

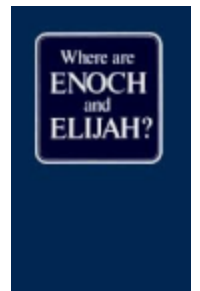
Going to Heaven??

In Stephen Covey's famous book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People he lists as Habit #5

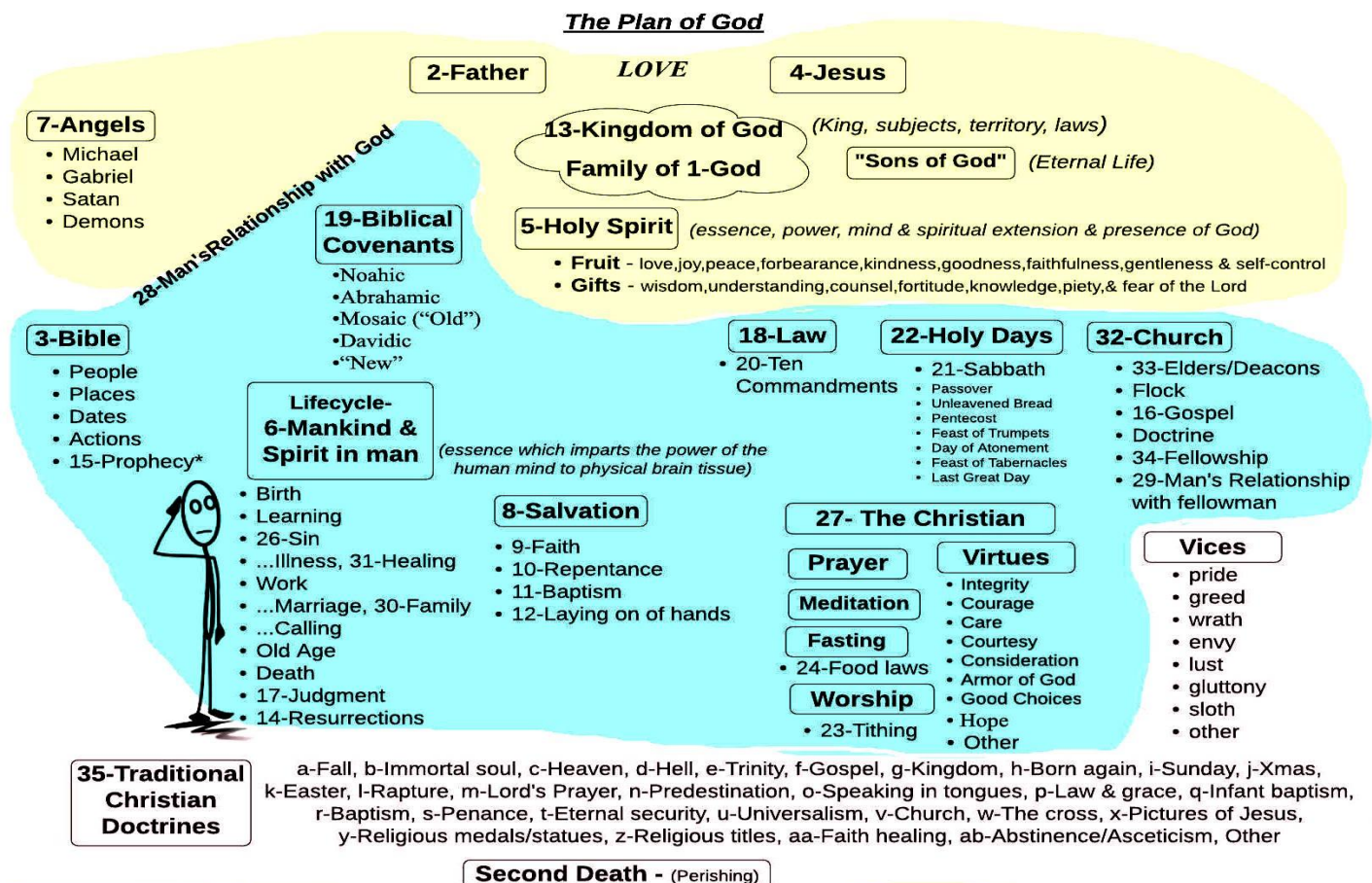
Seek first to understand, then to be understood

This is a “wise practice” as you go through life encountering different **people & ideas** ... and it is especially important in exploring “**Doctrine**” ... *the core spiritual beliefs & dogmas taught by a church or faith*

When I started to prepare this message I was thinking about the topic of Heaven -- and it reminded me of an old Church of God booklet ... **Where are Enoch & Elijah?** People who believe in “going to heaven” might cite these men because they believe they are Bible examples of “going to heaven”. We will explore this a little later ... but for now ... **How many people** today have actually **studied** the “Heaven doctrine”? I expect most people **hear** about heaven ... **think** it is a neat “comforting” idea... & **accept** it without investing any time in “proving it”!



