (who are all persons created by God, thanks to the Son Incarnating as a descendant of Abraham): the promise being to reconcile all things to God which need reconciliation, whatever those things are, whether things in the heavens (i.e. rebel angels) or things on the earth (rebel humans for example) or things under the earth (currently dead humans

and even slain rebel angels). And if we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son (as Paul says in Romans 5), how much moreso shall we be made alive into His life! In other words, there is no reconciliation that ends with permanent sinners, or with annihilated sinners, or with people no longer sinning but somehow not sharing in God's own eonian life.

\*\*\*\*\* the adoption/ransom model of the atonement: in this theory, which I also accept, the father decides the child is finally mature enough to inherit and so pays a 'raising/ransom' price to lift the status of the child from a slave in the household to a son or daughter. There's quite a bit of this kind of thing being talked about in the Gospels, too, though sometimes it's obscured for modern audiences by the question "what should I do to inherit the kingdom"? -- literally they're asking what they should be doing to be enjoying the allotment of the inheritance, i.e. what do they have to do to (if anything, or is just being a child of the Abraham covenant enough) to convince God they're mature enough to have the status of sonship in the kingdom.

Adoption in the NT atonement account isn't at all about God deciding that He'll treat persons who aren't His own children as though He created them and fathered their spirits after all (i.e. like a human adult could adopt some other person into a family who wasn't related already by generation). It is however about the children being led astray by rebel tutors into disavowing their relation to

God; so the children are the ones acting (whether explicitly, or in effect like Jesus' Pharisee opponents) in rebellion against the Father, thus as though God is not really their father.

Somehow this got all flipped around eventually to the sort of thing MacDonald was complaining about in his works, where it's like we were created and fathered in our rational spirits by someone or something other than God (Satan??) but God takes us in anyway: a theology that repudiates even basic supernaturalistic theism for something more like the polytheism of Mormonism -- except even less of a theology than that (since even Mormons typically grant that 'God' and not something other than 'God' creates rational creatures other than 'God'.)

Paying the ransom price to free someone from slavery has an application in rescuing captives or prisoners of war by "paying a ransom", too, but that isn't what ransom is actually about in the NT. Nor is it what the most popular idea of ransom atonement theory was about among the Patristics, which was more like a macho and clever military strategy, like a Samson event done on purpose: the Son voluntarily allows Himself to be slain in a fight against Satan (betrayed to death by the wife who should have been loyal to him! -- and not in an agreement to swap so that Satan will let go his captives for Christ) so that Satan will bring His body/soul into His fortress to gloat and triumph over it. Whereupon the Son takes the opportunity (before or after being brought inside the fortress) to kick the butts of Satan and Hades and Death and

any minion demons who dared oppose Him. The 'ransom' part in that case is freeing the prisoners in hades and 'raising them up'.

That version of ransom theory isn't at all a valid theological model (which is why it kept being tweaked to make the Son more legitimately powerful over hades from the outside -- after awhile the notion shifted over to Christ raiding hades from the outside, since He really shouldn't need to sneak into the fort), and it doesn't really have any direct scriptural evidence; but the raid on the Plunder-Possessor's captives is a big image for Christ in the famous incident of the sin against the Holy Spirit; and there's an odd sort-of echo in RevJohn where after a successful career of bothering the Antichrist and frying his minions, the Two Witnesses let themselves be killed and triumphed over in the AC's capital city for a few days, and then return to life to nuke the city with their bodily resurrection and ascension.

The Patristic raid-on-hades ransom theory is mainly important today as a witness to the prevalence of the agreement among theologians that 1 Peter is definitely talking about Christ descending to hades to preach the gospel to its captives and raise them to life -- which most Patristics agreed involved some kind of post-mortem salvation of sinners, not the rescue of "righteous" pre-Christian saints out of hades, since they shouldn't need rescuing! They disagreed with each other over how many sinners were brought out of hades by Christ, however, and/or whether others would come out later and

how many, and whether anyone else would go into hades/hell meanwhile. Notoriously, St. Augustine was one of the rare fathers who denied this was about raiding hades at all: he started the idea that Christ time-traveled back to the impenitent sinners before the flood to evangelize them for no good reason other than because He wanted to (I guess) since on Augustine's theology they must have been non-elect and Christ couldn't have been empowering them to accept the gospel and be saved (therefore not seriously offering salvation either). But it saved Augustine from having to acknowledge post-mortem salvation of sinners out of hades!

