

THE TRUTH ABOUT HEAVEN

Where are Enoch, Elijah, and Moses?

Authored by
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Where are Enoch, Elijah, and Moses?

One of the most misunderstood doctrines of the Bible is that of heaven. Billions of people believe that, upon death, those who are saved go immediately to heaven while the lost are destined to spend eternity in hell. This belief primarily comes from tradition that is not supported by the Scriptures. Consequently, the vast majority have misunderstood verses concerning Enoch, Elijah, and Moses. Because of a preconceived notion about heaven, most have simply assumed that these men are currently living with God.

Exactly where are Enoch, Elijah, and Moses? Are these great heroes of faith alive today? Do people go to heaven when they die? What does the Bible actually tell us about these men, the state of the dead, and the afterlife? What is the reward of the saved? Exactly what is the truth about heaven?

Enoch Walked With God

While there is only a small amount of information in the Bible regarding Enoch, his story is profound and fascinating. The book of Jude states that he was the seventh generation of righteous men descending from Adam (Jude 14). This chronology is also verified in the book of Luke which traces Christ's stepfather all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). The Bible also tells us that Enoch was the great grandfather of Noah and that he lived during the same pre-flood age.

Enoch was a man who feared God and preached of the coming Messiah. We can be certain of this by considering the words of Jude who wrote:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 14-15).

Enoch Walked With God

Enoch believed God and looked toward the coming of a Savior. He was a good man who lived in a world that was growing increasingly evil. Through it all, he continued to live and preach of God’s way. This becomes apparent when we consider the summary of His life recorded in the book of Genesis:

Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years (Genesis 5:22-23).

The historical record states that “Enoch walked with God,” but what does this mean? Are the Scriptures telling us that Enoch literally walked alongside the Almighty in heaven? The answer is no. This expression is a metaphor meaning that Enoch lived His life according to God’s law.

Consider that this passage clearly states he was 65 years old when he had his first son, and then walked with God for three hundred years during which he had other children. These were “all the days of Enoch.” Obviously Enoch did not literally ascend to heaven and stroll with the Creator.

The Apostle John wrote that to keep His Commandments is to “walk as He walked” (1John 2:6). Simply put, to walk with God means that Enoch lived by God’s moral code. He kept the Commandments. The Scriptures affirm that the Almighty’s

statutes and judgments are a way of life, and those who keep them are figuratively walking with God.

For example, Noah was the great grandson of Enoch and he too was considered a righteous man. Notice what the Bible tells us about Noah's way of life:

Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. **Noah walked with God** (Genesis 6:9).

Clearly walking with God is living by His divine ethics. As Psalm 119:105 states "Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Walking with God is to live the way our Creator directs. In fact, God defined this expression for us when speaking to the patriarch Abraham, saying:

I *am* Almighty God; **walk before Me and be blameless** (Genesis 17:1).

In another example, God told the nation of Israel that they were to walk by His law. Then He explained what this expression means:

You shall **observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them**: I *am* the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, **which if a man does, he shall live by them**: I *am* the LORD (Leviticus 18:4-5).

The prophet Micah also used this metaphor to show that living God's way is a means, by which we walk through life:

He has shown you, o man, what *is* good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to **walk humbly with your God** (Micah 6:8).

If this were not enough evidence, consider that God used a similar expression when referring to people who walked contrary to His ways, saying:

This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts, and **walk after other gods to serve them and worship them**, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing (Jeremiah 13:10).

The concept of walking with God always refers to living a way of life congruent with His Commandments. This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible, and it was the way of life that Enoch walked in.

God Took Him

Many make another incorrect assumption that leads to a major misunderstanding. They assume that Enoch literally walked with God because the Bible states that “God took him.” Notice the verse in question:

And Enoch walked with God; and he *was* not, for God took him (Genesis 5:24).

God took Enoch “and he *was* not.” But what does this mean? Why did God take him? While the Bible does not directly answer these questions there are obvious clues indicating what occurred.

First, the term “not” used in this verse doesn’t mean that he no longer existed. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* indicates that “not” is the Hebrew *ayin* and although it can mean “to be nothing, or not exist” it is also used when describing someone or something that is “gone” or absent (H369). Consider a few other verses that use the term *ayin* which relate absence. King David wrote:

My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has **gone** from me (Psalm 38:10).

In this verse *ayin* is translated as “gone.” Obviously David was not dead when he wrote this song and therefore a loss of life was not the intended meaning. Instead, he related that light had left his sight. His eyes remained intact, but his clarity of vision had departed.

The book of Job uses this same term, but renders it as something that cannot be known. Speaking of the various galaxies God had created, the author wrote that:

He does great things **past finding out**, yes, wonders without number (Job 9:10).

Here the author related how the universe is a miracle too difficult for us to completely understand. How the creation was made and sustained is beyond our mental capacity (Isa. 55:8).

Considering the meaning of “not,” we can understand that Enoch did not die and go to heaven at the time of Genesis 5:24. The expression “he *was* not” doesn’t mean that he died or that he was transformed. Instead, he was removed to an unknown location. He was absent—gone, and no one knew where God had taken him. Many translators have understood this truth and rendered the Hebrew words in the following ways:

And Enoch went on in God’s ways: and he **was not seen again** (*Bible in Basic English*).

And Enoch was well-pleasing to God, and **was not found...** (*Brenton’s English Translation of the Septuagint*).

