

Ministry of Grace

Heaven

Places associated with "Heaven" in the Bible

When most people think of heaven they think of Saint Peter meeting them at “the pearly gates” or walking down “the streets of gold.” Most Christians imagine themselves going directly to heaven when they die and being able to talk to God face-to-face. As we go through this study, we will learn that many people’s conception of heaven is incorrect, or at least significantly distorted.

Let’s start out by looking at the Greek word translated “heaven.” It is *Ouranos* , from which the planet Uranus is named. This was the name of the Greek god of the sky. In Greek writings the word appears almost interchangeably in the singular and the plural. This word appears more than 270 times in the New Testament, with 1/3 of them appearing in the plural.

In Hebrew, it is translated from the word *shamayim* (plural, meaning three or more). It refers to all that is above the earth.

Below are some of the words (places) in the Bible associated with heaven.

Abraham's Bosom or Abraham’s Side

The King James Version of the Bible refers to this as “Abraham’s Bosom,” which is a more literal translation. The word translated “bosom” is *kolpon*, which literally means, “the front of the body between the arms.” To be in someone’s bosom indicates a closeness of feeling or relationship symbolized by an embrace.

Luke 16:22 - The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, [ESV]

Paradise

This is where the righteous go when they die physically. It is a place of comfort and rest. Before the resurrection of Christ, it was located in the heart of the earth. Today, however, it is located directly beneath God’s throne room (don’t panic, we’ll get to this).

Luke 23:43 - Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in **paradise**. [NIV]

2 Corinthians 12:2, 3 - I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up **into paradise**--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- [ESV]

Revelation 2:7 - He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the **paradise** of God. [ESV]

Jerusalem

Of all the descriptions of heaven, the New Jerusalem most closely describes where the righteous will spend eternity.

Revelation 21:1-4 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the **new**

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Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." [NIV]

How many heavens are there?

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the church in Corinth, refers to an event in which he was transported up to the third heaven. It follows, therefore, that there must be a first heaven and a second heaven as well.

2 Corinthians 12:2 - I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the **third heaven**--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. [ESV]

What are the three heavens? Below are verses that indicate the domain of each of the heavens.

1. Earth's Atmosphere (where the birds fly)

1 Kings 21:24 Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the **birds of the heavens** shall eat. [ESV]

Jeremiah 15:3 And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction," says the LORD: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the **birds of the heavens** and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. [NKJV]

Matthew 13:32 which indeed is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the **birds of the heaven** come and lodge in the branches thereof. [ASV]

2. Universe (where the stars are)

Deuteronomy 1:10 The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as numerous as **the stars of heaven**.. [ESV]

Matthew 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and **the stars will fall from heaven**, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [ESV]

3. God's Dwelling Place / Throne Room

1 Kings 8:30 And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen **in heaven your dwelling place**, and when you hear, forgive. [ESV]

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says the LORD: "**Heaven is my throne**, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? [ESV]

Matthew 5:34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, **either by heaven, for it is the throne of God**, [ESV]

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Paradise

Paradise is where the righteous, both Old Testament and New Testament believers, go when they die physically.

Formerly in the heart of the earth

Christ told one of the thieves crucified with him that he (the thief) and Jesus would be in paradise on that very day. Thus, it follows that when they died physically, they were transported to paradise. We also see from the passage in Matthew 12 that Jesus went to the heart of the earth when he died. Therefore, at the time of Jesus' death on the cross, paradise was in the heart of the earth.

Luke 23:39-43 - One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." [ESV]

Matthew 12:38-40 - Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."

But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [ESV]

Now at the edge of the 3rd heaven

When we read of Paul's description of his being transported into paradise, we learn that he was transported **into paradise** but **up to heaven**.

2 Corinthians 12:2-3 - I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up **to** the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up **into** paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- [ESV]

To get the full impact of this, we need to look at a couple of Greek words. The word translated "to" is *eōs*, which means "to the edge of" or "as far as." The word translated "into" is *eis*, which indicates movement from the outside of something to the inside of it. Thus, we see that Paul was transported to the edge of the third heaven, but not into it, yet he was transported into paradise. It logically follows that paradise is up there at the edge of the third heaven.

How did it get there?

Since paradise used to be in the heart of the earth (part of Sheol), but is now up next to the third heaven, it must have been moved. According to the passages below, when Jesus was resurrected, he ascended on high and "led captivity captive." This is a colloquial expression

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that is a picture of a conquering army rescuing those who had been held captive by the enemy, taking them out and freeing them from their captor(s).

