

Q:

Is heaven one thing or many?

Since I can remember I've been told, "Do this and/or don't do that, and you'll go to heaven."

But what does this mean exactly – Go to heaven?

"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

– Matthew 5:20

Sounds pretty straightforward.

Yet some Bible translations say 'heaven' while others say 'heavens.' Which is it?

And why does Paul say he knew a man caught up in the third heaven?

And while we're at it,...where exactly is this heaven?

When I began to study the Bible in earnest, what I found surprised me. There is no heaven. At least not the one depicted by priests and pastors in church, or the one represented in modern media.

WORD ON THE WORD:

The Hebrew word for "heaven" is SHAMAYIM (pronounced "shah-MAH-yim) means to be lofty or aloft. It is grammatically plural with no singular form. Not one thing, but many. Some ancient scholars read the word as a compound: esh (fire) + mayim (water) – a miraculous fusion of opposites brought together by divine will.

In the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, the word "heaven" appears exactly 582 times and the word "heavens" 133 times.

Biblical narratives often depict the heavens as:

- **The First Heaven:** Earth's atmosphere where the birds fly and clouds gather. (Jeremiah 4:25).
- **The Second Heaven:** The celestial realm - sun, moon, stars, and planets. (Isaiah 13:10).
- **The Third Heaven:** The spiritual realm, paradise, and the dwelling place of God's throne.

In his letter to a newly established church in Corinth, the apostle Paul commented:

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven"

– 2 Corinthians 12:2

An ancient manuscript widely read between the old and new testament, 2 Enoch, lists seven heavens.

That's a lot of biblical evidence to suggest heaven is indeed real. A place perhaps not located in the earthly realm, but in the space above the sky and stars.

Today however, Biblical scholars speak of two. The first, an intermediate state, is a conscious, personal, blessed presence with Christ after death.

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Is heaven one thing or many?

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."
– Luke 23:43

The second is considered the final state - "the new heavens and the new earth". This follows the resurrection and final judgement of all the dead both great and small who will be called to stand before God's throne.

In this final state, we will not only be conscious but embodied in a physical, resurrected form, both imperishable and spiritual.

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create..."
– Isaiah 65: 17-19

This second and final heaven does not float above the clouds or beyond the stars outside the realm of the visible and invisible. It is not up there, but right here on earth.

A redeemed earth reformed after the spiritual victory over evil and death.

To get there, we don't rise, God comes down. According to scripture, God will return to earth to re-establish the garden of Eden through His Son in the place we now live and breathe (and sadly, sin).

This heaven will be the restored and redeemed union of God and His creation right here on earth.

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...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.'"
– Revelation 21: 2-3

This final state is "where God is" – a restful, secure, joyful location in the presence of our Creator.

A direct connection with light and love. An intimate understanding of The Word – that glorious sound that carries divine acceptance.

"Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."
– Isaiah 35:10

- THE **WORD** WITHOUT FAITH HAS NO ETERNAL BENEFIT.

"THEY SHALL NEVER ENTER MY REST."

- HEBREWS 4:5
- PSALM 95:11

ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WORDS IN THE BIBLE :

rest :

➡ A DEEP SPIRITUAL PEACE AND SOLACE THAT COMES FROM BEING IN **GOD'S** PRESENCE AND UNLOADING OUR BURDENS ONTO HIM.

⇒ A SURRENDER OF WORRIES AND A CESSATION OF SELF-EFFORT TO EARN SALVATION, FINDING PEACE THROUGH CHRIST INSTEAD.

⇒ A KNOWING WE EXPERIENCE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST. THIS REST CULMINATES IN HEAVEN WHERE ALL STRIVING ENDS.

➡ AN ADMISSION OF OUR OWN WEAKNESS SO THAT WE CAN ASK HIM TO TAKE OVER.

➡ A STANDING ASIDE TO ALLOW HIM TO HAVE HIS WAY IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS.

"REST PATIENTLY IN THE LORD;
DO NOT FRET."

- PSALM 37:7

...AND THERE HE (ABRAM) BUILT A ALTAR
UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME
OF THE LORD. 99

- GENESIS 12: 9

➡ "calling on God's name" is...

- A SHOWING OF FAITH AND DEPENDENCE ON GOD, CHOOSING TO TRUST GOD OVER HIS OWN SECURITY OR UNDERSTANDING

SIDE
NOTE: WHEN ASKED, ... "HOW DID YOU END UP IN WIMBERLEY?" ...
MY RESPONSE WAS ... "I DON'T KNOW."
BUT NOW I DO KNOW. **GOD SENT ME.**

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- YOUR WORDS ARE A PRODUCT THAT NEVER DEGRADE, DISSOLVE, SPOIL, ALTER, OR DISAPPEAR.
- YOUR WORDS ENTER THE UNIVERSE AND REMAIN ETERNAL.

YOUR WORDS
are
ETERNAL.

“YOUR WORD, LORD, IS ETERNAL,
IT STANDS FIRM IN THE HEAVENS.”
- PSALM 119:89

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“HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY,
BUT MY WORDS WILL NEVER PASS AWAY.”
- MATTHEW 24:35

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