

Are Enoch and Elijah in Heaven?

by Philip Neal

Mainstream “Christianity” insists that *heaven* is the reward of the “saved.” Key “proof texts” used to support this idea involve the patriarch Enoch and the prophet Elijah.

In Genesis 5:2 we read: “And Enoch walked with God, and then he *was* not, for **God took him.**” This is *presumed* to mean that God took Enoch *to heaven*. Concerning Elijah, II Kings 2:11 reads: “Then it came to pass as they went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire *came*, and [it] separated between them both. And **Elijah went up in a tempest [whirlwind, KJV] into heaven.**” This passage is likewise taken to mean that Elijah was taken to the heaven of God’s throne for his eternal reward. Elijah’s appearance in the “transfiguration” account of Matthew 17:3 also contributes to this idea that the prophet is now in heaven. Yet, Jesus said, “No one has ascended into heaven” (John 3:13).

Based largely on these texts, it is a chief tenet of Protestantism that *heaven* is the reward of the “saved.” But is this so? What does the Bible actually teach on this subject? Were Enoch and Elijah mysteriously taken to their “reward” in *heaven*? If not, *where* are they? And if they have *not* gone to heaven, how does this affect the popular teaching that heaven is the reward of the “saved”?

Elijah—Prone to Sudden Disappearances

Elijah was a key prophet of God during the reign of the notoriously wicked Ahab, king of the northern house of Israel. Elijah opposed Ahab in his efforts to keep Israel ensnared in almost total idolatry. Consequently, Elijah was always subject to persecution and death as a martyr. As we will see, however, God *protected* Elijah as necessary.

A passage in I Kings 18 records a chance meeting between Elijah and one of Ahab’s chief servants, Obadiah (who actually feared God). “And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And he [recognized] him, and fell on his face, and said, ‘*Are you my lord Elijah?*’ And he answered him, ‘*I am.* Go, tell your lord [Ahab], “Behold, *Elijah is here*” ’ ” (verses 7-8).

Ahab had been searching for Elijah, who was now planning a confrontation with the evil king (verse 2). But Obadiah is wary. In the past, when Elijah was said to be located, he would suddenly disappear—*nowhere to be found*. When this occurred Ahab had a habit of taking out his anger on the messenger. Hence Obadiah’s concern. He said, “What have I sinned that you would deliver your servant into the hand of Ahab to kill me? *As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation nor kingdom where my lord [Ahab] has not sent [men out] to seek you. And when [those of a nation or kingdom] said, ‘He is not there,’ he [Ahab] took an oath of the kingdom and nation [confirming] that they did not find you. And now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord, “Behold, Elijah is here!” ’* ” (verses 9-11).

Obadiah is afraid Elijah will pull one of his “disappearing acts” again, costing him his life. “And it will be as soon as I have gone from you, **the Spirit of the LORD shall carry you where I know not.** And when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me” (verse 12).

Notice that Obadiah was fully aware of Elijah's past "disappearances"—and feared that God would again "carry" him to some unknown location. It is apparent that Elijah had been miraculously "taken by God"—*relocated to a safe place*—numerous times in the past. Why? To avoid a premature death at the hands of evil men such as Ahab. God would "transport" Elijah to a safe location from where he could continue to work as a prophet—at least until his life was threatened anew.

Was Elijah Taken to God's Throne in Heaven?

In time, Elijah was to pass on his office to Elisha. In II Kings 2 we read: "And it came to pass when they had gone over [the Jordan], Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask what I shall do for you **before I am taken away from you.**' And Elisha said, 'Please, let a double portion of your Spirit be upon me.' And he said, 'You have asked a hard thing, *but if you see me taken from you*, it shall be so to you; but if [you do] not [see me taken], [your request] shall not be' " (verses 9-10).

Elisha understood what Elijah meant by his being "taken"—for Elijah had been "taken up" and *relocated* to another place numerous times. Now notice verses 11-12: "Then it came to pass as they went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire *came*, and [it] separated between them both. And **Elijah went up in a tempest into heaven....** And [Elisha] saw him no more."

We see that Elijah went up *into heaven*—out of Elisha's sight. But was *this* the heaven of God's throne? Was Elijah gone for good—on to his eternal reward? What did the other prophets think?

Notice verses 16-17. "And [the prophets] said to him [Elisha], 'Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master [Elijah], **lest 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.' But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, 'Send.' And they sent fifty men. And **they looked for three days, but did not find him.**"

It is clear from this passage that *no one* thought Elijah had been carried beyond the skies to God's throne, but to *another physical location*—"upon some mountain, or into some valley." This had apparently been the case numerous times, and Elijah was expected to eventually turn up again, just as he always had.

This time, however, Elijah's whereabouts remained a mystery. But some *ten years later*, a letter written by Elijah was delivered to King Jehoram of Judah (II Chronicles 21:12)—proving conclusively that Elijah had *not* been taken to the heaven of God's throne, but to another location on earth.

