

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #149:
SOME PEOPLE WE CAN KNOW BE IN HEAVEN
By John Temples

To avow or decree a person's eternal destiny is not ours to do. In the case of a faithful Christian, we can be fairly sure; but still, to claim we know with absolute certainty who will go to heaven or hell is highly presumptuous. We would be trespassing on God's authority and realm of judgment. We are (or ought to be) familiar with such passages as Romans 14:12--"So then each of us will give an account of himself to God"--and Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged."¹

But sometimes in the Scriptures, God as good as tells us that this or that person will be in heaven. In those cases, we can have no doubt as to their eternal destiny. It would be interesting and instructive, therefore, to make a list of *people who will surely be in heaven*. Before we look at that list, though, let us note a few who are NOT on this heavenbound list. Their absence from the list does not necessarily mean they won't go to heaven; it just means we are not sure of their eternal destiny. That list includes such notables as:

- *Adam and Eve*. They both lived for a long time after the fall in the garden, but the Bible is silent concerning their ultimate fate. Would it not be a shame and a tragedy if the first man and woman, created directly by God, were to miss heaven?
- *Methuselah*. He lived 969 years, longer than any other individual; but long life is not a guarantee of heaven. He died in the year the Flood came, possibly a victim of its waters.
- *Solomon*. He began his reign full of promise and with the favor of God. He even built a temple for God. He wrote part of the Old Testament, yet he turned to idolatry in his old age. Did he return to God? We don't know.

Having noted some whose destiny is uncertain, now let us look at:

¹ We are not saying that Christians can do no judging at all. We are commanded to "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24) and also that we can know false teachers and immoral people by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-16). The command in Matthew 7:1 to "judge not" is speaking of a harsh rush to judgment and a propensity to consign people to hell.

SOME PEOPLE WE KNOW WILL BE IN HEAVEN

This list includes:

- *Abel*—the first murder victim and the first resident of Paradise. Hebrews 11:4 reads, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.” Jesus Himself pronounced Abel righteous in Matthew 23:35. Abel will be in heaven.
- *Enoch*. This man lived in the period of universal wickedness leading up to the Flood. But Genesis 5:24 says, “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” Enoch is listed along with Abel in the “Hall of Fame of the faithful” in Hebrews 11. Verse 5 says, “By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, and was not found because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” No doubt about his destiny.
- *Noah*. Genesis 6:9 calls him “a just man, perfect in his generations,” and one who walked with God as did Enoch. In the building of the ark, Noah was blameless (Genesis 6:22 says that “...according to all that God commanded him, so he did”). Noah was not sinless (see Genesis 9:20-21), but he found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8); and Hebrews 11:7 assures us that we will meet him in heaven. There, the writer calls him “an heir of righteousness.” What a thrill it will be to meet Noah in heaven!
- *Abraham* will be in heaven. His wife *Sarah* will be there as well. Both of them are listed as examples of faith in Hebrews 11. Verse 16 is particularly beautiful: “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” 1 Peter 3:6 calls righteous women “daughters of Sarah.”
- *Isaac and Jacob*. These, the son and grandson of Abraham, had their ups and downs, and did not rise to the level of faith of their father; but they are called heirs of the promise in Hebrews 11:9 and 16. Jesus left no doubt as to their destiny in Matthew 8:11, saying, “...many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

- *Moses and Elijah.* We can be certain regarding their future, because we know they are in a state of glory now. Luke 9:28-31 says, “Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Interestingly, both these men left this world by direct acts of God. Moses died “according to the word of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 34:5) and was buried by God at an unknown location (next verse). Elijah was taken by God in dramatic fashion: “Then it happened... that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11).
- *Samuel.* He is in the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11. 1 Samuel 28 tells us that when Saul consulted a witch and asked her to bring up Samuel from the dead, God allowed it to happen. The fact that Samuel asked Saul why he had “disturbed” him by bringing him up implies that Samuel had been at rest in Paradise.
- *David.* David expressed confidence in his future salvation in many of the Psalms. Over and over again, after David’s death, God called him “My servant” (1 Kings 11:13, 38). Christ’s throne is called the throne of David (Luke 1:32). The blessings of the gospel of Christ are called “the sure mercies of David” (Acts 13:34). David is listed as one of the faithful in Hebrews 11:32. But wasn’t David a sinner? Yes, indeed. He was guilty of sexual immorality and murder, for starters. But he always acknowledged his sins and turned back to God. The fact that David will be in heaven should surely encourage all of us who sin!²
- *Lazarus the beggar.* Jesus spoke of his death in Luke 16:22, saying, “So it was that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s

² The statement in Acts 2:34 that David has not, or did not, ascend into the heavens does not negate the positive outcome spoken of in other passages. The point being made in Acts 2:34 is that Jesus Christ, not David, is the subject of the Old Testament prophecy that speaks of one whose soul was not left in Hades, but who has now entered into God’s presence (Psalms 16:9-11). David will not ascend to heaven until after the resurrection and the judgment, a fact true of all those who are righteous before God.

bosom [Paradise].” His after-death experience is contrasted with that of the rich man, who went immediately at death into “torment” (Luke 16:23).

