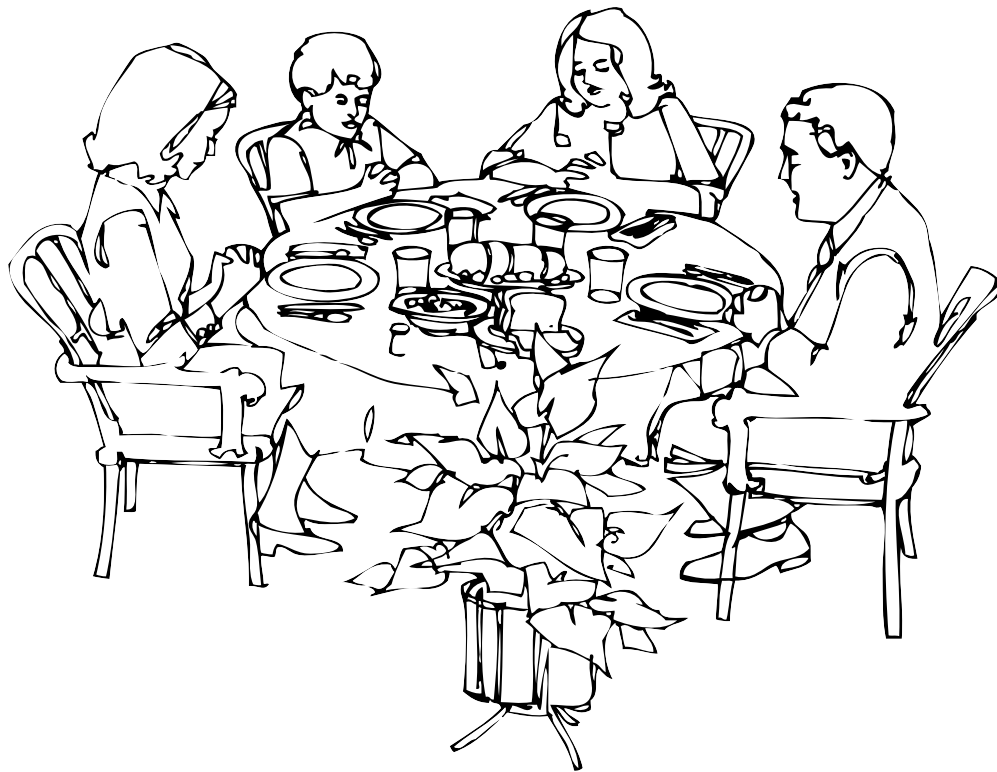


# Will We Recognize Each Other In Heaven?



*“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4)*

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# Future Recognition

## Introduction

- I. At one time or another, I suppose that nearly every Christian has pondered the great question, “Will we be able to recognize each other in heaven?”
  - A. You have thought about that question since you first learned that there is a heaven for the faithful and pure—for those who long to see God.
  - B. While the Bible does not directly ask this question, the human heart does.
- II. In this life we have friends, and they sometimes leave us in death.
  - A. Will we meet these friends again?
  - B. Will we know them *as our friends*?
  - C. Will I be able to greet my mother and father on the shores of eternal life?
    1. Will my eyes be able to look into theirs?
    2. Will I be able to say, “This is my mother!” or, “This is my father!”?
    3. The atheist tells me it is a dream and the agnostic hangs his head in doubt.
  - D. In death’s dark hour, can I comfort the relatives of those who “died in the Lord” with the hope of a future reunion in heaven?
  - E. When the funeral director closes the casket and sod is placed upon the vault, is that truly the hour of final departure?
- III. The Scriptures assume we will know and recognize one another in heaven.

## Discussion

### I. “Gathered To His People”

- A. The great patriarch Abraham died at the age of 175 (Gen 25:7–10).
  1. Notice the sequence: Abraham died, he was gathered to his people, *then* his body was buried in the cave of Machpelah.
  2. Though the tomb was new, Abraham was now *with* his people.
  3. Abraham has been “gathered to his people” until that day when he shall live again at the sound of the last trumpet and all the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man.
  4. “Abraham died at the good old age of 175, and was ‘gathered to his people.’ This expression, which is synonymous with ‘going to his fathers’ (Gen. 15:15), or ‘being gathered to his fathers’ (Judg. 2:10), but is constantly distinguished from departing this life and being buried, denotes the reunion in Sheol with friends who have gone before, and therefore presupposes faith in the personal continuance of a man after death, as a presentiment which the promises of God had exalted in the case of the patriarchs into a firm assurance of faith (Heb. 11:13).” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996)