\*\*\* for the philosophy portion: must post-mortem sinners necessarily always be sinning afresh so that they can never be forgiven by God? (One way this could be true is if some variety of Calvinism, or Catholic Augustinianism, is true, and God never empowers some sinners to ever do righteousness, thus they can never even possibly choose to do righteousness, much less could God ever lead them by any means to do righteousness even if He wanted to which, on this theory, He never even intended much less preferred or wanted. But then, the theorist need not appeal to any punishment after death, since on this theory the same would be true for all their behavior before death as well! Alternately, as some Arminians and their Catholic predecessors have thought, God chooses eventually after death to withdraw any ability for some sinners to do good, much less leads them to do it. However, such theories either way ultimately void the principles of trinitarian theism per se. So while



I might be prepared to accept them as live possibilities at least, apart from scriptural testimony otherwise, if I denied trinitarian theism; as a trinitarian theist and theologian and apologist I must reject such theories as incompatible in principle with God's own intrinsic self-existence at and as the ground of all reality, for reasons I have discussed already. As for any scriptural case along this line, that sinners after death must somehow keep sinning, I have already addressed such testimony as might be cited, typically from the end of RevJohn. That some sinners do continue to keep fondling their sins, even for eons of the eons, I acknowledged; but I also observed and acknowledged that some such statements (as at the end of RevJohn) occur along with strong statements of evangelism toward such people! Certainly so long as they choose to keep fondling their sins they cannot also be accepting God's forgiveness and salvation from those sins; but that in itself does not mean they necessarily must continue doing so.)

\*\*\* Infinite sin demands infinite punishment; but only God, the infinite, could sin infinitely, if any sin could be infinite at all! This does not even amount to mere supernaturalistic theism; it might not even amount to a God/Anti-God cosmological dualism; to paraphrase Lewis, the person who suggests such a defense of hopeless punishment (whether annihilation or ECT) had better go back to Islam and learn for a while: you are not yet ready for Christianity! But supposing for sake of argument that a person, sinning against an infinite authority, somehow

sins an infinite sin -- though that is nothing more than a merely legal extrapolation, which utter tyrants might also appeal to for proportionate principle in their favor, yet allowing it for sake of argument: there could be no salvation from sin at all, much less any salvation from any punishment for sin and an infinite punishment at that! For if God (somehow) must punish an evildoer infinitely for sinning against an infinite God, this necessarily excludes all salvation. Nor could God's infinite mercy be called in to trump it, as two contraventive infinities reflect or negate each other leaving the condition as it is! -- or at best, the conflicting infinities would result in annihilation of all sinners thus neutralizing both infinite punishment and infinite mercy -- but no Christian annihilationist thinks all sinners are permanently annihilated!

The proponents of this defense tend to present Christ as taking the infinite punishment in the place of some or all sinners, but so far as they deny Christ was permanently annihilated or suffers eternal conscious torment, they must logically also be denying just the substitution of punishment (upon the most innocent and righteous person possible, no less) which they think is required to save infinite sinners from infinite punishment -- and this says nothing at all about saving any sinners from infinite sin! (I would not even need to mention again that such a system radically schisms trinitarian theism, though as a trinitarian theologian and apologist I could not let that objection to typical notions of penal substitutionary atonement pass by either.)

But granting further that somehow God manages any salvation of any sinner at all from such an infinite punishment, much moreso from such an infinite sin, then universal salvation from sin would also be possible or even certain, or at least an appeal to the supposed infinity of sin and punishment would weigh no more against universal salvation than it would be against the salvation of even one sinner. The concept also makes a complete hash of all scriptural testimony to the effect that once God has punished certain evildoers enough (the goal of 'enough' being to humble them to seek repentance and reconciliation), even to double payback for their sins and injustice (e.g. Jer 16:18, which ought to be nonsense if He is repaying infinite sin with infinite punishment), He will make peace with them and reconcile them to Himself and to their fellow creatures. "Comfort My people, speak comfort to Jerusalem, says your God, and cry to her that her warfare is finished and her injustice pardoned for she has received double for all her sins from the hand of YHWH." (Isaiah 40:1-2)

Regardless of how the topic is approached, it amounts at best only to an emotional despair of God either wanting or being able to save sinners from sin, and an ultimately groundless emotional despair at that. Fear the punishment of true and foundational justice upon impenitent sin, certainly; but don't fear that where even God's grace exceeds, sin hyper-exceeds! As sin has reigned into death, even so shall grace be reigning through fair-togetherness (justice) into

eonian life, by Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 5:20-21) \*\*\*

\*\*\* More philosophy: could God not simply provide the means of salvation alone, and still be the Savior of all persons? This is an extreme Arminian version of the 'potentially all men' theory typical of Calvinists, with this main difference: unlike the Calv potential, the Arminian version of this idea is mere potential only -- neither the Son nor any other Person actively saves anyone from sin at all, not even the 'elect' or 'chosen'! Christ opens a door only, and waits inside for the lost sheep to wander in of their own accord, or at best sends undershepherds out to encourage (or drag) the lost sheep in, though those undershepherds themselves only wandered in and were never actually saved by Christ.

The concept behind this is that Christ has already done everything sufficient for salvation on the cross, therefore needs to do nothing more; but of course, if Arminians (or their Catholic predecessors) really believed this, they would be Universalists, seeing as how on this theory nothing more at all ought to be necessary to do to save all sinners from sin, Christ having saved everyone already through the cross, and so no one would be finally lost, neither man nor angel. But Arminians are not universalists, and even such extreme Arminians do believe some sinners are hopelessly lost, and so in practical practice they do believe more needs to be done for anyone at all to be saved, but not done by Christ nor by the Father nor by the Spirit. (Notably this idea

tends to be held also by the Arminians who believe salvation from sin once attained can be finally lost, since this theory tends to involve God doing nothing to keep a person saved either once saved.)