And he walked with God, and **was seen no more...** (*Douay-Rheims Bible*).

Enoch walked with God; then he **was gone...** (*God’s Word*).

Enoch lived close to God, and then **disappeared**...
(*Moffat Translation*).

Enoch walked with God; then he **was no more**,
because God took him away (*New International
Version*).

What may be the most accurate paraphrase of this verse
comes from the *Good News Bible* which states:

He spent his life in fellowship with God, and then he
disappeared, because God took him away (*Good News
Bible*).

Understanding what this verse does say, we must also
accept what this verse does not say. It does not state that Enoch
was taken to heaven. It does not tell us that he stood in the
presence of God; neither does it say that Enoch was changed into
a spirit being. The verse only states that he was gone, and it was
God who took him away. Any belief that the Eternal took Enoch
to heaven is based solely on the conjecture, misguided
imagination, and doctrines of men (Mat. 15:9). Such a belief is
not supported by the Scriptures. On the other hand, while we
cannot know where Enoch was taken, we can understand why.

The Pre Noachian Age

The story of Noah is of special interest when it comes to
understanding the life of Enoch. By faith, Noah and his family
worked for approximately 100 years to build the monumental ark.
The reason God commissioned such a task was because of the
great evil prevailing on the earth. As the author wrote:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was*
great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts
of his heart *was* only evil continually (Genesis 6:5).

It is easy to see that the righteous would have experienced enormous conflict and hostility considering the horrendously wicked environment. Therefore, Noah and his family were under considerable stress. The great Jewish historian Josephus recorded a description of Noah's age stating:

But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their disposition and their acts for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to their wicked pleasures, **he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children**, and those they had married; so he departed out of the land (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 1, chapter 3, section 1).

When considering the life of anyone who lived in that age we must take into account the atmosphere of the time. Any God fearing individual would have been the subject of extreme harassment. So fierce was this victimization that Noah thought his family might be murdered.

What many fail to recognize is that Enoch also lived during this same evil age. The Bible states that he was present four years before Noah's birth. At this time there were already terrible tyrants executing brutal violence throughout the land.

This is the context of the generation in which Enoch lived, and it is why he is named as one of the people who displayed great faith during extremely difficult times (Jude 14-15). The fact that he preached Christ's coming and the wrath of God so early in humankind's existence tells us that Enoch proclaimed the gospel during this time of great tyranny and violence. This truth inspired the author of Hebrews to write:

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5).

The Scriptures indicate that Enoch was removed from an area where his life was being threatened. Widespread wickedness of the people put Enoch in grave danger. Because of this, God miraculously saved him from being captured, tortured, or even killed. The Bible does NOT say that he became a spirit being, or that he went to heaven. In fact, after naming Enoch, this same chapter states that “These all died in the faith” (Heb. 11:13). If Enoch was taken so that he did “not see death,” and yet the Bible also states that he “died,” how do we reconcile these verses?

Defining Translated

There are some who believe that Hebrews 11:5 indicates Enoch was changed into a spirit being and taken to heaven. Although many translations of the Bible relate that Enoch was “taken,” the notion that he was changed to spirit is based on the word “translated” found in the King James Version of the Bible. This rendition states:

By faith Enoch was **translated** that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5, KJV).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words states that “translated” is the Greek *metatithemi* (G3346) and means “to transfer to another place” (p. 640). This same Greek word is rendered “removed” in Galatians 1:6, and “carried over” in Acts 7:16. In fact, of all the occurrences of *metatithemi* in the New Testament, the term NEVER means that an individual was changed into a spirit being or taken to God's heaven.

Because of its true definition, many translators have rightly interpreted this Greek word to indicate that Enoch was taken away. As the New King James Version states:

By faith Enoch **was taken away** so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken

him”; for before **he was taken** he had this testimony, that he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5).

The belief that the King James rendering is a reference to transformation is an assumption based on a false doctrine that people are taken to heaven when they die. Because of this mistaken belief, some translators presumptuously add their view to the account and say that Enoch “was carried away from earth, up to heaven, to be with God.” Such renditions of the Bible directly violate God’s command to not add to, or take away from, His Word (Deu. 12:32). Therefore, such translations cannot be trusted and should not be used by those who desire to learn only from the truth.

A similar mistake occurred when translators allowed the expression “translated” in Hebrews 11:5 to be used in the book of Colossians. Again, the mistranslation is not found in the New King James Version, but those who choose to use other translations of the Bible need to be aware that the Greek term used by Paul in Colossians is not the same word used in Hebrews and should not be considered as having the same meaning. As Paul wrote:

(God) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son (Colossians 1:13, KJV).

To the casual reader it may appear that this is the exact same expression used in Hebrews 11:5, but they are NOT the same. The original term used in Hebrews is *metatithemi*, while the Greek word in Colossians is *methistemi*. The expression used in Hebrews refers to being taken to another location, while the term in Colossians denotes a movement of focus that takes place in the mind. One is physical, the other is spiritual. For this reason, the book of Acts uses the same term to describe how the Apostle Paul “persuaded and **turned away** many people” from the worship of false gods and toward the obedience of Christ (Acts 19:26).

Therefore, the term used in Colossians simply indicates that those who are being converted were once going one direction in life that leads to darkness, but they have now been moved to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Another important point to consider is that the book of Hebrews speaks about faithful people saying that, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises,” and it specifically names Enoch as being one of “these” people (Heb. 11:13). Therefore, Enoch eventually died and has not yet received the promise of eternal life!