Indeed, Elijah had continued his watchful concern for Israel and Judah—but from a new, safe location—breaking his silence after ten years by writing to Jehoram. As is appointed to all men (Heb. 9:27), Elijah eventually *died*—but we are not told when, or where he was buried.

Is Elijah in heaven? As noted earlier, John 3:13 clearly states that "no one has ascended into heaven, except He [Jesus] Who came down from heaven." Yet we are told that Elijah "went up in a tempest *into heaven.*" How can this be?

The Bible Teaches *Three* Heavens

It will come as a surprise to most Bible students that Scripture speaks of *three* heavens. The first heaven is the atmosphere that envelops the earth (Gen. 1:8). Notice that *birds fly* in this

heaven (verse 20). The second heaven is what we call *space*—the abode of planets and stars (Gen. 15:5). The “third heaven” is the location of God’s throne (II Cor. 12:2).

Without question, Elijah was “taken up” into the air, the earth’s atmosphere—the *first* heaven—and transported by a “chariot of fire” to another location. Most decidedly, he was *not* taken to the “third heaven” of God’s throne.

The prophet Ezekiel experienced a similar phenomenon in his day—being transported via a “chariot” of sorts to another location (Ezek. 3:11-15). Notice verse 14, where Ezekiel says “the Spirit lifted me up and took me away.” Verse 15 shows that Ezekiel was immediately *relocated* to an area among his fellow Jewish captives.

Likewise, immediately after baptizing a eunuch, the evangelist Philip was miraculously relocated to another city several miles away. “But when they came up out of the water, *the* Spirit of *the* Lord caught Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no longer...” (Acts 8:39). Was Philip taken to the third heaven? No, for he was later “found at Azotus” where he continued to preach the Gospel (verse 40).

Clearly, when John writes that “no one has ascended into heaven,” the apostle is referring to the *third* heaven—the place of God’s abode. But, as we have seen, God has often *transported* certain of His servants through the *first* heaven—the earth’s airspace—in order to relocate them.

As for Elijah’s “transfiguration appearance” in Matthew 17:3, this event was simply a *vision* of the glory Elijah, Moses and Jesus will share in the yet future Kingdom of God. Only Jesus has been resurrected to such glory; like all saints, Elijah and Moses must *wait in their graves* for the first resurrection, which takes place at Jesus’ return (Col. 1:18; I Cor. 15:23).

Did God “Take” Enoch to Heaven?

With what we have learned from Elijah’s case, we can now better understand Enoch’s mysterious disappearance. Again, we read: “And Enoch walked with God, and then he *was not* [found], for God took him” (Gen. 5:2).

In the book of Hebrews we have this statement concerning the patriarch: “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” (Heb. 11:5; *KJV*).

For those who insist that heaven is the reward of the “saved,” this verse is *seems* ironclad: Enoch walked with God and had the testimony that he pleased God—thus, God “took him” or “translated him” to his heavenly reward so that he would not “see death.” But is this really what the Bible teaches?

Plainly, these verses say Enoch was “not found”—meaning his whereabouts were *not known*. But in no way do these passages suggest that Enoch was taken into the third heaven; rather, such a preconceived notion must be “read into” the texts. As we will see, Enoch—like Elijah—had simply been “taken” by God to another physical location.

The Greek word for “translated” is *metatithemi*, meaning simply to *transfer* or *relocate* something. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (1985) says the term means “to transfer to another place.” The same word is rendered in Acts 7:16 as “carried over”—showing that Jacob’s bones were *transported* from Egypt to Sychem (Shechem). There is absolutely nothing about this Greek term or the concept of “relocation” that hints at one going to the heaven of God’s throne. Again, such ideas are carelessly “read into” the text.

But how is it that Enoch was not to “see death”? Does that really imply that he had been

taken on to his “reward” in heaven?

Enoch—Protected From *Premature* Death

First, let’s understand that Enoch did, in time, *die*. Hebrews 11:13 lists Enoch among those patriarchs who had “died in faith.” Yet verse five says Enoch was “translated that he should not see death.” How can this be?

Recall that Elijah was *relocated* by God on numerous occasions, primarily for his own *protection*. Could the same apply to Enoch? In Jude 14-15 we read that Enoch was actually a prophet. “And Enoch, *the* seventh from Adam, also **prophesied** of these [incorrigible rebels, as described in the preceding verses], proclaiming, ‘Behold, *the* Lord comes with ten thousands of His holy saints to execute judgment against all, and to convict all who are ungodly of all their works of *evil* ungodliness that they have impiously committed, and of all the hard *things* that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.’ ”

Those are strong words—strong enough to get one killed. Enoch walked with God, meaning he obeyed God’s teachings and followed His way of life. It is apparent that he *confronted* the sinners of his day with the truth, warning them to repent or face the judgment of God. Like all of God’s prophets, Enoch undoubtedly *faced death* on more than one occasion.

