

Which heaven do Christians go to?
A Series on the Fate of Your Soul: Part 6

Is there more than one heaven? Does it really matter? It is a valid question to ask as the quest for the answer will sharpen your theology and recognize that heaven is a temporary abode for your spirit.

1. How many heavens are there? The concept of three heavens is stated by the apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:1-4), which is an understanding that has long been a Jewish tradition.

The first heaven appears to be the physical atmosphere around the earth and its gravity where water exists as a gas and liquid.

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. (Gen 1:6-8)

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; (Isa 55:10)

The second heaven appears to be the visible solar system.

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. (Gen 1:14-16)

They will spread them out to the sun, the moon and to all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served, and which they have gone after and which they have sought, and which they have worshiped. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be as dung on the face of the ground. (Jer 8:2)

The third heaven appears to be where God resides on His throne (Ps 11:4), is seen as the "highest heaven" (Deut 10:14; 1 Ki 8:27), where Jesus ascends after His resurrection (Heb 9:24), and from where the Holy Spirit is sent (1 Pet 1:12). Created by God, third heaven is also where unfallen angels, the "heavenly host," reside (Neh 9:6) and serve God (Rev 5).

While God resides in the third heaven, all three comprise His heavenly realm (Ps 115:16).

The heavens are the heavens of the Lord,
But the earth He has given to the sons of men. (Ps 115:16)

2. What human beings are described in the third heaven's Temple of God?

When studying Revelation, there are 3 instances when human beings are mentioned in the Temple of God. In each instance, these human beings appear to be a) those martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ before the end times (Rev 6:9-11), and b) those who were martyred during the end times with the beast and false prophet such as the 144,000 bond servants and tribulation saints (Rev 7:13-15; 14:1-3).

It is significant to note that those Believers who were martyred for their faith before Jesus Christ returns reside underneath the altar in the Temple of God and emerge later, when Jesus breaks the seals, to receive their white robe and serve God Himself.

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When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, **I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained**; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Rev 6:9-11)

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. (Rev 7:13-15)

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and **with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads**. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. (Rev 14:1-3)

Note here that the heavenly "Mount Zion" is synonymous with the Temple of God as the 144,000 bond servants are singing before the throne of God.

Where are the souls of Believers who died naturally or not for their faith?

3. Is third heaven just comprised of the Temple of God?

The Bible does not explicitly describe third heaven; however, there are strong indications that it is large. Along with the Temple of God (Mount Zion), third heaven appears to include the "city of the living God / heavenly Jerusalem."

But you have come to Mount Zion **and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22-24)

Because it appears that only the spirits of deceased martyrs are in the Temple of God, then it is likely that the spirits of other Believers reside in the city of the living God. Unless it was in reference to a martyr, it is probably in this context that the apostle Paul speaks of a man "caught up to the third heaven" when he wrote to the church in Corinth (2 Cor 12:1-4).

Just as Paul also spoke of that man "caught up to the third heaven" as "caught up into Paradise" (2 Cor 12:4), Jesus spoke similarly to the thief next to Him on the cross:

And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)

After all of God's judgments have been dispensed and all of God's enemies, including death, vanquished, a New Earth and its heavenly atmosphere replaces the old.

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Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Rev 21:1-4)

God's ultimate plan is to unite the Temple of God with the New Earth where saints with their resurrected bodies can commune with their Lord; third heaven is New Jerusalem on the New Earth!

The Tree of Life is associated with the Paradise of God:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (Rev 2:7)

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev 22:1-3)

It is significant to note that in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), the Greek word for the English translation "paradise" is used for Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8-10, 15-16).