Hebrews 11 discusses faith and those who died for it. This section of the Bible has been surnamed the “faith chapter.” It gives examples of heroic men and women such as Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon, Samson, and David; people whose devotion to God did not fail in times of severe persecution. While we do not know the specific details of Enoch’s situation, it is evident that he was in considerable danger. That is why he was named in this chapter.

It should now be obvious. God supernaturally moved Enoch to another place on the earth so that he would not suffer torment at the hands of wicked men. As Genesis and Hebrews state, Enoch could not be found. Those who desired to do him harm were unaware of his location, and he was not seen again.

The Book of Enoch

Enoch remains a subject of interest to many Bible students. Since the Bible gives little detail about His life, some have turned to spurious works claiming to be authored by the patriarch. However, two things must be understood.

First, the book of Jude, and the entire Bible, never mentions the existence of a book of Enoch. Jude simply states that “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied...” (Jude 14). This is indicative of an oral statement handed down through the ages by tradition.

Second, while it is possible that a book written by Enoch may have existed at one time, the narrative being circulated today

is a complete fraud. It is referred to by scholars as part of the apocrypha. Books in this category are theoretical religious writings of uncertain origin. They may be regarded by some as inspired, but are rejected by the majority of legitimate authorities. Consider just a few quotes from scholars around the world regarding this spurious work:

The materials in 1 Enoch range in date from 200 B.C.E. to 50 C.E... Pseudepigrapha is a Greek word meaning “falsely superscribed,” or what we moderns might call writing under a pen name. The classification, “OT Pseudepigrapha,” is a label that scholars have given to these writings (Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, pp. 22-23).

The *Book of Enoch* is a pseudepigraphical work [a work that claims to be by a biblical character] (J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4*).

The book we refer to is the Book of Enoch, an ancient composition known from two sets of versions, an Ethiopic one that scholars identify as “1 Enoch,” and a Slavonic version that is identified as “2 Enoch,” and which is also known as *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*. Both versions, of which copied manuscripts have been found mostly in Greek and Latin translations, are based on early sources that enlarged on the short biblical mention that Enoch, the seventh Patriarch after Adam, did not die because, at age 365, “he walked with God”—taken heavenward to join the deity (Zecharia Sitchin, *When Time Began*, p. 127).

Both 1 Enoch and Jubilees are unmistakable products of Hellenistic civilization. A world view so encyclopaedic that it embraced the geography of heaven and earth, astronomy, meteorology, medicine was no part of Jewish tradition - but was familiar to

educated Greeks, but attempting to emulate and surpass Greek wisdom, by having an integrating divine plan for destiny, elaborated through an angelic host with which Enoch is in communication through his mystical travels (Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*, p. 178).

We may, therefore, with reasonable certainty assign the composition of our text to the period of 1-50 A.D... The author was a Jew who lived in Egypt, probably in Alexandria. He belonged to the Hellenistic Judaism of his day... In questions affecting the origin of the earth, sin, death, etc., he allows himself the most unrestricted freedom and borrows freely from every quarter. Thus, Platonic, Egyptian, and Zend elements are adopted into his system. The result is naturally syncretistic [a combination of different forms of belief] (R. H. Charles, *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, Introduction, p. xxvi).

Some have made claims that the Book of Enoch should be a part of the Bible. But the so-called “Book of Enoch” was not written by the Patriarch Enoch who lived before the Noachian Flood. The book was the product of *first-or second-century B.C.* mystical writers, thousands of years after Enoch had died... Jude did not quote from it. Jude obtained his information *directly* from Jewish tradition, which this Book of Enoch also drew on. Obviously, all such tradition is not correct. But the information Jude used is accurate because God had it incorporated into inspired Scripture. The Book of Enoch, on the other hand, contains such unbiblical myths as angels marrying women, and the “fall” of Adam. The spurious Book of Enoch was *definitely not* regarded as inspired by New Testament writers (Herbert W. Armstrong, *Do We Have the Complete Bible?*, p. 5).

Religious authorities caution readers against trusting these writings, and for good reason. Describing this pseudepigraphical work as a journey of “mystical travels” is quite accurate. The book contains esoteric stories comparable only to the fables of ancient Greek gods. For example, some of the subject matter declares that:

- There are spiritual portals all around the world from which the sun, moon, wind, and rain come into contact with our planet.
- A holy angel known as Uriel led Enoch around heaven.
- Enoch was used by God to reprimand wicked angels.
- A group of angels, known as the watchers, had sex with women and animals and are currently incarcerated heaven.
- A race of half human and half angels were born called the “nephilim” and were literal giants.
- Heaven consists of seven levels.
- There exists a supernatural prison filled with the light of massive fires.
- Demons will be imprisoned for 10,000 years and cleansed during their time of incarceration.

Claims such as these are likened to the fairy tale legends of Greek gods. So outrageous are the stories found in the book of Enoch that some have connected it to witchcraft and UFOs. In numerous places it entwines pagan myth and superstition with Biblical themes and creates a complete fallacy. The book of Enoch cannot be trusted. It is foolish to use such writings when trying to understand the Bible. As Paul warned of such spurious writings:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, **not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

Paul cautioned Christians about false writings that profess to be from true believers. He told us to not be moved by them! Though some have made outrageous claims that the book of Enoch actually compliments the Bible, this work was not written by the patriarch and it is filled with fictional stories and lies about Enoch, God, the angels, and heaven.