Today we'll explore the “going to heaven” doctrine to see its significance, its links to other *unscriptural* doctrine & look at what the Bible actually says.



Time: (Past - History - Creation, 25-Hebrew Calendar ... **Present** -(World events) ... **(Future** - 15-Prophecy*) ... **Eternity ...)**

To begin, here is the CGI understanding of this subject ...

Doctrinal Statement on HEAVEN

The reward of the saved is **not** going to heaven at death. No conscious human beings have ever ascended into the heavens after death (except Jesus Christ). Man's destiny is to enter God's **Family** as His sons and daughters, and to rule in His **Kingdom**, which will be set up on earth. The dead in Christ "rest" in their graves until the **resurrection** when God will bring them into His Family. Eventually, when the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 comes, which also brings **New Jerusalem** to earth from God out of heaven, God the Father's dwelling and throne will be forever with man. In this light, the question of "going to heaven" becomes meaningless, for heaven will then be on earth, which will be the final home of both God the Father and Christ the Son. **John 3:13, Rev 21:1-2, Mat 5:5, Rev 5:10**

In seeking to explore what people believe who have studied "going to heaven" we gain some important insights ... We have a **lot in common**:

Points of Agreement		
Topic	Agreement	Key NKJV Scriptures
Christ died and rose again	Both affirm Christ's death and bodily resurrection as the foundation of Christian hope.	Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4
Believers will live forever	Both believe eternal life is found only in Christ.	John 3:16; John 10:27–30; 1 John 5:11–12
Resurrection is certain	Both affirm a future bodily resurrection.	John 5:28–29; John 6:39–40, 44, 54; 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17
Christ will return	Both await the Second Coming.	Acts 1:11; Titus 2:13; Revelation 22:20
Judgment is future	Both believe Christ will judge all people.	Matthew 25:31–46; John 5:28–29; Revelation 20:11–15
Believers receive glorified bodies	Both affirm resurrection bodies like Christ's.	Philippians 3:20–21; 1 Corinthians 15:42–54
Death is defeated through Christ	Both affirm death's final defeat.	1 Corinthians 15:54–57; Revelation 21:4
Final home of God's people	Both affirm the ultimate state is the Kingdom of God, culminating in the new heaven and new earth.	Revelation 21–22; Matthew 5:5

Both views affirm:

- ✓ Jesus Christ is Lord.
- ✓ Salvation is by grace through faith.
- ✓ Christ died and rose bodily.
- ✓ Christ will return.
- ✓ The dead will be raised.
- ✓ Believers will receive glorified bodies.
- ✓ There will be final judgment.
- ✓ God's people will live forever in His kingdom.



BIBLE TIMELINE

OLD TESTAMENT



NEW TESTAMENT



CREATION PATRIARCH EXODUS CONQUEST JUDGES KINGDOM EXILE RETURN SILENCE GOSPELS CHURCH MISSIONS FUTURE

The Bible Storyline

Perhaps the most significant agreement is that both views place the believer's hope within the same overarching biblical narrative:

1. **Creation** – Humanity is created in God's image (Genesis 1–2).
2. **Fall** – Sin brings death into the world (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12).
3. **Redemption** – Christ dies and rises again, conquering sin and death (1 Cor 15:20–22).
4. **Present Age** – Believers live by faith, awaiting Christ's return (Titus 2:13).
5. **Second Coming** – Christ returns in glory (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).
6. **Resurrection** – The faithful dead are raised (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15).
7. **Judgment** (2nd Resurrection) – God judges “the rest of the dead” (Rev 20:11–15).
8. **New Creation** – God dwells with His people forever (Revelation 21–22).

The disagreement concerns **Step 4½**—the period **between an individual believer's death & the resurrection occurring at Jesus' return**

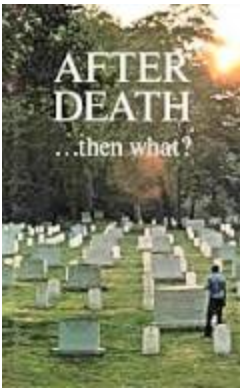
What is different?

