

What is the third heaven?

By

Marten Visser

Christian basics › Life after death

<https://www.biblword.net/>

What is the third heaven?

Christian basics › Life after death

Paul wrote that he was “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2). In the next verse he calls the same place “paradise”. Paradise, or the third heaven, is the place where God is. Jesus promised to the criminal on the cross: “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). They will be in the presence of God together. So ‘third heaven’ (which only appears once in the Bible) has the same meaning as how we normally use the word ‘heaven’.

Various ways of heaven

Why then is Paul talking about ‘third heaven’ and not just ‘heaven’? That is to make sure his readers do not misunderstand him. ‘Heaven’ or ‘heavens’ is used in various ways in the Bible.

The first meaning of ‘heavens’ is the atmosphere of the earth. Examples of this are: • ‘The birds of the heavens’ (Genesis 1:26) • ‘The windows of the heavens were

closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained' (Genesis 8:2). • 'He will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain' (Deuteronomy 11:17). • 'You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven' (Matthew 26:64).

The second meaning of 'heavens' is the stars beyond the earth's atmosphere. Examples of this are: • 'There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness' (Exodus 24:10). • 'I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven' (Genesis 22:17). • '... served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden' (Deuteronomy 17:3)

The third meaning of heavens is the dwelling place of God. Examples of this use of the word are: • 'And listen in heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive' (1 Kings 8:30). • 'Then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land' (2 Chronicles 7:14). • 'The LORD has established His throne in the heavens'

(Psalms 103:19). • ‘Give glory to your Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 5:16).

Mixed use of heaven

Often ‘heaven’ is used in a way that these three meanings are more or less mixed. For example: • When Jacob flees Esau, we read ‘And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!’ (Genesis 28:12). • “Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven’” (John 6:32).

In the presence of the Lord

So when Paul was writing about ‘third heaven’, he meant to say: ‘I was not in the clouds, I was not among the stars – I was in the presence of God!’ That is a deep and overwhelming joy that each of us will experience if we have trusted in the Lord Jesus as our Savior.