Heaven throughout the Bible

Heaven is a subject of great importance in the Bible. It is mentioned more than 500 times in the Old and New Testaments. However, it must be understood that all of these various Scriptures do not speak of the same place. The Bible reveals three distinct definitions of heaven:

1. *Heaven*: The sky—the visible arch in which the clouds move (Gen. 8:2; 1Kin. 8:35; Jam. 5:18).
2. *Heaven*: The celestial bodies, outer space—the place where other planets, stars, and galaxies exist (Gen. 1:1; Nah. 3:16; Heb. 12:26).
3. *Heaven*: The place where God and His angels reside (2Cor. 12:2; 1Pet. 1:4; Rev. 20:9).

Because heaven can refer to one of 3 different places, whenever the term is used, readers must consider the context of what is being stated in order to know which definition applies. Because the third definition refers to the dwelling place of God and His angels, this depiction is sometimes referred to as “the third heaven” (2Cor. 12:2). Knowing this we can now discuss what happened to the prophet Elijah. While doing so, it will become clear that this great hero of faith was not taken in a whirlwind to the place of God’s throne.

Did Elijah go to the Third Heaven?

After the separation of Israel from Judah, the northern tribes fell deep into the practice of idolatry and the worship of

Baal. God sent them the prophet Elijah to reprove the growth of heathen practices, and to correct the wicked behavior of Israel's leaders (1Kin. 18-22; 2Kin. 1). Elijah later took on an apprentice named Elisha (1Kin. 19:19). Elisha would eventually receive the position God gave to Elijah as God's prophet to the northern tribes. When the time drew near for Elisha to take Elijah's place, God revealed what He would do and instructed the prophet to go to Bethel. As the historian wrote:

And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and *as* your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel (2 Kings 2:1).

These two men journeyed to the area of Gilgal and then on to Jericho. Other religious men they met along the way confirmed Elijah's transfer of office to Elisha. Because of the apprentice's enormous respect for Elijah, Elisha felt a strong aversion to the repeated news of this coming event. As the Scriptures disclose:

Now the sons of the prophets who *were* at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and *as* your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they came to Jericho. Now the sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" (2 Kings 2:3-5).

Elijah proceeded to miraculously part the waters of the Jordan and stood with Elisha in the sight of at least 50 people (2Kin. 2:7). While the two conversed, God took Elijah away:

Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2:11).

A clearly upset Elisha proceeded to take up the mantle of Elijah and cross the Jordan. Understanding what God had intended, the onlookers bowed before Elisha and recognized him as the one God had chosen to carry on His work on the northern side of the divided nation of Israel (2Kin. 2:12-15). What most people fail to understand is what actually happened to Elijah.

A Whirlwind into the Sky

The fact that there are three definitions of “heaven” is of great importance when considering what happened to Elijah. Though it may sometimes confuse people, when we consider the context, and the description of Elijah’s ascension, it’s these definitions that make the truth clear. The prophet was not taken to outer space nor was he taken to the place where God and the angels reside. He was taken into the sky and set down in another location. There are several pieces of evidence proving that this was the case.

First, many who witnessed this event were “sons of the prophets.” This means that they had an understanding of the true God and the miracle they had just witnessed. Even after observing this amazing event, they were sure that Elijah was NOT transformed into spirit and taken to be with God. Instead, they believed he was moved to another area on the earth. Because of this, they wanted to go and look for him. As they told Elisha:

“Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken

him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send anyone.” But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, “Send *them!*” Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days but did not find him (2 Kings 2:16-17).

These men were convinced that Elijah remained on the earth. Their conviction led them to search for three days, but to no avail. This was not because Elijah was no longer on the earth. As we will soon see, it was because he was further away than expected.

The second indication that Elijah did not ascend to the third heaven comes from the method God used to move him. The Scriptures states that he “went up by a whirlwind.” The Hebrew for whirlwind is *sa'ar* which means “a hurricane, storm, [or] tempest” (*Strong's*, H5591). This is indicative of a very strong movement of air. Because air only exists on our planet, this statement proves that only earth bound components were used to move Elijah to another place.

Where Was Elijah Taken?

To understand where Elijah was taken we must remember a promise God made to Israel. The Eternal told His people that, as long as they were faithful, He would not leave them (Jos. 1:5). God always had at least one prophet ministering to the nation. This was the case even after Israel separated into two kingdoms. After the division occurred, God later commissioned Elijah to be the prophet to Judah while his apprentice Elisha remained as the prophet to Israel. Therefore he was taken in a whirlwind to another location within the region of Judah to serve as the prophet to the Southern tribes. This fact is made clear by letters Elijah sent to the leaders of Judah long after he was taken up in the whirlwind.

After the nation had divided, heathen practices were adopted by Judah. Jezebel led King Ahab astray and her daughter married the King of Judah. Pagan influence spread

throughout the region leading the southern tribes deeper into apostasy. As a result, God instructed Elijah to warn these wicked rulers. The chronicler documented these events stating that Elijah sent a letter to King Ahab's grandson Jehoram who presided on the throne. However, like his wicked fathers, Jehoram would not listen:

Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray. **And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet**, saying, Thus says the LORD God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father's household, *who were* better than yourself, behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you *will become* very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day (2 Chronicles 21:11-15).