5. **“He was gathered to his kin.** This phrase, peculiar to the Torah, is also used of Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, and Moses. An analysis of the contexts in which it is found reveals that it is to be distinguished from death itself because the action follows the demise. It is not the same as burial in an ancestral grave, because it is employed of Abraham, Aaron, and Moses, none of whom was buried with his forefathers. It is also not identical with interment in general because the report of burial follows this phrase, and the difference between the two is especially blatant in the case of Jacob, who was interred quite a while after being ‘gathered to his kin.’ It would seem, therefore, that the existence of this idiom, as of the corresponding figure ‘to lie down with one’s fathers,’ testifies to a belief that, despite his mortality and perishability, man possesses an immortal element that survives the loss of life. Death is looked upon as a transition to an afterlife where one is united with one’s ancestors.” (Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989)
- B. This phrase, “gathered to his people,” is found recorded at the death of many Old Testament worthies:
1. Ishmael “died, and was gathered to his people” (Gen 25:17).
  2. Isaac “breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days” (Gen 35:28–29).
    - a) When Isaac and Ishmael were “gathered to their people,” did they recognize their own father, Abraham?
    - b) It would be foolish to deny they did.
  3. Jacob was “gathered to his people” while still in Egypt (Gen 49:33).
  4. Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel, died on the top of Mount Hor and was “gathered to his people” (Num 20:23–26).
  5. Moses died and was buried in the mountains of Nebo, and was then “gathered to his people” (Deut 32:48–50).
    - a) The destiny of Moses is further described in Deuteronomy 31:16 when God said, “Behold, you will rest with your fathers...”
    - b) This could not refer to his physical body, for it was buried “in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor” (Deut 34:6).
    - c) Did Moses recognize his own brother, Aaron, in that home of the soul?
  6. After the death of Joshua an entire generation was said to have been “gathered to their fathers” (Judg 2:10).
  7. It was a source of comfort when the prophetess Huldah told Josiah he would be gathered to his fathers in peace (2 Kgs 22:14–20).
    - a) What comfort would there be if he could not recognize his fathers?
    - b) Was he to dwell in eternity, among his own family, as a total stranger?

## II. Other Bible Examples

- A. Saul and the witch at En Dor (1 Sam 28:3–19).
  1. The woman at En Dor was a medium, i.e., one who conducted seances.
  2. It is not our purpose in this lesson to discuss *how* she obtained these powers, or even if they were real (cf. 1 Sam 28:12).
  3. During her seance Samuel the prophet appeared and rebuked Saul, and said, “Tomorrow you and your sons shall be *with* me” (1 Sam 28:19).
  4. This passage teaches that Saul and his sons would be in Hades, the unseen abode of departed spirits—and he would be there *with* Samuel.
- B. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:42–43).
  1. In this passage Paradise is synonymous with heaven.
  2. Jesus promised this thief that he would be *with* the Lord later that same day.
  3. If this penitent thief could not recognize Jesus in heaven, how would he know if Jesus kept His promise?
- C. Our Lord’s promise to His apostles (John 14:1–3).
  1. How could they recognize the place Jesus promised unless they bore in their memory that it had been promised?
  2. If they could not remember the promise then one place would be just as good as another.
- D. The transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:28–35).
  1. Moses and Elijah appeared as themselves.
  2. If they had no memory of their past how could they talk with our Lord about His own departure (Luke 9:31)?
  3. If they remembered their *work* they could remember their *audience*!
- E. We will *see* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Luke 13:23–28).
  1. If we will know Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whom in this life we never met, how much more shall we know our own friends?
  2. These people remembered eating and drinking in the presence of Christ—they recalled some connection with this world!
- F. The scene at the final judgment (Matt 25:37–40).
  1. The righteous knew they never saw the Lord while on this earth!
  2. Jesus told them to remember the other people they had assisted in this life.
- G. If there is no future recognition, what’s the force of a group of strangers who condemn other strangers (Matt 12:41–42)?
- H. How would Paul know whether Christ presented “us with you” if there is no future recognition (2 Cor 4:13–14)?
- I. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:27–28).
  1. The rich man *remembered* his five brothers and knew they were still alive.
  2. The rich man *recognized* both Lazarus and Abraham.
  3. Abraham recognized the rich man and knew of his past.
  4. If Abraham could recognize the rich man across the *great gulf* that was fixed between them, how much more must he have recognized Lazarus who was reclining on his bosom!

