

Will we recognize and be reunited with our loved ones in heaven?

Scripture: Genesis 25:8; Genesis 35:29; Genesis 49:29; Numbers 20:24; Judges 2:10

Code: QA100

Yes! In the Old Testament, when a person died, the biblical writers said he was "gathered to his people" (cf. Gen. 25:8; 35:29; 49:29; Num. 20:24; Judg. 2:10). In 2 Samuel 12, when David's infant child died, David confidently said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (v. 23). David evidently expected to see the child again--not just a nameless, faceless soul without an identity, but that very child.

The New Testament indicates even more clearly that our identities will remain unchanged. While sharing the Passover meal with His disciples, Christ said, "Take this [cup] and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17-18). Christ was promising that He and His disciples *would* drink the fruit of the vine together again--in heaven. Elsewhere Jesus makes a similar, but even more definite, promise: "Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11).

Furthermore, Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Even though it had been centuries since Moses died and Elijah was taken to heaven, they still maintained a clear identity (Matt. 17:3)--Peter, James, and John evidently recognized them (v. 4), which implies that we will somehow be able to recognize people we've never even seen before.

All the redeemed will maintain their identity forever, but in a perfected form. We will be able to have fellowship with Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, Moses, Joshua, Esther, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, David, Peter, Barnabas, Paul, or any of the saints we choose. For that to be possible, we must all retain our individual identities, not turn into some sort of generic beings.

Describing the Lord's appearing and the resurrection of the saints who have died, Paul writes, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

Paul's purpose in writing was to comfort some of the Thessalonians who evidently thought their dying loved ones would miss the return of Christ. He says in verse 18, "Comfort one another with these words." The comfort comes from the prospect of reunion. Little comfort this would be if in the reunion we could not even recognize one another. But Paul's promise that we will all be "together" forever implies that we shall renew fellowship with all whom we have known.

We will be reunited not only with our own families and loved ones, but also with the people of God from all ages. In heaven we will all be one loving family. The immense size of the family will not matter in the infinite perfection of heaven. There will be ample opportunity for close relationships with everyone, and our eternity will be spent in just that kind of rich, unending fellowship.

If you're worried about feeling out of place in heaven, don't. Heaven will seem more like home than the dearest spot on earth to you. It is uniquely designed by a tender, loving Savior to be the place

where we will live together for all eternity and enjoy Him forever--in the fullness of our glorified humanity.

Is it any wonder that the psalmist said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116:15)?

Adapted from John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 138-41.

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