From the details mentioned in this letter it is clear that the wicked events Elijah wrote about had already occurred. The disease prophesied to come upon King Jehoram struck the ruler a few years after he received Elijah's communication. This proves that the letter was written about ten years after the prophet was relocated by the whirlwind. Although he was removed from serving the house of Israel, Elijah still lived in the region and continued to be active as God's prophet to the house of Judah.

This document of history is irrefutable evidence that the prophet was not changed into a spirit being, and he did not go to the third heaven. Instead, he remained in the area of the southern tribes and continued to serve God on the earth as His prophet to Judah.

The Elijah to Come

Another set of verses that sometimes confuse people is found in the book of Malachi. In chapter four the prophet wrote of the end-time, stating:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:5-6).

Those who believe that Elijah was taken to the third heaven think that these verses foretell of God sending him back down to the earth before Christ's second coming. However, the Elijah of old is not the man being referenced by Malachi. In fact, Christ spoke of this same prophecy in Matthew 17 where He described the work of John the Baptist as a preliminary fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy:

And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that **Elijah has come already**, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that **He spoke to them of John the Baptist** (Matthew 17:10-13).

John the Baptist was not the prophet of old. However, he was an Elijah type figure who only partially fulfilled Malachi's prophecy. To support this truth, consider a conversation between an angel and John the Baptist's father that took place before John's birth:

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will

bear you a son, and you shall call his name John... For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him **in the spirit and power of Elijah**, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:13-17).

An angel of God plainly stated that John the Baptist would be born before Christ and he would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah." This does not mean that John was Elijah, but that he was a man who had the same divine inspiration as the Old Covenant prophet. In fact, John was confronted by the scribes and Pharisees who, like many today, misunderstood Malachi's writings:

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No" (John 1:21).

John declared that he was NOT the Elijah of old. In addition, John said that he was NOT the prophet prophesied to come before the end of the age. Instead, he was empowered by the same spirit which guided Elijah. His ministry pointed to the true God, and John was called for a similar purpose.

After John the Baptist was murdered, Christ made it clear that John was a type of Elijah. However, the Savior also said that "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things" (Mat. 17:11). By these words the Messiah foretold that there would be another individual the Father would send in the spirit and power of Elijah. Just as John the Baptist was a forerunner of Christ's first coming, another individual will precede the Messiah's second coming. This future Elijah will powerfully proclaim the

gospel and will turn the hearts of people to their ancient faithful fathers of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mal. 4:6).

Like John the Baptist, the prophet Elijah is dead at this time. He is not in heaven! He is asleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection of God's true and faithful servants.

No One has Ascended to Heaven or seen God

Christ declared that there is only one individual in all of humanity that has ever ascended to God's heaven. Consider His plain and simple words explaining:

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13).

This verse is not ambiguous or symbolic. The Savior's statement is straightforward. No man except Christ has EVER been to heaven. In addition to these clear words, Christ also stated that:

Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father (John 6:46).

The Apostle John reiterated this truth when he wrote:

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him* (John 1:18).

If Enoch or Elijah would have gone to heaven, they certainly would have seen God the Father. If this were the case, both John and Christ would be liars, the Messiah would have sinned, and we would have no Savior. And yet, God's Son, and the apostle whom Christ loved, declared that "No one has ascended to heaven," and "No one has seen God at any time!"

Moses greatly desired to see God and was only allowed to see His back (Exo. 33:22-23). Ezekiel saw a likeness of God on

His throne being carried by awesome spirit beings (Eze. 1:26-28). The apostle John witnessed Christ in a vision (Rev. 1:13-16). Jacob stated “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Gen. 32:30). However, it must be understood that Jacob was referencing an encounter with a spirit being that appeared to him as a man. In these accounts people only saw His back or a vision of God. They did not see God in His full glory. This is because an actual manifestation of the Creator before the eyes of a human being is not possible. God made this clear when He told Moses:

You cannot see My face; **for no man shall see Me, and live** (Exodus 33:20).

When the Bible states that Moses spoke to God “face to face,” this is simply an expression meaning that Moses talked to God directly as a friend (Exo. 33:11). In addition, Christ said that He was the God of the Old Covenant who spoke to Moses (John 8:58; Exo. 3:14). Christ is the only individual who died and went to heaven to stand face to face with the Father. Even King David who is known as a man after God’s own heart was not taken to heaven (1Sam. 13:14). As the Apostle Peter stated:

Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... For David did not ascend into the heavens (Acts 2:29-35).

The apostles were called by God to become future kings and priests. But their transcendent reward is yet to come. Christ made this clear when He plainly told them that they would not follow His ascension:

Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘**Where I am going, you cannot come,**’ so now I say to you (John 13:33).

Only our Savior has ascended to heaven. Paul made this crystal clear when he wrote that Christ, “is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18). However, the saints will one day rise to meet Him in the air. At that time the faithful be able to visit heaven—the dwelling place of God (1Ths. 4:17).

The Transfiguration

The Bible tells of another man who was taken by God. This occurred after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness when Israel finally approached the Promised Land. As the Bible records:

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, “This *is* the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have caused you to see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.” So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day (Deuteronomy 34:1-6).

God did not take Moses to another place where he would continue to live. Instead, He allowed him to die in Moab, but removed the body to a burial site that only God was aware of. But why hide the body of a faithful dead man?

