

HEAVEN

Scripture actually speaks of three different “**heavens**”. There is the first heaven, or what we might call the atmospheric heaven, where there are clouds, rain, thunder, winds, dew, frost, air, and sky. In technical, non-biblical terms this is called the troposphere – that space that surrounds the earth and extends outward approximately 7 - 8 miles. Sometimes on the way to Romania we are flying at 38,000 feet or over 7 miles high. Secondly, there is what is called the second heaven, or the celestial heaven. This is the realm of the sun, moon, stars, and planets – or what we call the universe. Its vastness is incomprehensible. [Genesis 15:5](#), for instance, refers to the stars in the heavens.

Ge 15:5 (NKJV) Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

However, there also is what Scripture defines as the “**third heaven**”, or the actual dwelling place of God. It is called in Scripture as the “**highest heaven**”, or as the “**heaven of heavens**”. For instance, in [1 Kings 8:27](#) Solomon declares,

1Ki 8:27 (NKJV) But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

We know that God is omnipresent which means that He is always everywhere, but in a very particular way, heaven is His dwelling place, His habitation. In [2 Corinthians 12:2](#), Paul is speaking of the third heaven and says,

2Co 12:2 (NKJV) I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven.

This was a specific place. Heaven is a place, and in particular it is the dwelling place of God Himself during this present age. [Isaiah 66:1](#) says,

Isa 66:1 (NKJV) Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?"

Now, we make the simple point that heaven is a place simply because some theologians have incorrectly defined heaven as a state of mind. Millard Erickson, who is a wonderful theologian, says this in his excellent book called Christian Theology,

“While heaven is both a place and a state, it is primarily a state.”

That statement is very difficult to understand. Something is either a place or a state, but not both. A place is a place or it is not a place. It is not a kind of place, but really more of a state.

Donald Guthrie, another well know theologian, says this,

“We shall not expect, however, to find a description of a place, so much as the presence of a person.”

Once again, that kind of theology is very difficult to swallow simply because in [Revelation 21:9-27](#), John gives a specific description of the New Jerusalem and it is well defined as an actual place with physical characteristics. The idea that we as Christians will just be floating around in some kind of ethereal, ghostly existence is far removed from the New Testament description of what the new heavens

and the new earth and the New Jerusalem will be like. The Scriptures are clear that God will be present in heaven, and the very definition of being present is to be located in a place.

When Jesus was ascended into heaven, He left one place and went specifically to another place. In fact, that seems to be the whole point of that narrative in that as Christ ascended to a specific place He will also descend from that same place to this place again. In [Acts 1:9-11](#), Jesus ascended into heaven itself as His disciples watched,

Ac 1:9 (NKJV) Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

In [Acts 7:54-56](#) we have part of the story of Stephen and what took place immediately before he died from stoning.

Ac 7:54 (NKJV) When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Stephen did not see a state, but a specific place. Wayne Grudem says this about that passage,

"He did not see mere symbols of a state of existence. It seems rather that his eyes were opened to see a spiritual dimension of reality which God has hidden from us in this present age, a dimension which nonetheless really does exist in our space/time universe, and within which Jesus now lives in his physical resurrection body, waiting even now for the time when He will return to earth."

In [John 14:2-3](#) Jesus said these very specific words,

Jn 14:2 (NKJV) In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

So right now heaven is an actual place that is unknown to us relative to its location and it is a place unable to be perceived by our natural senses.

In [Revelation 4:1-5](#) John was caught up and transported to heaven and when he arrived he saw a throne, a specific place.

Rev 4:1 (NKJV) After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing open in* heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." ² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³ And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their

heads. ⁵ And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

[Psalm 2:1-4](#), speaking of God in heaven and how he governs the affairs of the earth and the rulers of the earth, says this,

Ps 2:1 (NKJV) **Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us." ⁴ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.**

Jesus declared in [Matthew 6:9](#) in the Lord's prayer,

Mt 6:9 (NKJV) **In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.**

There is a very important observation that needs to be made at this point relative to where heaven is actually located. You may have read some article in the past that indicated that heaven was located somewhere far in outer space. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. To the contrary, Scripture indicates that heaven is not distant, but very near – much nearer than we might imagine. I do not want to go into this in detail in this study, but just to make the point I will offer some proof to substantiate what I have stated. Elisha **saw** Elijah going up into heaven. Isaiah **saw** the Lord on His throne. Ezekiel **saw** into the heavenly throne room. Nebuchadnezzar **saw** into heaven. Daniel **saw** into heaven. Stephen **saw** Jesus standing next to God the Father. Paul **heard** Jesus speaking from heaven. Peter **talked** with the Lord. John **saw** into heaven. Jesus Himself said that heaven is near in [John 1:51](#).