Finally, so that Enoch would “not see [premature] death” at the hands of wicked sinners, he was transported—*metatithemi*—to another location where he lived out the rest of his life in safety.

A better translation of Hebrews 11:5 follows: “By faith Enoch was transported so that he would not look upon [immediate, premature] death, and [he] was not [to be] found because God had transported him [to another location]; for before his departure it was testified of him that he pleased God.”

Enoch was never heard from again, and it may well be that he lived many more years until his natural death: “And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years” (Gen. 5:23).

Importantly, Enoch—along with all of the faithful listed in Hebrews 11—died *without* receiving his promised reward. If, as mainstream “Christians” insist, heaven is the reward of the “saved,” then why has righteous Enoch been denied his reward? Notice verse 13: “All these died in faith, **not having received the promises**, but having [figuratively] seen them from afar, and having been persuaded of *them*, and having embraced *them*, and having confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth [awaiting a future kingdom].”

Continuing in verses 39-40: “But these all, *though* they had received a good report through faith, **did not obtain the promise** *because* God had determined in advance to provide something superior for us so that **without us they would not be made perfect.**”

Enoch and those faithful men and women of Hebrews 11 had *no expectation* of going to heaven! Rather, they *looked for* a prophesied *earthly* kingdom wherein they would *inherit eternal life*—but not before those saints who have come after them! The Old Testament righteous patriarchs and prophets must *wait in their graves* until the return of Jesus Christ when *all saints*—including those from the first century to today—will receive their eternal reward by being raised *together* to immortal life in the *first* resurrection.

The Hope of the Resurrection

As we saw in John 3:13, “no one has ascended into heaven, except He [Jesus] Who came down from heaven.” Indeed, according to Peter, even “David has not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34). Writing later, the apostle refers to the patriarchs as having fallen “asleep” (II Pet. 3:4; *KJV*). They are not in heaven, but are “asleep” in their graves.

Similarly, the apostle Paul writes that the risen Christ “has become the first-fruit of those who have fallen asleep” (I Cor. 15:20). Paul continues with the assurance that *all who have died* will be “made alive” (verse 22)—but, “each in his own order: Christ *the* firstfruit; then, those who are Christ’s **at His coming**” (verse 23). Between Jesus’ resurrection and the time of His return, those who are “dead in Christ” (I Thess. 4:16) are simply “asleep in Jesus” (verse 14)—that is, they belong to Him even while in the grave.

The New Testament apostolic church clearly taught that no human being other than Christ Himself had been resurrected from death to immortality. All saints who have “fallen asleep” in Christ await His glorious return, at which time they will be *raised* to immortal life. In fact, Paul makes the bold assessment that *unless there is a coming resurrection*, “those who have fallen asleep in Christ **have then perished**” (I Cor. 15:18).

Clearly, this *precludes* any kind of so-called “heavenly reward” as taught by Christendom.

The fact is, Scripture unambiguously links eternal life with being *resurrected* from the grave, not with “going to heaven.” Immortality is a gift to be given only to those who belong to Christ *at the time of the first resurrection* (Rev. 20:4-6)—not before.

At the heart of this issue is the misguided but popular idea in Christianity that people have an “immortal soul” that leaves the body at death. (With a modicum of research, the reader can easily prove that the “immortal soul” concept is the product of early Greek philosophy.) This soul, it is presumed, goes either to *heaven* or “hell.” But the Scriptures actually define the “soul” as the *whole person*—a living being—not as some kind of spiritual inner being trapped in a physical body. This is why Genesis 2:7 records that the first man, Adam, did not *have* a soul, but *was* a soul—literally “became a living soul” (*KJV*) or “became a living being.” The prophet Ezekiel wrote, “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20). Thus, the soul—the *living person*—can be destroyed.

Jesus warned: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but do not have power to destroy the life [soul, *KJV*]; rather, fear Him Who has the power to destroy both life [soul, *KJV*] and body in Gehenna [fire]” (Matt. 10:28). Many take this passage to mean that the body and soul are separate entities. But as we have seen, the soul is the *living being*; when a person dies, his soul—*his life*—comes to an end. But through a resurrection, God will ultimately *restore the lives* of all who have died (I Cor. 15:21-26; Rev. 20:5, 12-14). What Jesus is actually saying in Matthew 10 is that if God destroys a person in the fires of Gehenna (*KJV*, hell), that person—not just their physical body but their *life itself*—will utterly perish with *no hope* of a resurrection.

Again, it is the *resurrection* that is the key to one’s eternal destiny. Enoch and Elijah, having “died in faith,” are *asleep in their graves*. As with all who are dead, they have no awareness of the passage of time—for “the dead do not know anything” (Eccl. 9:5, 10). Like the saints who have followed after them, they will be *awakened* in a resurrection and granted immortality at Jesus’ return (I Cor. 15:51-54; I Thess. 4:13-17).