The following chart summarizes the core difference:

Question	Heaven View	Resurrection View
What happens at death?	The believer consciously goes to be with Christ (Heaven) ... or hell??	The believer rests in death until Christ returns.
What is the next major event?	Resurrection reunites the believer with a glorified body.	Resurrection restores the whole person to conscious life.
What is the final destiny?	Resurrection life with Christ in the new creation.	Resurrection life with Christ in the new creation.
Greatest emphasis	Presence with Christ immediately after death.	Resurrection as the beginning of conscious eternal life.
Greatest shared hope	To be with Christ forever in His everlasting Kingdom.	SAME

An Important Biblical Observation

Regardless of how one understands the intermediate state, the **New Testament consistently directs believers to fix their hope on Christ's return & the resurrection**. Passages such as **John 6:39–40, 44, 54, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, Philippians 3:20–21, and Revelation 21–22** all culminate in the same expectation: the complete redemption of God's people in resurrected bodies, living forever in the presence of God. Thus, while the timing of conscious fellowship is debated, the central hope proclaimed by both views is the same—**everlasting life with Christ in the consummated Kingdom of God**.



1. The **Key** point of Disagreement is ...

When does conscious fellowship with Christ begin?

View A – At Death - Believers consciously enter Christ's presence immediately after death

- **Php 1:21-23** 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.
- **2Co 5:6-8** 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.
- **Luk 23:43** & Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise
- **Act 7:59** & they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God & saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit
- **Heb 12:22-24** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly & church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

View B – At Resurrection - Believers "sleep" in death until Christ raises them.

- **Joh 11:11-14** These things He said, and after that He said to them, "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."
- **Joh 5:28-29** Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.
- **1Th 4:16-17** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, & with the trumpet of God. & the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive & remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. & thus we shall always be with the Lord.
- **Dan 12:2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame & everlasting contempt.
- **Act 2:29-34** "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead & buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, & knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was **not** left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, & having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see & hear. "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

2. Different Starting Assumptions

The disagreement (Heaven vs Resurrection) often begins with different assumptions about “nature” of humans. (*Do we have an immortal soul?*)

View A –

The "immortal soul" view generally argues:

- Humans have a non-physical aspect of personhood.
- That aspect continues consciously after physical death
(*hence Heaven is a place for them to be*)
- The body dies, but the soul/spirit survives.
(ie a person = a physical body + immortal soul/spirit)



Problems with this view:

- Souls are not immortal ... **Eze 18:4** The soul who sins shall die. (also **James 5:20**)
- Sometimes it is more plausible to understand “symbolic” imagery (like **Gen 4:10** Abel’s blood “crying out”) rather than a “literal” view **Rev 6:9** ... I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain (*crying out*)

View B –

Doctrinal Statement on THE IMMORTAL SOUL

Man neither is nor has an immortal soul. The traditional concept of an immortal soul, a spiritual entity or substance with fully independent existence and consciousness, which is so fundamental to various religious systems, is a myth. Man is a totally mortal, finite, living-breathing creature who has no consciousness, no awareness and no existence after death. In this regard humans and animals are alike—the same death befalls them both. The one element, which sets man apart from animals, is not an "immortal soul" but a spiritual essence—a "spirit-in-man"—which transforms the human brain into the human mind. Man indeed has the potential for immortality, but this will occur only in the future at the resurrection from the dead when immortal life will be freely gifted from God through the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 18:4,20; Ecclesiastes 3:19; Psalms 146:4; Job 14:14; Rev 20:5

3. Popular culture - A new ad campaign by Franklin Graham starting Aug 3 (eg on Fox News)



Hi I'm Franklin Graham.

*Have you ever thought about **death & what happens?***

Many people think it is a step into the abyss or some kind of darkness.

Well, for those who have come to the cross... we go immediately into the presence of Almighty God...

... no “**evidence**” provided / needed ... roughly 85% of Christians hold this view!

4. Which Event Receives More Attention (in scripture)? (Heaven vs Resurrection)

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| • resurrection | • last trumpet | • Christ's coming kingdom |
| • appearing | • last day | |

The Bible has **entire chapters** devoted to **resurrection**.

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|----------|
| • John 11 | • 1 Thes 4 | • John 5 |
| • 1 Corinthians 15 | • Daniel 12 | • John 6 |

Yet it has **no chapter** devoted specifically to the intermediate state...

this indicates **Scripture's primary pastoral focus is on resurrection.**

This emphasis is recognized by both sides

5. What Comfort Did Jesus Give?

At Lazarus' death Jesus says **John 11** "Your brother will rise again."

Notice He does not say "Lazarus is already with Me."

This shows **resurrection** is the biblical comfort.

