

What Happened to Elijah and Enoch?

Question: What about Elijah who “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11)?

Answer: The Hebrew term "hashamayim" is often translated as "the heavens" (or simply "heaven," as seen in 2 Kings 2:11). Its primary meaning is the sky, indicating that Elijah did not go to reside permanently on the other side with God and the angels. Elijah did not vanish indefinitely; he reappears in 2 Chronicles 21:8-15, where he is seen writing letters to King Jehoram of Judah. Therefore, Elijah was not in heaven and removed from this earth forever; instead, he was transported to another location. A similar occurrence can be found in the New Testament after Philip baptized the eunuch:

Question: What about Enoch? Didn't he go to heaven without tasting death?

Answer: In Hebrews 11:5 it says: 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.

Many people make the automatic assumption that Enoch did not experience death and, therefore, must have gone to heaven. The term "taken" can also be interpreted as "translated," as found in the King James Bible. Some speculate that he might have been taken or translated to prevent him from facing persecution and death in a particular situation. However, since there are no specific details provided regarding this matter, what we can be certain of is that Enoch did eventually die. In the same chapter of Hebrews 11, there is a summary of various faithful individuals, including Enoch, and verse 13 explicitly states:

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.

So scripture confirms that Enoch did definitely die along with the rest of the saints.

I also want to take the time to write a little more about Enoch and Elijah to confirm my point concerning the matter of Romans 5:12 in chapter 18. I have a periodical I receive in the mail where a person wrote about the enigma of the end of Enoch and Elijah. This person focused at one point on Rom. 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death,” and Rom. 3:23 where it says, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” After pointing out these passages, the person went on to say: All have sinned; therefore all must die (unless Jesus returns first). He continued, “Would it be fair that God would allow these two sinful men, no matter how ‘good’ their lives might have been, to receive immortality without experiencing the wages of their sin?”

This individual referred to Enoch and Elijah as "sinful men." The term "sinful" carries the connotation of being wicked and immoral, engaging in the commission of sins. This description implies that the person was characterizing Enoch and Elijah's lives as being wicked and immoral, with a continual pattern of sinning. However, does this portrayal align with what scripture says about them? How can this assertion stand when it is clearly stated that Enoch "walked with God" and was found pleasing in His sight? Can one truly be both sinful and pleasing to God simultaneously? Is it not contradictory to claim that these two men were "sinful" regardless of how virtuous their lives may have been?

Furthermore, we have the example of the prophet Elijah, who exhorted the people of Israel to repent from their sins and return to the one true God. Would "sinful men" undertake such a mission? Elijah served as a voice "crying in the wilderness," faithfully carrying out God's mission despite the dangers and hardships he encountered in rebuking sin and exposing false prophets and idolatrous practices in the land.

I now grasp the perspective of the individual who authored this article. The teaching that associates physical death with even a single sin is at the core of this understanding. The author posits that since "All have sinned; therefore all must die," physical death becomes a consequence of sin. But what about infants? Is their death attributed to their own sin? After all, it is commonly stated that "The wages of sin is death." However, infants cannot commit sin, so how does this principle apply to them? Even if Jesus had lived to old age, he would eventually have experienced death, not due to his own sin (assuming he had sinned), but because all human beings face mortality as a result of Adam's transgression. Adam and his descendants were deprived of access to the tree of life, which would have preserved their mortal existence.

In scripture, we find the statement "For all have sinned." Nevertheless, it's crucial to note that the word "have" implies individual activity. Sin is a voluntary act, committed by those who transgress God's law. While it holds true that the consequence of sin is death, the question arises: what kind of death? This is a spiritual death, signifying a "moral and relational separation from God," which carries eternal ramifications.