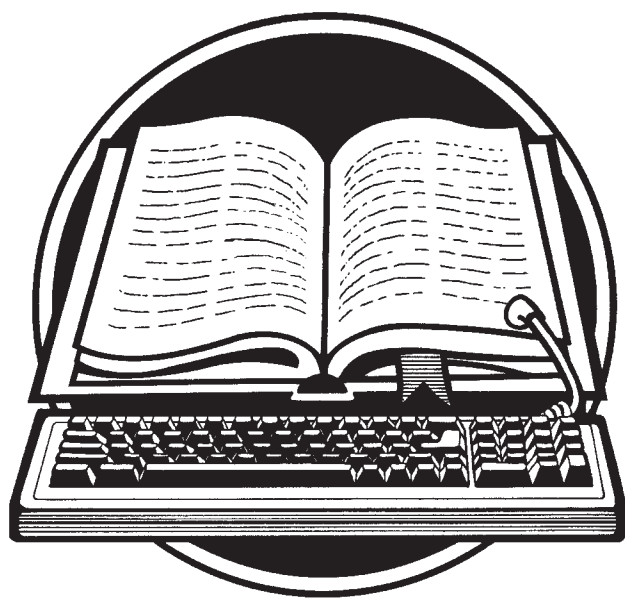
- J. The souls of faithful martyrs under the altar of God in heaven (Rev 6:9–10).
  - 1. These believers had some connection with current events upon the earth.
  - 2. They knew how they had died (“avenge our blood”).
  - 3. They also knew that their blood had not yet been avenged.

### III. Objections Considered

- A. While considering the objections raised to the Bible doctrine of future recognition, I am reminded of the words of brother Moses Lard.
  - 1. “We have no sympathy with that infernal delusion called *soul sleeping*. Neither have we respect enough for it to attempt its refutation. We speak for the comfort of good men, not the refutation of bad ones. Still in passing we may jot down a thought or two.” (Moses Lard, *Lard’s Quarterly*, April 1865)
  - 2. I wholeheartedly agree with brother Lard.
  - 3. In the remainder of this outline we will notice two of the most common objections to the Bible doctrine of future recognition.
- B. “Would you be happy in heaven knowing some of your friends and relatives were not there?”
  - 1. Instead of helping our problem, this question increases it.
  - 2. If I cannot recognize any of my loved ones in heaven, then I would be forever uncertain if any of them made it there!
  - 3. Furthermore, this question assumes I would want to overlook the manner of life these people led while alive.
    - a) If they are lost, it will be because they did not desire heaven enough to quit the practice of sin.
    - b) We serve a God who “knoweth and doeth all things well.”
  - 4. We will miss our absent friends and relatives in heaven.
    - a) At present, this is a very painful thought.
    - b) Let us therefore labor more diligently for their eternal salvation.
    - c) Then we will not be pained by missing them in the next.
  - 5. Yes, we will be saddened by the loss of some, but I always thought this is why “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).
- C. “Doesn’t the Bible say that after death we will be like the angels of heaven who neither marry nor are given in marriage?”
  - 1. This objection is based on Matthew 22:23–30.
  - 2. Jesus tells us that in the resurrection we will neither marry nor be given in marriage but will be like the angels of heaven.
    - a) This passage proves our point.
    - b) The angels of heaven surely know and recognize each other.
  - 3. We will not have a physical marriage in heaven for we will be married to the Lamb of God (Rev 19:7).

Conclusion

- I. The first child from the sinful union of David and Bathsheba died after a week of suffering (2 Sam 12:15–23).
  - A. Grief stricken David, with his child yet unburied, said, “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Sam 12:23).
  - B. What comfort could David have of being with his child again if he could not distinguish his child from mine?
- II. After the final judgment I fully expect to “see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:28).
  - A. I shall see them in the same way I shall *see* Jesus (1 John 3:2) and *see* the face of His Father (Rev 22:4).
  - B. The same Greek word for *see* (ὁράω) is used in all three verses.
- III. Brethren often sing the beautiful song, *Shall We Gather At The River?*
  - A. In this hymn we bid our brothers and sisters in Christ to look for us on the shores of the river of life, after our earthly journey is completed.
  - B. As the song suggests, we will “gather with the saints at the river, that flows by the throne of God” (cf. Rev 22:1–5).
- IV. Earthly ties cannot last forever.
  - A. Knowing we shall recognize one another in heaven, let us labor diligently to increase our acquaintances in that glorious abode of the soul.
  - B. While writing concerning the doctrine of future recognition, brother Guy N. Woods wrote, “It is grounded in hope, it is sustained by faith, and love longs for its realization” (*Shall We Know One Another In Heaven?*).
  - C. As another song suggests, “If we never meet again this side of heaven, As we struggle through this world and its strife, There’s another meeting place somewhere in heaven, By the side of the river of life.”



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