

WILL YOU GO TO HEAVEN?

There are numerous people who have the belief that upon death, their spirit ascends into the heavens. Throughout the centuries, we have been brought up to believe this ideology. In addition, to those just learning the Bible, the words of Jesus can be confusing when he speaks of himself coming down from heaven. But does the Bible actually state that when we die, we go to heaven? In this study, we will examine many of the verses used to justify immediate life-after-death.

The first verse in the Scriptures that appears to suggest people ascending to heaven is Genesis 5:24 which states: **"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."** Later in Hebrews, the author of that book seems to support the belief that Enoch went to heaven: **"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. The Greek word that was interpreted as being "translate" was "metatithema" which means "to transfer; remove; change" but that in itself does not tell us much. Something we need to remember is what Jesus said in John 3:13a: **"And no man hath ascended up to heaven..."** In the same vein, King Solomon said this in Proverbs 30:4a: **"Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended..."** These verses conflict with the common belief that people go to heaven when they die; as a Christian, we should be particularly concerned when Jesus himself taught that no one has ascended up to heaven. Looking back at the verses talking about Enoch, it states that he was translated, removed or transferred but it does not actually say anything about Enoch ascending into heaven. Most people miss Scriptures where it actually confirms that Enoch did die. **"And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years."** Genesis 5:21 to 23. The final proof that Enoch did not go to heaven is found in Hebrews 11:13: **"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."** Note that Hebrews 11:1 to 12 spoke of various biblical persons who lived by faith, including Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David and so on and the author of Hebrews confirms that all of these persons died and none of them received the gift of eternal life nor ascended to heaven as of yet.

Another passage in the Old Testament that can cause confusion regarding ascension to heaven relates to Elijah and his translation. **"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."** II Kings 2:11. So did Elijah not see death and went straight into the abode of the Father? Something that some people are not aware of but need to know is that the Jews have different types of "heavens". For example, one of the heavens is what we call the sky or the earth's atmosphere: **"... and fowl that my fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."** Genesis 1:20b. So here in Genesis 1, we see a reference to what the Jews called "heaven" yet we know it was not referring to God's abode but the sky or the earth's atmosphere in which birds fly. Beyond our earth's atmosphere is space, the planets and galaxies: **"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years."** Genesis 1:14. In this last verse, the word "heaven" is used again but this time not to refer to the sky or earth's atmosphere; we know this because it is referring to the creation of "lights" (ie. The sun, moon and stars) which are used to determine days and years. So this is a different type of heaven again. Paul in his second epistle to the Corinthians speaks of a "third heaven": **"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven."** II Corinthians 12:2b. While this last passage does not describe exactly what is meant by "third heaven", the context does not seem to suggest Paul was referring to God's abode. When we analyse the scriptures, we find that Elijah must have been carried away to a place of safety by God's angels. What were the chariots and horses of fire? **"Who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire."** Psalms 104:4. See also Hebrews 1:7. **"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them..."** Psalms 68:17; **"And Elisha prayed, and**

said, **LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.**" II Kings 6:17; **"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."** Psalm 34:7. In most of the preceding verses, the chariots and angels of fire are the protectors and deliverers of God's people. Some further verses for consideration: **"...And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him [Elisha] and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."** II Kings 13:14b; **"And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more."** II Kings 2:12a. To further add to the clarification, these "horsemen" were God's angels. The words spoken by Elisha were exactly repeated by King Joash, in what most Bible scholars believe was a prayer. So what he have established is that chariots and horses of fire were often used to describe deliverance by God of his people. Could this be what happened to Elijah? Absolutely. Read II Chronicles 21:12a: **"And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father. Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father..."** This letter from Elijah was written several years AFTER Elijah's translation event. So from this, we can deduce that Elijah was not carried away into God's abode but was translated to another area to protect him. This then maintains that "no man hath ascended up to heaven" just as Jesus had taught.

Another event from Scripture that is used to substantiate immediate life-after-death is the transfiguration of Jesus. Read Matthew 17:1 to 9; Mark 9:2 to 13; and Luke 9:28 to 36. Those claiming that people go to heaven right at death point out the presence of Moses and Elias talking to Jesus during this transfiguration event. They believe that it was the spirits of Moses and Elias that were talking to Jesus much like many people believe the souls and spirits of the dead talk to the living in the present day. But was Jesus actually talking to the spirits of the dead prophets? **"...Jesus charged them saying, Tell the vision to no man..."** Matthew 17:9. So what the disciples of Jesus witnessed was a VISION, and was not real. The purpose of witnessing this vision would be to confirm that the man, Jesus, who they followed, was in fact the one prophesied by the prophets of old. **"While he [ie. Peter] yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."** Matthew 17:5. See also Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:35. The confirmation of God's approval of Jesus being the Messiah was also witnessed by John the Baptist: **"And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."** John 1:32 to 34. We should also pay attention to Luke's version of the transfiguration wherein he states: **"And as he prayed, the fashion of his [ie. Jesus'] countenance was altered..."** Luke 9:29a. This supports that what the disciples that were with Jesus seen was in fact a vision.