Ephesians 4:8, 9 - Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? [MKJV]

Psalms 68:18 - You have gone up on high; You have led captivity captive... [MKJV]

To add further to this idea that those in Paradise before the resurrection were captives, we want to look at a couple of verses. Before Christ's resurrection, the devil had the power of death. He was able to take a person's life and hold him or her in death. As evidence of this, look at Job 2:6 where God gave Satan permission to test Job, but not to take his life. If Satan did not have power over death, God would not have had to give him this command.

Hebrews 2:14,15 - Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him **who had the power of death, that is, the devil**, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.... [NASB]

Then, in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, we read about John falling at the feet of Christ who informs John that he, Jesus, has the keys to death and Hades. Having the keys indicates authority over what they keys unlock. Hence, Jesus is saying that He now has authority over death and Hades, not Satan. This is why Jesus was able to take captivity captive, to carry paradise away from Hades and up to the third heaven.

Revelation 1:17, 18 - When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and **I have the keys of Death and Hades**." [ESV]

Paradise is the temporary abode of believers

We've already seen that Old Testament saints went to be with Abraham, and Jesus told the thief next to him that they would be together in paradise, but what about us New Testament believers? Is there scriptural evidence that we go to paradise when we die? In the second and third chapters of Revelation, John is writing messages to the seven churches in Asia. In these messages, he gives each of them promises for "those who overcome" or "those who conquer." We need to look at John's first general epistle to understand who the overcomers (conquerors) are.

1 John 5:4, 5 - For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? [ESV]

From these verses we see that Christians are the overcomers, therefore, each of the messages to the overcomers in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are messages given to Christians. In his message to the church at Ephesus, John says that the overcomers will have access to the Tree of Life which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7 - He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. [NIV]

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The Apostle Paul also tells us something about what happens to us when we leave this physical body. He says that we will be at home with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 - So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [ESV]

Let's look at a couple of these words. The word translated "at home" is *endēmeō*, which means "one who is at home, in his own country, or among his own people." The word translated "with" is *pros*, which means "toward, by the side of, near, with, or in the vicinity of."

However, believers can't see Jesus now. And we won't be able to see Him until He appears at the Rapture when we will become like Him:

I Timothy 6:16 - who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. [ESV]

I John 3:2 - Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [ESV]

Remember, Paradise is up next to God's throne room and Christians will be in Paradise when we die. Thus, we will be "with" or "near" God while we are in Paradise, but we won't be able to see Him until the Rapture. As we will see in our study of the Rapture, those who "sleep in Jesus" will come with him and their bodies will be resurrected and made perfect before the living Christians are raptured from the earth. At that point, we will finally be able to see him because we will be like him.

I Thessalonians 4:14-17 - For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [ESV]

I John 3:2 - Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [ESV]

Believers in Paradise do not yet have their "perfect" bodies because they won't get their perfect bodies until the rapture. So, until then, while they are in Paradise waiting for the rapture, they must have some kind of temporary bodies.

Jerusalem (lit. "dwelling place of peace")

Other than the physical city of Jerusalem, the New Testament makes three other reference to a Jerusalem not of this earth.

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The “above Jerusalem”

Galatians 4:25-26 - Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the **Jerusalem above** is free, and she is our mother. [ESV]

The “heavenly Jerusalem”

Hebrews 12:22 - But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [ESV]

The "new Jerusalem"

Revelation 21:1-4 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. [ESV]

It seems that all three of these are references to the New Jerusalem spoken of in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. This is the final home of believers. Therefore when we refer to going to “Heaven,” in the final analysis it is a reference to New Jerusalem where we will spend eternity.

Description of Heaven (new Jerusalem)

Revelation 21:1 - 22:5 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

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The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using.

The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper (diamond clear), the second sapphire (sapphire blue), the third chalcedony (agate or onyx, probably whitish in color), the fourth emerald (emerald green), the fifth sardonyx (red-orange onyx), the sixth carnelian (blood-red ruby), the seventh chrysolite (golden-yellow topaz), the eighth beryl (blue-green emerald), the ninth topaz (topaz, blue, green, or yellow), the tenth chrysoprase (apple green), the eleventh jacinth (reddish-blue zircon), and the twelfth amethyst (deep purple).

The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. [NIV]

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