Jn 1:51 (NKJV) **And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."**

Jesus watched heaven come near at His baptism. The Scriptures are replete with examples of God simply opening a glimpse into heaven for people to momentarily peer into its glories. God Himself is heard speaking from heaven. If we can state it this way, heaven is simply in an unseen realm that is near to us right now.

Some theologians believe that the current heaven or what Paul described as the “**third heaven**” is where all of the New Testament believers go when they die – into the very presence of God in heaven. “**To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord**” – and that would be in the “**third heaven**”. However, we need to understand that theologically this is called the “**intermediate heaven**”. I.e., it is **not the final** dwelling place, it is **not the final heaven** that God will create and provide for us. That is why it is often referred to as the “intermediate heaven”. If I can use this term, it is a “temporary” home for the New Testament believer. Paradise, or Abraham's bosom, is the temporary dwelling place for the Old Testament saints until they receive their resurrected bodies and are united with the New Testament saints at the beginning of the Millennium to enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. We will all be together forever after that point in time.

So, the intermediate heaven is a transitional place between our life on the earth and our final home in the “**new heaven**” and the “**new earth**” which have not been created yet. It has a temporary nature to it. Once we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and participate in the marriage of the Bride to Christ, we will then return to the earth in the Millennium and **after** that, we will enter into what [Revelation 21](#)

describes as the “**new heaven**” and the “**new earth**”. It does not happen until the end of the Millennium, and it is a **NEW** heaven and a **NEW** earth that become ours – not the intermediate heaven or the current earth. The current “**heaven**” that we talk about is not the permanent heaven, but simply a temporary heaven.

Most often when we talk about heaven, what we mean is that place where a Christian goes after they die. However, in reality, what we are identifying for the current New Testament believers is this intermediate place, this intermediate heaven – not the final one. Just by definition, the term “intermediate” indicates that it is not a permanent place, but a temporary place. Randy Alcorn in his book called Heaven says this,

*“The intermediate state or present heaven is not our final destination. Though it will be a wonderful place, the present heaven is not the final place that we are made for – the place God promises to refashion for us to live in forever. **God’s children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected earth.** We must not lose sight of our true destination. If we do, we will be confused and disoriented in our thinking about where, and in what form, we will spend eternity.”*

I certainly believe that what Randy Alcorn has communicated is accurate. Will we live in heaven forever? Yes. Will we be with the Lord forever? Yes. However, will we be with Him in exactly the same place that heaven is located now? No. Ultimately, we will live in the “**new heaven**” and the “**new earth**”. If we fail to grasp this, then ultimately we will fail to grasp the biblical truth related to the doctrine of the eternal state.

Scripture does not give an abundance of information about the eternal state. The most comprehensive description is found in Revelation 21 and 22. What we learn from these two chapters is that the current heavens and the current earth as we know it will continue in some “renewed” form until the end of the Millennium when the “**new heaven**” and the “**new earth**” will be created. Wayne Grudem addresses this aspect of heaven in his book Systematic Theology and says this,

*“But in fact the biblical teaching is richer than that: it tells us that there will be new heavens and a new earth – an entirely renewed creation – and we will live with God there...There will also be a **new kind of unification of heaven and earth**...There will be a **joining of heaven and earth** in this new creation.”*

What we discern from all of this is really very simple, but something that is probably not very well understood by many Christians. It is the fact that we will live with Christ and all other believers forever, but not in the intermediate place we now call heaven. Rather, we will live in the unified new heaven and new earth which is also connected to the New Jerusalem where the triune God will dwell. If we were to die today, we would go to heaven – but a temporary heaven. Our ultimate and final destination in which we will dwell is the “**new heaven**” and the “**new earth**”, and the “**New Jerusalem**”.

