

Men Who Never Died

A Deeper Look at Matthew 17 and Mark 9

Enoch

There are at least four different men in the Bible named Enoch (**Genesis 4:17; 5:18; 25:4; 46:9**). We should note that, in **Genesis 25:4** and **Genesis 46:9**, the NIV gives the name “Hanok,” while some other translations, such as the Darby translation, give the name “Enoch” instead. In both verses, the name “Hanok” is from the same Hebrew word translated “Enoch” in **Genesis 4:17** and **Genesis 5:18**. Other translations say “Hanoch” or “Henoch.” The only difference is one of English spelling.

It is only the Enoch mentioned in **Genesis 5:18** that the Bible gives any significant information about. This Enoch was the great-great-great-great-grandson of Adam. **Genesis 5:22–24** says, “After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”

Hebrews 11:5 gives a little more detail: “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: ‘He could not be found, because God had taken him away.’ For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.” This being “taken away” is what Enoch is most famous for. Only two people in the Bible are said to have been chosen by God to escape death, **Enoch and Elijah**. Enoch appears to have been given this privilege due to being a man who walked faithfully with God (**Genesis 5:24**) and pleased God (**Hebrews 11:5**). For what purpose was Enoch taken away? The Bible does not specifically say. The most common assumption is so that he could serve as one of the **two witnesses**, alongside Elijah, in the end times.

There are also three pseudepigraphal books using Enoch’s name, with 1 Enoch being the most well-known, often referred to as the **Book of Enoch**. None of the pseudepigraphal books of Enoch were actually written by the biblical Enoch. However, since the biblical book of Jude quotes from 1 Enoch and attributes the quotation to the biblical Enoch (**Jude 14**), at least that one small prophecy must be truly attributable to the biblical Enoch.

Enoch draws a lot of attention due to the mystery surrounding him. Far too much speculation has gone into how and why God took Enoch away. Instead of conjecturing, we should be seeking to follow Enoch’s example by being men and women who walk faithfully with God and seek to please Him with our lives.

Elijah

The prophet Elijah is one of the most interesting and colorful people in the Bible, and God used him during an important time in Israel’s history to oppose a wicked king and bring revival to the land. Elijah’s ministry marked the beginning of the end of Baal worship in Israel. Elijah’s life was filled with turmoil. At times he was bold and decisive, and at other times fearful and tentative. He alternately demonstrates victory and defeat, followed by recovery. Elijah knew both the power of God and the depths of depression.

Elijah, a prophet of God whose name means “my God is the Lord,” came from Tishbeh in Gilead, but nothing is known of his family or birth. We first meet Elijah in **1 Kings 17:1** when he suddenly appears to challenge Ahab, an evil king who ruled the northern kingdom from 874 to 853 BC. Elijah prophesies a drought to come upon the whole land as consequence for Ahab’s evil (**1 Kings 17:1–7**). Warned by God, Elijah hides near the brook of Cherith where he is fed by ravens. As the drought and famine in the land deepen, Elijah meets with a widow in a neighboring country, and, through her obedience to Elijah’s request, God provides food enough for Elijah, the woman, and her son. Miraculously, the widow’s barrel of flour and jar of oil never run out (**1 Kings 17:8–16**). The lesson for the believer is that, if we walk in fellowship with the Lord and obey Him, we will be open to His will. And when we are in God’s will, He fulfills all of our needs, and His mercy to us never runs short.

We next see Elijah as the central character in a face-off with the prophets of the false god Baal on **Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:17-40)**. The prophets of Baal call upon their god all day long to rain fire from heaven to no avail. Then Elijah builds an altar of stones, digs a ditch around it, puts the sacrifice on the top of wood and calls for water to be poured over his sacrifice three times. Elijah calls upon God, and God sends fire down from heaven, burns the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones and licks up the water in the ditch. God proved He was more powerful than false gods. It was then that Elijah and the people killed all of the false prophets of Baal, in compliance with God’s command in **Deuteronomy 13:5**.

After the great victory over the false prophets, rain once again fell on the land (**1 Kings 18:41-46**). However, in spite of victory, Elijah entered a period of wavering faith and depression (**1 Kings 19:1-18**). Ahab had told his wife, Jezebel, of God’s display of power. Rather than turn to God, Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah. Hearing of this, Elijah fled to the wilderness, where he prayed for God to take his life. But God refreshed Elijah with food, drink, and sleep instead. Then Elijah took a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb. There Elijah hid in a cave, still feeling sorry for himself and even confessing his belief that he alone was left of the prophets of God. It is then that the LORD instructed Elijah to stand on the mountain as the LORD passed by. There was a great wind, an earthquake, and then fire, but God was not in any of those. Then came a still, small voice in which Elijah heard God and understood Him. God gave Elijah instructions for what to do next, including anointing Elisha to take his place as prophet and assuring Elijah that there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. Elijah obeyed God’s commands. Elisha became Elijah’s assistant for some time, and the two continued to deal with Ahab and Jezebel, as well as Ahab’s son and successor, Ahaziah. Rather than die a natural death, Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (**2 Kings 2:1-11**).