- *The penitent thief on the cross.* Just before their deaths, Luke 23:43 told the thief, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”
- *Stephen.* This courageous disciple was the first Christian to die for faith in Christ. Angered by his faithful testimony, a crowd of Jews “...stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Just before he died, he was permitted to see Jesus rising from His heavenly throne to honor him and his request (Acts 7:55).
- *Paul (along with, as far as we know, all the other apostles except Judas).* Paul had no doubt as to his destiny, saying by inspiration in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”
- *Joseph, Rahab the harlot, Gideon, Barak, Samson(!), and Jephthah.* These are in the “honorable mention” category of the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11:32, and are said to have obtained “a good testimony” because of their faith.
- *All persons who die in infancy, or who have the mental status of a child.* In spite of the widely taught and believed idea that babies are born sinful, the Bible plainly teaches that they are safe, never having known sin. Babies, and older people who do not have the mental capacity to distinguish right from wrong, are not accountable before God. How do we know this? Here are several reasons:
 - Ezekiel 18:20 plainly declares, “The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

- When the Israelites accused God of failing to get them to the promised land and bringing them and their children into the desert to die, He told them, “Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, *who today have no knowledge of good and evil*, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea” (Deuteronomy 1:39).
- Jesus lovingly invited little children to come to Him, saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). This can only mean that little children are innocent before God.

Of course, myriads of others will be in heaven, but of these we have spoken we have Biblical confirmation.

We know these saints will be in heaven. But why will they be? What qualities assure them (and us) of an eternal heavenly home?

- Abel—because of *his worship*. He sacrificed what God said in the way He said to do it. Hebrews 11:4 says Abel’s offering was by faith, while his brother Cain’s was not.
- Enoch—because of *his walk*. Genesis 5:24 declares that “Enoch walked with God.” His life and his daily activities were centered around God. He did not just occasionally *visit with* God; he *walked* with Him.
- Noah—because of *his obedience*. He built the ark to God’s exact specifications. He did not deviate from God’s blueprint, like so many feel free to do today.
- Abraham—because of *his faith*. He was another example of obedient faith. He was not perfect, but He trusted God enough to obey without question.
- Isaac and Jacob—because of *their willingness to submit to God*. They also were not perfect; in fact, their weaknesses probably outweighed their strengths. But they accepted God at His word and instilled faith in God in their children.
- Moses and Elijah—because of *their roles as faithful servants*. Both were weak on occasion. Moses even told God once to get somebody else, and Elijah once cowered in a cave and moaned that there was none left besides

himself to serve God. But nevertheless they completed their journey faithfully to the end.

- David—because of *his unabashed love for God*. He was a murderer and an adulterer. Yet he was called “a man after God’s own heart.” Why? Because when he sinned, he always repented, confessed, and turned back to God. He was willing to listen to good advice. The Psalms of David run the gamut of human emotion. They show David glad, mad, and sad; but they always show him clinging to God.
- Samuel—because of *his being God’s faithful messenger*. He was Israel’s elder statesman. He always delivered God’s message faithfully, to rulers and to the people, when it was pleasant and when it was not, when it was appreciated and when it was not.
- The thief on the cross—because of *his penitence*. He confessed his sin, was sorry for it, and acknowledged Jesus as the Christ.
- Stephen—because of *his courage*. He was faithful to tell a mob of Jews what they needed to hear. Revelation 2:10 says, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” To us, that is a nice and noble sentiment; but to Stephen, it was reality.
- Paul—because of *his zeal*. He was fiercely jealous for God’s honor, never knowingly violating his conscience (Acts 23:1). When he saw his zeal was misplaced, he instantly left Judaism to follow Christ and never wavered.

CONCLUSION

These, then, are some whose names we know are in the Book of Life. They will surely be in heaven, because the Bible tells us so. They will not be there because of their perfect lives, unusual talents, or superior abilities. They were ordinary people who obeyed God, whose lives revolved around God, and who did what God said in the way He said to do it. They are among the “great cloud of witnesses” figuratively cheering us on as we run our spiritual race. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2). Put these names on your list of “people to meet” on that great day. —John Temples