Yet another passage in the Bible that is used to support a home in God's abode is John 14:2, 3 which reads: **"In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."** Many believe that Jesus was saying that when he died, he was preparing a place in heaven (ie. God's abode) for all those saints who would die after him and that they would join him upon their respective deaths. But is heaven our reward when we die? Read Matthew 5:3, 5: **"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."** This excerpt from the Beatitudes suggests that our inheritance will be this earth. King David suggests a similar belief in Psalm 37:11: **"But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."** Read Isaiah 65:17, 21: **"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall be remembered, nor come into mind... And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them."** And finally Isaiah 45:18: **"For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath**

established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else." These verses may be a shock to some, but God's reward to the righteous is not a place in some abode above us but right on this earth. In the future, after end-time events have come to fruition, the earth will be cleansed of all its pollution and wickedness so that it can return to the pure state it once was in at the time right after Creation. *"And I saw an new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God..."* Revelations 21:1, 2, 10. Just as Jesus said, a place is being prepared for the righteous but it is the New Jerusalem which shall come to this earth upon Jesus' return. The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10 states *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."* So when teaching us how to pray, Jesus said that we should pray for the kingdom of God yet to come which shall set up on this earth after last-day events have taken place.

Returning to John 14:2, 3, the word that was translated as "mansions" in the King James Version of the Bible was 'mone', a Greek word meaning a place of residence or a biding place. In other words, it was a place that room for many people. When we examine the passage again, this makes sense: *"I go to prepare a place...If I go and prepare a place..."* So we can see that he wasn't actually taking about building every righteous person their own mansion but that there would be a place for all the righteous. When we read *"I will come again, and receive you unto myself, That where I am, there you may be also"*, it does not say that we are going to heaven but that when he returns and the Kingdom of God is set up on this earth, he will receive the faithful unto him at that time. We just read in Revelations 21 how the saints will inherit a paradise on earth. God created the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18) and that will take place after the earth and the heavens have been cleansed.

The last controversial passage about whether we go to heaven right after death pertains to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. *"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted; and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from thence to you cannot: neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."* Luke 16:19 to 31. Before going any further, remember that this was only a parable – a fictional account meant to illustrate a moral principle. Now why would Jesus use a parable that described a celestial paradise to express a moral principle when Jesus taught the opposite as in *"No man hath ascended up to heaven"* (John 3:13a)? Bear in mind that the parable does not say that Lazarus was carried away into a heavenly abode – that is just an assumption made by most who believe in a celestial heaven. Neither does it say that the rich man is in some underworld hell or Hades. The parable suggests that the rich man and Lazarus are on the same level surface but separated by a great gulf or chasm. So then, what is the setting of the parable? It is describing a futuristic state when the wicked will be destroyed in the lake of fire at the end of times (see Revelations 20:12 to 15). The meek and poor in spirit will inherit the earth for life-everlasting while the wicked shall receive their due in the lake of fire. The

parable, then, is describing the beggar Lazarus as being one of those received into the kingdom of God at the end of time to a paradise on earth which even Abraham looked forward to (Hebrews 11:13). With respect to the rich man being tormented in flames, it does not say that he will be burning for ever and ever; the bible does not teach that those who are judged unworthy of eternal life will be tormented forever – death and the grave will ultimately be destroyed (Revelations 20:14).

A paradise in some celestial abode is a doctrine from our heathen ancestors. When we carefully read the Scriptures, it tells us that the righteous will receive a reward in the form of eternal life spent on this earth but in a pure state. That reward will be granted upon Jesus' return to this earth. Those who have lived a righteous life will be resurrected from the dead upon his return while those righteous who are still alive will meet Jesus in the air upon his return. ***"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*** I Thessalonians 4:16, 17; ***"And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."*** Revelations 5:10. Just for clarification, the verse in Thessalonians states that we meet the Lord in the air, but it does not say we remain there in the sky; it states that once we meet up with Jesus, we will be with him for ever from that point on. Hopefully, from this study, it can be seen that the Bible does not teach that we go to heaven upon our death but that we will receive the gift of eternal life at the end of time upon Jesus' return.