John the Baptist’s ministry was marked by “the spirit and power of Elijah” (**Luke 1:17**), fulfilling the prophecy of **Malachi 4:5–6**. James uses Elijah as an example of prayer in **James 5:17–18**. He says that Elijah “was a human being, even as we are,” yet he prayed that it would not rain, and it did not. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The power of prayer is in God, not in our own human nature.

As was true for Elijah, when we focus on the tumult of life in this world, we can get our eyes off of the LORD and become discouraged. God does display Himself in mighty works of power and judgment such as wind, fire, and earthquakes. But He also relates with us intimately and personally, such as in the quiet whisper. God meets our physical needs, encourages us to examine

our own thoughts and behaviors, instructs us in how to proceed, and assures us that we are not alone. When we are attentive to God's voice and walking in obedience to His Word, we can find encouragement, victory, and reward. Elijah struggled with typical human frailties, yet he was used mightily of God. It may not be through such obviously miraculous displays of might, but, if we are yielded to Him, God can use us powerfully for His kingdom purposes, too.

Why did God Take Enoch and Elijah to Heaven without them dying?

According to the Bible, Enoch and Elijah are the only two people God took to heaven without their dying. **Genesis 5:24** says, "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." **2 Kings 2:11** relates the earth-to-heaven translation of Elijah: "As they [Elijah and Elisha] were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind."

Enoch was a seventh-generation descendant of Adam through Seth. He was the father of Methuselah and great-grandfather of Noah. **Genesis 5:24** describes Enoch as a man who walked "faithfully with God" (NIV) or "in close fellowship with God" (*NLT*). The name **Enoch** may originate from a Semitic word meaning "to dedicate, initiate." Enoch was 365 years old when "he disappeared, because God took him" to heaven (**Genesis 5:24**, *NLT*). Some scholars believe **Psalms 49:15** and **73:24** are references to Enoch's story.

Elijah lived many centuries after Enoch during the reigns of kings Ahab and Ahaziah when Israel existed as a divided kingdom. Elijah was a worker of spectacular miracles, including the calling forth of drought and rain (**1 Kings 17:1, 17–24; 18:16–46**). He was perhaps the most powerful of God's prophets in the Old Testament. *Elijah* rather fittingly means, "My God is Yahweh [the Lord]." Elijah spent his prophetic energies proving that Yahweh was superior to the false god Baal. The Bible says Elijah was walking and talking with his understudy, Elisha, when the two prophets were separated by a chariot of fire pulled by flaming horses. Suddenly, Elijah was carried up into heaven in a whirlwind.

Why did God take Enoch and Elijah? The Bible does not specifically give us the answer; therefore, we can only speculate.

Enoch and Elijah had one primary trait in common, they were both exceptionally faithful in serving and obeying the Lord. Perhaps for this reason, God desired to spare them from experiencing death.

Enoch lived during an exceedingly evil period in world history, right before the Flood. Almost every living person had rejected God, becoming wholly corrupt, and the world was full of violence (**Genesis 6:5–12**). However, Enoch stood for righteousness and refused to be silent about the sinfulness all around him. According to Jude, Enoch prophesied against his wicked generation: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (**Jude 1:14–15**).

The author of Hebrews seems to suggest that Enoch was taken to heaven without dying because his great faith pleased God: “It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying, ‘he disappeared, because God took him.’ For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God” (**Hebrews 11:5**, NLT).

Some hypothesize that Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven in preparation for a strategic role in end-times events. Malachi prophesied that God would send Elijah back before “that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (**Malachi 4:5**). Some thought Jesus might be Elijah returned (**Matthew 16:14; Mark 6:15**). Elijah “appeared in glorious splendor” with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration to discuss with Jesus His soon departure (**Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36**).

A conceivable theory is that the two witnesses of **Revelation 11:3–12** are Enoch and Elijah. Neither is mentioned by name, but both have the “power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want” (verse 6). While this inference is possible, it is not explicitly taught in the Bible.

Whatever the reason, God had His purpose for taking Enoch and Elijah to heaven without their dying. We can’t always understand the Lord’s plans and ways in our finite human state (**Isaiah 55:9**), but we can trust and know that “his way is perfect” (**Psalms 18:30**).

Melchizedek

Melchizedek is only mentioned in a few passages in the Bible, but his role is significant. Melchizedek was the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High (**Genesis 14:18**). He met Abraham and blessed him after he had rescued his nephew Lot from captivity. The book of Hebrews states that Melchizedek was “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life” (**Hebrews 7:3**). This is interpreted to mean that he had no human lineage and was not subject to death.