

Heaven isn't what you think it is

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What is heaven like? And where is it, anyway? Nearly everyone who believes in God has asked these questions at some point in their lives. The answers they're normally given, unfortunately, are generally vague guesses or assumptions, or simply statements saying "we can't know for sure." The truth, however, is that Scripture actually answers these questions for us, and the answer is so simple that I can actually show you heaven right now. How? Well, let's take a look at some of the passages of Scripture which tell us the answer to that question:

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. — Genesis 1:20

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. — Matthew 24:30

So when we see the word heaven, we can see that it's sometimes referring to the sky, where the birds and clouds are (the atmosphere, in other words).

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained — Psalm 8:3

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide 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 firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth — Genesis 1:14-17

As we've already determined, heaven is "above" us, but it isn't only a reference to the atmosphere, but to outer space as well.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. — Genesis 1:1

This tells us that there are only two overall "places" one can be: on earth, or in heaven. And if one is in the sky or in outer space, they're not on earth, which only leaves heaven for them to be in.

And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. — Luke 24:51

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. — Acts 1:9–12

This also reaffirms that heaven is a reference to what is "up above" the ground we stand on. As we can see, after Jesus ascended up into heaven, the disciples were gazing up into the sky (heaven), as the angels also confirmed they were (while also confirming that a prophecy of Zechariah is about Him and when He'll one day return to the exact same spot He left from, which was the Mount

of Olives¹). So, simply put, if someone wants to see heaven now, all they have to do is look up at the sky.

Most people, of course, think of heaven as a place the righteous dead go to, but you won't find any Scripture that tells you anyone goes to a place called heaven while dead (which makes sense, considering the fact that the dead are unconscious, as proven in my much longer Bible study titled "*What the Bible really says about heaven, hell, judgement, death, evil, sin, and salvation*," as well as in my shorter study titled "*What is death?*", so please go read one of those if you aren't already aware of this scriptural fact). The truth is, only the living can go to heaven, at least in a conscious state, and those in the body of Christ *will* go there when Christ comes for His body, and will finally "*ever be with the Lord*" there² (and if there's no Scripture which says the dead exist consciously in a place called heaven, it stands to reason that nobody will exist consciously in any of the biblical "hells" either, which they definitely won't, as also proven in those two aforementioned studies). That said, heaven isn't a place you'd want to go right now in your current body (aside from a short trip there in an aircraft

¹ Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. — Zechariah 14:1-4

² But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. — 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

or a space shuttle), because one needs a quickened (meaning immortal) body that could survive and thrive out there if you were planning to stay long, considering the fact that you'd suffocate from lack of oxygen, or freeze to death, or die from radiation poisoning out there in the heavens without either an immortal body or some sort of vehicle or structure to protect you from death (this is at least partly why Paul wrote that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*";³ we know that flesh and blood *will* inherit the part of the kingdom of God which will be on earth, meaning the kingdom of heaven, because we know that not everyone in Israel will be immortal during the thousand years — please read that longer Bible study I just mentioned, or my shorter one titled "*Things that differ*," for the scriptural passages teaching this fact — so this was clearly only about the part of the kingdom that will be *in* heaven, not the part that will be sent *from* heaven). It also isn't the perfect, sinless place most people think it is,⁴ at least not yet, since the devil and his angels haven't been cast out of heaven yet,⁵ for one thing, although it will be pretty great for the body of Christ when we have our new bodies that can enjoy it out there with our Lord as we fulfill our impending ministry to the spiritual beings residing there. This means, by the way, that Christians who like to claim that God can't allow sin into heaven (which is not an assertion I've ever seen made in Scripture) seem to have forgotten that, if Satan needs to be cast out of heaven, it means sin has already been in heaven, as is also confirmed by the fact that the book of Job says he was there too.⁶ Similarly, the claim they often make that sin can't exist in heaven because God can't look upon sin is also an

³ Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. — 1 Corinthians 15:50

⁴ Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. — Job 15:15

⁵ Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: — Ephesians 2:2

⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. — Job 1:6

unscriptural one, since the words of Habakkuk 1:13 they like to quote are actually, *“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil,”*⁷ with “to behold” in this verse simply being an expression in the KJV that means “to give attention to” or “to look upon approvingly” (which is what the Hebrew *רָאָה* /“raw-aw” that “behold” in this verse is translated from means). Satan’s presence in heaven, not to mention God’s omnipresence and the fact that *“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good,”* as Proverbs 15:3 tells us (with “beholding” in this verse translated instead from the Hebrew *צָפָה* /“tsaw-faw’,” literally meaning “observing”), would make this a very problematic (not to mention contradictory) verse as well, if most Christians were correct about what that verse in Habakkuk meant.

But we still have to ask ourselves where people got the idea that the righteous dead go to a place called heaven from in the first place. Well, there are a few reasons for this, but the main two reasons are verses that refer to God being in heaven,⁸ as well as a misunderstanding of the word “paradise.”