This concealing was likely performed so the people of Israel would not eventually worship Moses’ grave, idolize his bones, or create religious relics from his remains. Remember that

Israel built a golden calf and proclaimed “a feast to the LORD” shortly after leaving Egypt (Exo. 32). Knowing that the people were capable of being swayed to idolatry, Satan wanted Moses’ body to be made available (Jude 9). However, God chose to keep his grave hidden foreseeing what might occur.

From these historical accounts we can be certain that Moses died. Thousands of years later Matthew recorded that Christ was transfigured before three disciples who witnessed a vision of Moses and Elijah talking with the Savior. As the apostle wrote:

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him (Matthew 17:1-3).

Could these verses be telling us that Moses and Elijah are now spirit beings and they literally came down from heaven to speak with Christ on earth? Absolutely not! This event was the fulfillment of something Christ had prophesied earlier which is recorded in the preceding chapter. As the Savior said:

Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matthew 16:28).

Six days later Christ was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. However, what these men saw was a vision. These three disciples did not see Moses and Elijah as living spirit beings. The vision was not real. For this reason the Savior had to bring them back to reality. As the apostle wrote:

Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.” When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only (Matthew 17:7-8).

The transfiguration was NOT an actual appearance of Moses and Elijah. Though it may have seemed real to the disciples, it was imagery projected by God to relate a specific truth. Christ will return and when He does He will raise up Moses and Elijah to be His intimate consultants. For this reason the Savior instructed these men to “Tell the vision to no one, until the Son of Man is risen from the dead” (Mat. 17:9). This particular vision was given as evidence that God will one day raise His chosen servants from the dead and they will rule with Christ for 1000 years (Rev. 20:6).

Moses, Elijah, and Enoch are not in heaven. They are not yet spirit beings. They are in the grave awaiting a future resurrection of the saints (Heb. 11:39-40).

Humans Do Not Have an Immortal Soul

The primary reason so many people believe that they go to heaven when they die is because of a false doctrine that began shortly after the creation of the first man and woman. God told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed Him they would die. The devil lied and told Eve the exact opposite:

Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4).

From that time forward, the belief that humans have an immortal soul within a physical body has been propagated by almost every religion. For centuries it has been taught that when we die our soul is released and goes to either heaven or hell. This inference continues even though God made it perfectly clear that we do not have any form of immortality. Notice Paul’s words:

He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **who alone has immortality...**
(1 Timothy 6:15-16).

A catalyst for the false doctrine of an immortal soul comes from a mistaken belief about what a soul truly is. Many

think that the word “soul” refers to a spiritual life force that is somehow separate from, but living within, a human body. They believe that this entity generates its own life sustaining energy, and when the body dies, it keeps on living. However, the Scriptures indicate that “soul” simply refers to a living, mortal being. Notice the first use of this word in the Bible:

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and **man became a living soul** (KJV, Genesis 2:7).

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible states that the word “soul” is the Hebrew *nephesh* and means “a *breathing* creature...” (H5315). In other words, a soul is simply a physical being that is susceptible to death. As the Scriptures declare:

Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The **soul who sins shall die** (Ezekiel 18:4).

Although humankind is special and set apart from all other creatures on this planet, when regarding the soul, we are no different than the animals. As Solomon wrote:

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: **as one dies, so dies the other**. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity (Ecclesiastes 3:19).

No human being has an immortal soul. Knowing this, we can understand the truth about heaven. Although God’s third heaven is a literal place, Christ is the only mortal being who has died and ascended to it (John 3:13). This being the case, what has become of those people who faithfully lived their lives according to God’s law? Does every human being die?

These all Died

The author of Hebrews describes the difficult lives of many faithful people. Notice what we are specifically told about the present state of these saints:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:13).

The Bible tells us that people such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Elijah, Jacob, and Moses are dead! It does not say that some, or even one of them, did not die. It says they “all died.” None of them have been changed into spirit beings and not one has gone to heaven! The promise of salvation has not yet been received, and it will not be fulfilled until the resurrection of the dead. As the Scriptures state:

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise. God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Hebrew 11:39-40).

What is the promise? It is the “hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Tit. 1:2). It is a place in God’s eternal Kingdom (Rev. 1:6). Christ has not returned and these rewards have not been handed out. None of these individuals have been transformed into spirit beings. The ancient patriarchs and heroes of faith are in their graves waiting for their change to come.

We can be certain that Enoch was not taken to heaven to walk beside God, Elijah was not changed to spirit, and Moses is not alive today. These men, and all who have died, are in the grave waiting for the time when they will be resurrected (1Cor. 15:52; 1Ths. 4:16; Rev. 10:7; 20:5).

Death—a Type of Sleep

Paul wrote that the things of God can be understood by examining the physical creation (Rom. 1:20). This indicates that God's plan for mankind is woven into the very fabric of life's processes. One of these essential processes is our sleep and wake cycle. What most do not realize is that there is a spiritual relationship between sleep and death, waking and the resurrection. In fact, the Bible repeatedly declares that when a person dies it is likened to being asleep, and when they awake it pictures being resurrected.

For example, the New Testament tells the story of a man named Lazarus who became very ill and died. When Christ realized that His friend was no longer living, He spoke to the disciples and said:

“Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” However, **Jesus spoke of his death**, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, **“Lazarus is dead”** (John 11:11-14).

Lazarus died, but Christ said he was asleep. After traveling four days to the place of his tomb, the Savior woke Lazarus up by raising him from the dead (John 11:17-45).

This correlation between sleep and death is found in several other verses. As another example, Daniel was a prophet who understood this Biblical concept and he wrote:

And many of those **who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake**, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:2-3).