Jesus' Own Words ... **John 5:28–29** "...all who are in the graves will hear His voice..."

4 Times in John 6 ... "I will raise him up at the last day."

6. What Comfort Did Paul Give?

1 Thessalonians 4 Paul comforts grieving believers.

His comfort centers on •Christ's return •**resurrection** •reunion

Paul does **not** appeal to believers already being in heaven.

Paul's Language - Paul almost always says ... Believers

- await • wait • hope • look for

Examples (Romans 8 Philippians 3 Titus 2)

7. What about that 1962 booklet?? **Where are Enoch & Elijah?**

(by Herman L. Hoeh)

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

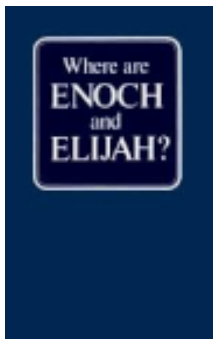
(ie Only Jesus is **qualified** to speak on heavenly things!)

Enoch's Fate:

- **Gen 5:24** & Enoch walked with God; & he was not, for God took him

*"took" does **not** mean "make immortal"*

- **Gen 5:23** So all the days of Enoch were **three hundred and sixty-five years**.
- **Deu 34:6** God also *"took"* Moses to keep the location of his grave secret
- **Col 1:13** He has delivered **us** from the power of darkness and **conveyed us** into the kingdom of the Son of His love
(Living Christians are *"translated"* / conveyed / moved from darkness to light)



- **Heb 11:5 (KJV)** 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.

(“Translated” NKJV = “taken” - G3346 - *metatithēmi* = transport)

- **Heb 11:39-40** 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**.
- **Tit 1:2** in **hope of eternal life** which God, who cannot lie, **promised** before time began

Enoch was moved to safety by God and eventually died a physical death.

Elijah's Fate:

- **2 Kings 2:1,11** 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.
11 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**.

- Which Heaven? (3 “Heavens” listed in Scripture)

1. Place of earth’s atmosphere

(**Gen 1:20, Deu 33:28**)

2. Place of the stars (**Gen 1:15-17**)

3. Place of God’s throne (**Rev 4-5**)

There could be no “whirlwind” in any other place but in the atmosphere surrounding this earth

- **2Chron 21:12-15** *Elijah sends a letter to (evil) king Jehoram - about 7 years after the whirlwind journey*



Elijah's whirlwind trip was only into the earth's atmosphere, not God's throne room, and he later wrote a letter to King Jehoram before dying.

The Resurrection teaching ... Concludes both men remain dead in the dust of the earth awaiting the final resurrection

8. Explaining the “Difficult Passages”

Interestingly, the two views disagree about **how to interpret a relatively small number of passages (heaven) in light of the larger biblical narrative (resurrection)**.

Luk 23:43 & Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, **today** you will be with Me in Paradise

- Simply shifting the punctuation, removes the implication of a conscious immediate state
- No evidence they were in Paradise “doing things” when they were dead in the grave

Philippians 1:21–24 For to me, to live is Christ, & to die is gain... having a desire to **depart & be with Christ**, which is far better.

- While death is described as sleep... Paul knows his next experience is to be with Christ rather than more suffering (**2 Cor 11:22-29**)

2Co 5:6-10 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**. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- Paul is contrasting life “today” in a physical earthly body **that can sin & be judged** ... with the spirit “Resurrection body” he described in **1Cor 15:35-49** that he knows we get at the resurrection when we are “with Christ”

2Co 5:6-10 (NLT) So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. For we live by believing and not by seeing. Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please Him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body

Heb 12:22-24 No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, **whose names are written in heaven**. You have come to God Himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the **spirits of the righteous ones in heaven** who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the One who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.



- Paul speaks of faithful names written in heaven (awaiting a resurrection) ... rather than saying “these faithful are looking down at us from heaven!” (the perfect opportunity!?)
- **Ecc 12:7** Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the **spirit** will return to God who gave it. (*spirit = H7307 - rûach = wind, breath*)
Gen 2:7 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 being.
(*Scripture does not say man “became or has” a conscious immortal soul ...just that the spirit -the life force, or breath of life - returns to God*)

Rev 6:9-10 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth

- To claim these are literal people (martyrs) who (in some cases) have been kept under an altar in Heaven for 2000 years who have **gotten tired** so they are to “rest a while longer” is silly ... Clearly it is a symbolic message - Not meant to be “proof of going to heaven”

One point that virtually all Christians agree on is that the **resurrection** is indispensable ... It is “unfortunate” that a few scriptures are hijacked to try to support believers “going to heaven”.