Revelation 21:1-4, a very important passage relative to what the final dwelling place that we call heaven will be like, says this,

Rev 21:1 (NKJV) **Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I**

heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

The “**new heaven**” will replace the existing heaven, the “**new earth**” will replace the existing earth, and the “**New Jerusalem**” will replace the current Jerusalem where Christ will dwell during the Millennial kingdom. This new “place” will include all of the redeemed from all of the ages – whether the New Testament saints, the Old Testament saints, and those individuals saved in the Tribulation and in the millennial kingdom. When we think of all of this, it is very important to keep in mind that even during the millennial kingdom that there will still be both sin and death. People that are born will still have a propensity to sin and eventually they will die. We know that that will not be the case in the eternal state.

In very short detail, this city that John saw will descend from the “**third heaven**” to the earth. This will occur after the Great White Throne Judgment and will usher in what we have called the “eternal state”. So, at the beginning of the eternal state, the “**new heaven**” will actually come to the “**new earth**” and will be part of the eternal dwelling place that God has prepared for us. So, in a sense, our actual final dwelling place that we refer to as heaven has **NOT** yet been finally created. The “**third heaven**” is where God the Father and Jesus Christ are right now, but it is not the final dwelling place – even though much of it will most likely be fully retained. It appears from [John 14:1-2](#) that Jesus is there now preparing it, but it will not be fully manifested to us until after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment.

What will be different is that currently “**heaven**” where God dwells, and “**earth**”, where we dwell, are separated. I.e., God does not actually dwell with us in some kind of visible form. God indwells us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, but He does not actually dwell with us so that we see Him or Christ. However, in the new heavens and the new earth, the two will be joined together so that we will be in the actual presence of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit – all in their manifested glory. We will be in the presence of Christ during the Millennium, but not in the presence of the Father, but after the “**new heavens and the new earth**” are created, we will forever be in the physical and visible presence of both.

So, prior to the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the Millennium, all believers – Old and New Testament alike– will be on the earth in the Millennial kingdom. Then sequentially the “**new heavens and the new earth**” and the “**New Jerusalem**” will be manifested and in that place we will have our eternal home. This will be an entirely renewed creation that God is going to create. It may have similarities to what we currently know, but in essence it will be richer and better and different than what we currently know. In fact, the creation that we currently live in has actually been cursed by God in [Genesis 3](#), and that is why in [Romans 8](#) Paul stated that the whole creation is groaning for its redemption. [Isaiah 65:17](#) says,

Isa 65:17 (NKJV) **"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.**

That is a pretty strong statement. I.e., the new heavens and the new earth are going to be so far superior to what we currently enjoy in life that we will not even remember what this world was like. It will

simply pale into non-existence in our minds. What we deemed as incredible here will just pale into insignificance in our minds when we are actually in the new heavens and the new earth.

It appears that [Hebrews 12:22-24](#) gives a partial indication of what the New Jerusalem will be like.

Heb 12:22 (NKJV) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

So, what we know is in the **current** heavenly Jerusalem, or what we might call the current dwelling place of God, are God the Father, Jesus Christ, an innumerable number of angels, and church age believers. Obviously, there may be much more than described here in this short passage.

Now, based on [Revelation 21:2](#), John says that the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven.

Rev 21:2 (NKJV) Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

I think that what makes this phrase “**coming down**” significant is that in the original state, in the original creation, God the Father walked in the garden with Adam. He was present there in some actual form that allowed both He and Adam to have fellowship. It must have been remarkable for God to even be physically present with Adam, nevertheless actually talking with Him. However, it appears from this verse and [Revelation 21:3](#) that when God the Father descends from the heavenly Jerusalem and in the “**New Jerusalem**” that it will be so that we can personally be in His presence. Look at [Revelation 21:3](#) again,

Rev 21:3 (NKJV) And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

We want to define the current heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God – the actual place where God manifests His presence, His glory, and His blessings. It is a place of indescribable blessing. [Revelation 21:9-27](#) gives us an actual description of the New Jerusalem which you can read on your own. The Bible reveals that heaven will go on forever. [Revelation 22:5](#) declares,

Rev 22:5 (NKJV) There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

Unfortunately, the unsaved will be fully excluded from heaven. The utter misery that the wicked will find themselves in is more than feeble words can describe. In fact, the book of [Revelation](#), because of the immense consequences of not coming to Christ, ends with a renewed invitation for those people living in our current world to respond to the gospel message. [Revelation 22:17](#) says,

Rev 22:17 (NKJV) And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.