God designed the sleep and wake cycle of the human body for several reasons. One of its purposes was to reveal His divine plan. It reflects a destiny that awaits all humanity. Consider the similarities between death and sleep—the resurrection and awakening.

How does it feel when we are sleeping? It feels like nothing. After we fall asleep we are not aware of anything going on around us. It is like flipping a switch and all sense of time becomes lost until we wake up. Only then do we realize that hours have past. Though there are brain functions going on in the background, unless we are in a sort of “half sleep,” we do not know anything until we wake up. It can be compared to a computer that is set to sleep mode. It shuts down with all its functions at rest. When it is jarred or awakened, the machine is up and running right where it left off as if no time has passed.

It is the same when we wake up each morning. When our consciousness is revived, we are unaware of how long we were asleep. Were it not for the light of day, or the face of a clock, it would seem as though little time had passed.

This is how it is with death. When the body ceases to function, the switch of life is turned off. We lose consciousness and our thought process stops. When our resurrection comes, it will seem as though no time has passed. For many people decades, centuries, even thousands of years will have passed. They will be raised to life unaware that anything had transpired since they died. The only knowledge they will have is that which they possessed before death. As the wise Solomon had written:

For the living know that they will die; **but the dead know nothing**... Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished... Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going (Ecclesiastes 9:5-10).

The psalmist also related this truth when he wrote:

Do not put your trust in princes, *nor* in a son of man, in whom *there is* no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; **In that very day his plans perish** (Psalm 146:3-4).

The Bible reveals that there is no sense of sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch, or even thought after the body has ceased to function. The dead remain in a state of suspension until God raises them up. When the switch of life is turned back on, what will be the thoughts of those who are raised? Will they remember the years their body laid decomposed in the dirt? Will they recall centuries of confinement in a coffin or tomb? Will they be aware of all the time they had spent in the grave? No. Like awakening from a night of sleep, it will feel as though they had just died and awoke seconds later. This truth inspired Paul to write:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, **concerning those who have fallen asleep**, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so **God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus**. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15).

The dead are essentially asleep. They will remain in this state of unconsciousness until “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1Ths. 4:16). King David recognized this truth and wrote:

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness (Psalm 17:15).

Our sleep and wake cycle pictures this future event. At that time, the people chosen by God will be changed to be like

Christ (Php. 3:21; 1John 3:2). They will then rise up to meet him in the air. Only then will they be able to ascend to heaven. After which, they will return and set up the Kingdom of God on earth as personal assistants to the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 20:1-6).

Christ's Promise to the Criminal

A popular verse used to propagate the idea that people go to heaven when they die is found in the book of Luke. While recounting Christ's crucifixion, the physician documented a conversation between the Savior and two criminals that were crucified with Him:

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "**Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise**" (Luke 23:39-43).

His response to the second malefactor's words indicates two things. First, the criminal understood that Christ was an innocent man who did not deserve to be crucified. Second, he realized that his own crimes deserved such a punishment. This tells us that he was truly repentant of his sin and recognized Christ as the Savior. Because of this he asked Christ to remember him in the next life.

The Savior knew this man's heart and forgave him of his sins. He then related words of enormous hope. The criminal was told that he would find himself in a place described as "paradise." Many believe this indicates the criminal would immediately be taken to heaven after death. Such an assumption

is made despite the fact that heaven is never mentioned in this verse. Instead, the word used by Christ was “paradise.”

The word translated as “paradise” is *paradeisos* meaning “a park, forest, orchard, or Eden” (*Strong’s*, G3857, H6508). When we consider the many prophecies concerning the coming millennial rule of Christ, and how there will be a restoration of all things to the earth, “paradise” refers to the earth when it is restored to the way God originally designed it to be (Acts 3:21). This planet will become much like Eden was when God placed Adam in the midst of the garden (Isa. 35). During that time, the earth was considered to be a paradise. This explains that Christ was not referring to heaven at all. He was speaking of the future Kingdom that God will establish on the earth (Jer. 23:5; Rev. 5:10; 11:15).

Another misunderstanding comes from a misuse of punctuation. Very little punctuation was in use by those societies in which the original manuscripts were produced. In fact, scholars agree that the New Testament books did not contain any punctuation until copies of them were made in the second century. Punctuation developed dramatically hundreds of years later at the same time copies of the Christian Bible were made. The comma that was later placed in Christ’s statement has misled an enormous amount of people. In fact, it is likely that the current placement was chosen specifically to encourage the idea that people die and go immediately to heaven. Notice carefully how this statement in Luke 23:43 reads with the comma in its current place, and then how it should be understood with appropriate placement:

“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

“Assuredly, **I say to you today**, you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Instead of telling the criminal that today he would be in paradise, Christ only related that He was speaking these words on

this particular day. In like manner, truly we say to you today, that nobody dies and goes immediately to heaven.

Christ's Ascension

Christ taught His followers that they were to walk in His footsteps. This means that the way to Eternal life is a trail blazed by the Savior (Mat. 16:24; 19:21; John 14:6). Because of this, many believe that when people die they will ascend to heaven just like Christ did. However, the Bible indicates this is not the case.