Whether this idea is scripturally accurate, of God doing nothing more at all to save sinners, not even continuing His own evangelism after the cross, I think I have shown enough in that Part already to be wrong: at the absolute minimum, there are records of at least a few evangelical miracles after the cross, and those miracles sure didn't come from men, nor from angels (at least so far as the scriptural witness indicates). Any action by God to save any sinner at all, after the resurrection and the ascension (allowing as far as this restricted theory of action could be construed), would evidentially ruin this theory in principle, and St. Paul stands as a personal example of the direct action of Christ to save him from his sins. This theory would reduce the Son of God to be under the rebuke of St. James, and on greater matters than mere bodily salvation: "If any of you see a brother or sister naked and lacking daily food, and you say, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' yet you don't give them those things which are needed for the body, what does that gain?!" (James 2:15-16) For, in order for this theory to be consistent, Christ must not even give salvation to those who ask Him for it, nothing more at all being needed, and so nothing more at all being done by Christ, to save sinners after the cross!

But, leaving aside the scriptural witness (such as that without Christ we can do nothing, and every good and perfect gift including faith comes down from above as the gift of God, and that we must be born again of the Spirit); and leaving aside the philosophical reduction to absurdity, that if true, Christ would not even give salvation to those who come to Him to ask for it (and not coming to Him by any further action on His part either, such as calling and sending missionaries); consider that those who hold this theory usually acknowledge that God acts directly after the cross to judge and condemn and punish sinners -- yet not to save them!

Beyond sin exceeding grace after all: on this theory, the trinitarian God Whose own self-existent life (by which all other existence also exists) consists in fulfilling fair-togetherness between the Divine Persons, goes only so far in fulfilling fair-togetherness (righteousness, justice) between created persons, and leaves off any action to do so after the cross (or after the Ascension at the latest) -- yet requires more of creatures to be saved than the supposed everything that God has already done on the cross, and even requires creatures to be the chief and only evangelists to each other (humans being the chief evangelists with perhaps some angelic help on occasion) -- but the trinitarian God will stop at nothing, on this theory, to fulfill ultimate non-fair-togetherness between persons, in hopelessly condemning sinners, calling this justice instead of what it is (in relation to God's own self-existent action of interpersonal communion), anti-justice!

True, some Arminians who take this route, that God does nothing at all after the cross to save sinners from sin (which would have to include not baptizing with the Spirit so that a person can be born from above, nor giving eonian life to any creature), also take the same view of divine punishment: God does nothing actively at all to punish sin, but merely leaves sinners to their own devices, not sending them to hell or judging them in any way, not authoritatively inconveniencing them in any way nor sequestering them off away from the victims they desire to abuse in any way, not choosing even to withdraw the continuation of life from them so that they annihilate out of existence... except of course, no such Arminian believes this either. One way or another they do include at the very least some kind of authoritative inconvenience inflicted on the impenitent sinner to keep him eventually from victimizing all whom he might otherwise abuse.

And well should such Arminians keep that in the account, even on philosophical principle (not even counting scriptural testimony, which to say the least runs quite against the idea of God ultimately letting sinners go on with their own devices without interference)! It makes no philosophical sense that God, Who actively self-exists in fulfilling justice, and Who would do so eternally even without creating not-God realities, should refuse at last to act to fulfill justice in regard to the creatures who after all only exist by virtue of God's self-existently active justice!

But then, God's action to fulfill justice, real justice, the justice of God the Trinity, among and for and in creatures, must be consonant with God's own self-actions (as the three Persons of the divine Unity) to fulfill fair-togetherness between persons. To refuse to act in judgment against unrighteousness, non-fair-togetherness, at all, would be exactly as nonsensical, theologically speaking, as to act in judgment which results in non-fair-togetherness being ultimately brought about between persons and persons, and between persons and the Persons of God.

Philosophically, if trinitarian theism is true, God must logically (I mean 'must' in the sense of discovering truth, not of dictating truth) be more of a Savior than a punitive judge, not less, nor less than a punitive judge where applicable for achieving God's goals, which themselves must involve saving sinners out from their sin (much moreso out from any sin-effects they have been thrust into without their chosen consent) and into fair-togetherness, righteousness, justice, between persons. To propose (whether or not to save a theory of final hopeless punishment or fate for some sinners) that God stops acting to save sinners at some point, is theological nonsense if trinitarian theism is true; and to propose that God stops judging against sin and against sinners who hold to their sins (whether or not to apparently balance out an equal lack of action by God to save sinners from sin), only introduces more theological nonsense if trinitarian theism is true.



Trying to propose one or the other idea, in order to explain why some kind of non-universalism happens, or to justify it, or to save it as a theory, ends up not only being a position such theorists aren't willing to consistently hold in doctrinal practice, but also running up against a coherent trinitarian theism.

\*\*\* finished 1831's edition of 1788's *The Universal Restoration* by Winchester. \*\*\*

\*\*\* Very top of page 118 of 1712 3rd Edition of *Restitution of All Things* by Jeremiah White. \*\*\*