

WHERE IS HEAVEN?

What is heaven? Where is it? Will we all be going to heaven when we die?

The best way to find out about it would be to ask someone who has been there. Wouldn't that be good—if we could find such a person! Well, in actual fact we can—the Bible talks about one human being who has been there.

The Apostle Paul spoke about his experience in heaven, in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 ¹“I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— ⁴was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”

Verse 1 He had to boast, because people were demanding his credentials. He didn't want to, so did it grudgingly.

Verse 2 When he talks about “a man” here, he is talking about himself. He was caught up to the “3rd heaven.” That's an interesting thing about heaven. The Bible talks a lot about “the birds of heaven” etc—the first heaven is our earthly atmosphere, the blanket of life sustaining gases encircling the globe, where “the rain falls from heaven”. The 2nd heaven represents the expanse of the great universe—outer space where we find the sun, moon and stars of the heavens. The 3rd heaven is the location of God's throne, where God lives. This is heaven we want to focus on in the sermon. Where is it, and what is it like?

- ✚ It is the place where God lives: “Our Father, who art in heaven”.
- ✚ It is a place where God's will is done: “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”
- ✚ It is the place Jesus came down from, and has now gone back up to.
- ✚ There are lots of angels there: “The armies of heaven,” “the angels in heaven.”
- ✚ No man has ever gone there. John 3:13 “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”
- ✚ That seems to mean that when people die they don't go there. Acts 2:34 says “David did not ascend to heaven.”

But if no man has gone there, how come Paul did? Well, he didn't really, as we see as we continue in 2 Corinthians 12.

Verse 2B “Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I don't know—God knows.”

This was a vision (Verse 1) but it was so vivid that Paul was a little confused about it, it seemed so real. But I'm sure the answer is that he was not carried up there bodily, because “no man has been to heaven.”

Verse 4 This heaven can be called Paradise, and it contains inexpressible things.

This brings to mind 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 ⁹“However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” the things God has prepared for those who

love Him—¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

We can't even imagine how wonderful the future is beyond the grave.

Verse 10 But God's Spirit helps us to understand deep things like this. He helps us to understand spiritual things and I believe heaven is a spiritual thing, a spiritual not a physical place.

A Russian cosmonaut said after going up to space that he looked everywhere for heaven, but he couldn't see it, so therefore God doesn't exist. I think that's ridiculous reasoning because God isn't physical. God is Spirit, and spirit is invisible to human eyes, unless He wants to make Himself visible at any time.

If God is immortal and invisible, why would He live in a place that is physical and visible? He doesn't get tired or have to sit down or sleep, He doesn't have to eat, so why would He need anything physical?

1 Kings 8:27 "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

The sky around us is physical, but it can't contain God, because He is spiritual. He is outside time and space—no space can contain Him because He exists in a different realm.

Ephesians 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Heaven is a different realm—it is the realm, or dimension, or world, where God lives—different to the physical realm or dimension where we live!

It is a different kingdom, and in fact is called the Kingdom of Heaven. We can enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and be in that Kingdom, as well as still be in a physical kingdom or world, because the Kingdom of Heaven is spiritual.

Matthew 6:20 "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

We can store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust don't destroy, because they are spiritual treasures. This isn't talking about a physical place where we have physical gold or treasure being stored up for us.

1 Peter 1:3-4 ³"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you."

We have a new (spiritual) birth (not physically born again!) and our heavenly inheritance is immortal.

Back in Ephesians 2:6 "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus".

Because we have the Holy Spirit, we have moved over into that realm of heaven to some extent. Our citizenship is now in that spirit realm. If it is a physical place, we can't be in the heavenly realms yet

(because we're not in any different physical place to this one!) and therefore this promise wouldn't be true!

So heaven isn't a physical place. Therefore it isn't up or down, east or west. It doesn't take up any space!

I'm spending a bit of time on this because it is very hard for our human minds to grasp. The Bible says "Jesus went up into heaven." Jesus "lifted His eyes up to heaven" when He prayed. But heaven isn't up!

Our human words and languages can't do justice to spiritual realities. Take love, joy and peace for instance.

The love of Christ "surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19).
God gives us "inexpressible joy" (1 Peter 1:8)
And His peace "transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7)

We can't fully understand love, peace and joy—we can't describe or express them in human words. We're even more limited when we try to express or understand the presence of God and the wonders of heaven.

We have to use some sort of preposition to describe its location, so we use the word "up", but it doesn't actually have a physical location. We actually enter into it when we pray.

Hebrews 10:19 "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus".

We enter the throne room of God in heaven! We enter His presence not by physical transport, but in the innermost person, in heart and soul. It is a movement of the spirit, not of the body! It is a change in attitude not in altitude!

2 Corinthians 5:1 "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

Does this mean a physical house? If so, how could it be eternal? Every physical thing breaks down eventually.

Our heavenly reward is a spiritual one, and it will be incomparably greater than our physical bodies now (Verse 2). This isn't talking about a building to live in, but our body. We will inherit a spiritual body in the resurrection, as we see in 1 Corinthians 15—and we will then be in the heavenly realm where God lives, the Kingdom of Heaven.

So I believe we will go to heaven after we die. But I'm talking about after the resurrection—we'll be where God is, and He is in heaven. We'll be in the spirit realm. We'll be in the Kingdom of Heaven, we'll be in Paradise—in heaven. Actually we're in the heavenly realms now to a limited extent, we will be there in all fullness. But we'll also be on earth!

Let's conclude with the description of our reward in heaven that we read in the last couple of chapters in the Bible.

Revelation 20:14 shows that hell fire will be on the earth. Similarly, heaven will be on the earth! After the lake of fire has burnt up the earth and all evildoers, there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Revelation 21:1 “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. ⁴ ‘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.”

Verse 2 “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

Verse 3 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

God’s dwelling is in heaven. Where He lives is in heaven. He will live with men. So we will be in heaven! Heaven will be on earth. But not this tired old physical earth. It will be a new earth, a spiritual earth that will last forever.

Verse 4 “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.”

A good description of what heaven will be like.

The next verses describe it in more detail and show God’s throne will be there.

Revelation 22:3 “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.”

It’s going to be a fantastic place. When we think of Paradise we can’t help but think of physical things we would enjoy. But I believe the rewards of heaven will be spiritual things that will dwarf into insignificance any physical pleasures we could think of.

Someone described heaven as “A state of happiness infinite in degree and endless in duration.” Another writer said “The joys of heaven are without example, above experience and beyond imagination.” Someone else said “Heaven will be a place of perfect purity, fullness of joy, everlasting freedom, health and fruition, complete security and eternal good.”

It’ll be a pretty fantastic place, living with God forever! The spiritual blessings there will be much greater than anything enjoyable we can have here. Paul said man is not even permitted to tell the things there!

Let’s conclude with the way David summed it up.

Psalms 16:11 “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”



(Picture from Google Images)