The Messiah's situation was extraordinary. No one but Christ has ever ascended to heaven (John 3:13). In addition, the resurrection of God's faithful chosen few has not yet occurred. As Paul wrote:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, **afterward those who are Christ's at His coming** (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Paul stated that the elect who are dead will be resurrected at Christ's coming. Since the Savior has not yet returned to this earth, those who are His have not yet been raised. No one has ascended to heaven, and none will until the Messiah comes in all His power and glory (1Ths. 4:16-18). Until then, everybody who dies is asleep in the grave.

Absent in the Body, Present with the Lord

Another misunderstood verse comes from the Apostle Paul who compared our physical bodies to a desired state of immortality. As Paul wrote:

Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So *we are* always confident, knowing that **while we are at**

home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:5-8).

Because Paul compared the corporeal existence to the spiritual, many think that we are in a continuous state of existence. They interpret Paul's statement to mean that we are either physically or spiritually alive with no suspended state in between. But this is NOT what Paul said.

Verse five indicates that God gives those He calls "the Spirit as a guarantee." Among other things, the Holy Spirit is a down payment, or pledge, of what is to come. Paul also referred to this guarantee as an "earnest of the Spirit" (2Cor. 1:22). God's guarantee gives Christians confidence knowing that, while they are in the flesh (at home in the body), and therefore not in the presence of God (absent from the Lord), they are assured to eventually be "absent from the body" and "present with the Lord." The indwelling of the Holy Spirit assures this.

These verses do not mean that there is a constant state of existence where people are either alive on the earth or with God in heaven. It does not indicate that there is no period of time in between—a sleep of death. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that the dead are essentially asleep, and will only be raised after Christ has returned.

Despite the many verses explaining this truth, some still hold to the false doctrine that we die and immediately go to heaven. Another set of verses misused to support this tradition of men are found in another letter by Paul. To the Church in Philippi, the apostle wrote:

For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. Nevertheless to

remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you
(Philippians 1:21-24).

Many read this verse and erroneously conclude that Paul believed he would die and immediately be with Christ. They believe that these verses indicate that he would be either alive on this earth or dead and with Christ. This is not the case.

We must recognize the meaning of “the two” states Paul is talking about. This is easily understood by examining his initial statement saying, “For to me, **to live** *is* Christ, and **to die** *is* gain.” Thus the two options are either to live or die. In other words, Paul stated that he could not tell which he would prefer: To live with Christ in him, or to depart (die) and be at peace. On the one hand being alive enabled him to have Christ in him, leading him, and inspiring him. On the other hand to die *is* gain meaning His work and suffering would be finished. Paul said that he was “hard pressed between the two.” However, he admitted that to remain in the flesh was more valuable for those he served in Philippi.

In addition, Paul clearly understood the relationship between sleep and death. The apostle knew that sleep resulted in a loss of conscious thought, and how the same results are produced in death. Therefore, Paul recognized that after he died his next waking moment would be a time when Christ raises the saints from the dead and at that moment Paul would be with the Savior. When this finally occurs it will feel as though no time had passed since his death. Thus Paul desired for the persecution and pain to end. He wanted to go to sleep and wake up in the resurrection.

Wake Up to the Resurrection

Sleep pictures death and waking up foreshadows a resurrection. When this monumental event takes place, the faithful will be raised as incorruptible and immortal spirit beings. As Paul declared:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep,
but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Paul also wrote that God is the only being who has immortality at this time (1Tim. 6:16). Because the above verses indicate that the saints will one day possess that divine attribute, we can see that no one except Christ has been resurrected and gone to heaven.

The patriarch Job was another godly man who knew that he would die and he understood that he would be in the grave until God raises him up. Only then will he be changed to spirit and live again. As Job stated:

If a man die, shall he live *again*? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come (Job 14:14).

Such is the case for every man and woman who has ever lived. Nobody dies and goes to heaven at this time. We must all wait until the time of God's choosing before we can become a spirit being and see His face. The Bible boldly teaches that the dead will be raised at a later time (Rev. 20; Eze. 37; Luke 11). The Apostle Paul declared this truth in a powerful sermon stating:

But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that **there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust** (Acts 24: 14-15).

Despite the obvious truths stated directly in the Bible, billions cling to a false doctrine about heaven. Countless numbers continue to believe in an immediate transference from this life to the next. Dozens of denominations dogmatically preach this falsehood and in doing so they blatantly disregard the true purpose of our existence.

The truth about heaven should inspire us to tirelessly work at being a part of the resurrection of the just. It should encourage everyone to fear God, keep His Commandments, and make every effort to be one of the chosen few who will be raised to reign with Christ in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 20:6).

The Reward of the Saved Is not Heaven

Heaven is not the place humans will eventually inherit. When the final resurrection takes place, the wicked will be burned up in a lake of fire. The righteous will live for eternity, but their ultimate reward is not to dwell in heaven. God is going to do away with this physical universe and create a new heavens and earth. After that, He will bring the New Jerusalem down to the new earth where the saved will forever dwell with Him. As God revealed to John:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is

done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:1-8)

This will be a wonderful time when all the faithful from all ages will be given eternal life. That life will be with Christ and His Father, but not in heaven where they dwell now.

Christ is preparing a place for us (John 14:2-3). It is the New Jerusalem. This future place will be the headquarters for God’s spiritual Kingdom. That is the transcendent destiny of those who will be saved.

Those who are not found in the Book of Life will be erased from existence—never to return. Those whose names are found in the book will become incorruptible and will live forever in God’s Kingdom. As Christ stated:

Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, video, and audio to help people better understand God's Word and His plan for humanity. Some of the printed material available includes:

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