Since we know that the body of Christ will go to the heavens, and also that people will be living with God in the New Jerusalem, most Christians have assumed that these references must be talking about a place the dead go, not realizing that these things both take place within the physical universe, experienced by living people, rather than in an ethereal afterlife dimension experienced by the dead (the body of Christ goes to the heavens to complete a ministry there, but not until after they’ve been resurrected from the dead and/or quickened; and the New Jerusalem later descends from the heavens/outer

⁷ Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? — Habakkuk 1:13

⁸ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. — Matthew 6:9

space to the New Earth rather than being a place anyone who is dead goes to). That said, yes, God indeed *is* in heaven. He has a throne room (which can also be referred to *figuratively* as “heaven”⁹) and a throne somewhere out there in outer space, presumably in the city that will one day be called the New Jerusalem, while it waits to descend to the New Earth,¹⁰ and it also seems likely that He manifests a part of Himself in some sort of manner that the spiritual beings there can perceive, but He ultimately transcends the whole universe at the same time.¹¹

As far as the second misunderstanding goes, paradise is a reference to a future state of the earth where the tree of life will be,¹² both after Jesus returns and also later on the New Earth,¹³ which makes sense considering there would be no need to eat from the tree of life in an ethereal afterlife dimension as a ghost in order to remain “alive” (if the immortality of the soul were true, which I proved it isn’t in that longer Bible study, as well as in my study titled “*What is death?*”). This means that Jesus’ statement to the thief on the cross about being with

⁹ For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: — Hebrews 9:24

¹⁰ But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. — Galatians 4:26

¹¹ But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him? — 2 Chronicles 2:6

¹² He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. — Revelation 2:7

¹³ In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. — Revelation 22:2

Him in paradise¹⁴ couldn't mean what most Christians assume it to mean, because paradise doesn't really even exist yet, at least not outside of the Jerusalem which is currently above as it waits to descend to the New Earth, I suppose (and anyone who wants to insist that Jesus was speaking about something other than a future state of the earth will need to provide some scriptural references with solid exegesis of those passages to prove that assertion, not to mention explain away all the proof I covered in those two Bible studies I already mentioned that the dead really are unconscious — and before someone brings up 2 Corinthians 12:4,¹⁵ in light of everything we've just covered, this being a reference to Paul having a vision of the future splendours of the New Jerusalem on the New Earth, and not a reference to the supposed afterlife dimension we've now learned there's no basis for believing exists anyway, makes far more sense than any other interpretation I've ever heard). Since we have to interpret this verse in light of everything else we've just covered, based on the way it renders Jesus' statement, we're forced to interpret this verse in the KJV figuratively, meaning that, from the thief's perspective, it would feel like the same day when he woke up from his sleep and began to live with Jesus in paradise, either in Israel after Jesus returns, or on the New Earth (and for those who think it would mean that Jesus was being less than truthful by speaking figuratively here, ask yourself if He was also then being

¹⁴ And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. — Luke 23:39-43

¹⁵ How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. — 2 Corinthians 12:4

untruthful when He spoke figuratively to call Himself a door?¹⁶). This is also confirmed by Jesus' statement that He hadn't ascended to the Father yet in John 20:17,¹⁷ not to mention the fact that we're told His soul went to "hell" when He died¹⁸ (which simply means that His consciousness ceased to exist when He died, as we know from those Bible studies I've now mentioned a few times), not to heaven (or paradise), and if Jesus did *not* go to paradise on that day, the thief could not have been with Him there either, verifying that this could only be a prophetic statement about a time in the distant future when paradise begins on this earth or the New Earth. (And yes, I know that Jesus had been resurrected when He made that statement about not having ascended to the Father yet, but it's still not a statement He could have made honestly if He had ascended as a ghost, which we know He Himself didn't do anyway since His body was in the tomb and His soul was figuratively "residing" in "hell" while He was dead.)

Now, there are those who understand what death and paradise are, but who think this passage should be translated differently. You see, some will point out that there are no commas in the original Greek, and tell us that Luke 23:43 would be better translated as saying, "Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise" (just like Paul used similar expressions in Acts

¹⁶ I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. — John 10:9-11

¹⁷ Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. — John 20:17

¹⁸ For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. — Psalm 16:10

20:26¹⁹ and Acts 26:2,²⁰ not to mention all the times expressions like this were used in the Hebrew Scriptures, such as in Deuteronomy 4:26,²¹ 39–40,²² and 5:1,²³ to list just a few of *many* examples of this type of figure of speech in Scripture), simply meaning the thief would be with Jesus in paradise, either in Israel after Jesus returns, or on the New Earth, in the future (lining up exactly with the malefactor’s request that Jesus remember him *when He comes into His kingdom*²⁴ — something we already know will be here on earth in the future; but even if the kingdom *were* an afterlife location, we know that Jesus went to “hell” rather than to heaven when He died anyway, so He certainly didn’t “*come into His kingdom*” during those three days — telling us that he was expecting Jesus to either escape the cross or to be physically resurrected after he died, something even Jesus’ disciples didn’t believe was going to happen at that time, which means he might have been the first convert to believe in the resurrection if that was the case, and to inaugurate the kingdom of heaven on earth in the future regardless of whether He died or not, which makes sense considering the fact that no Israelite back then would have been expecting the kingdom to be anywhere *other* than in Israel). That said, while we certainly can

¹⁹ Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. — Acts 20:26

²⁰ I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: — Acts 26:2

²¹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. — Deuteronomy 4:26

²² Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever. — Deuteronomy 4:39-40

²³ And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. — Deuteronomy 5:1

²⁴ And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. — Luke 23:42

if we want to, without any violence to the original Greek, we don't actually have to change the punctuation at all in order to understand what Jesus was getting at since, regardless of where the comma is located, we still have to interpret this verse in light of the rest of Scripture, which means that whether we move the comma (as some translations do) and interpret Jesus' statement literally, or leave it where it is in the KJV and interpret Jesus' statement figuratively, the end result is still the exact same no matter where the comma ends up (at least if we're taking the rest of Scripture into consideration), with the thief not ending up in paradise with Jesus until he's resurrected from the dead to live either in Israel or on the New Earth, so I'll leave it at that.

This all means, by the way, that it's also time to rethink the term "the kingdom of heaven," or "the kingdom of the heavens" (which is simply a reference to the future kingdom coming *from* the heavens to Earth, specifically to Israel), since this might actually be better translated as "the kingdom of/from outer space," or perhaps simply "the kingdom from above."