

Paradise

PARADISE. A loanword from Old Persian (*pairi-daēza*), which means “enclosure,” then “park” or “garden.” It appears in Late Biblical Hebrew as *pardēs*, only with profane meaning (Neh 2:8 [RSV: “forest”]; Cant 4:13 [RSV: “orchard”]; Eccl 2:5 [RSV “park”]). The profane meaning continues in Mishnaic Hebrew *pardēs* “park” (e.g., *t. Beṣa* 1.10) and in Jewish Aramaic *pardēs* (ā’) “garden” (e.g., *B. Meṣ.* 103a).

The Old Persian etymon is also the source of the Greek loanword *paradeisos*. In the LXX *paradeisos* denotes God’s garden (Gen 2:8–10, 16), and the shift from secular to religious meaning has been made. The religious meaning—God’s garden or Paradise—entered Jewish thought and vocabulary after the Babylonian Exile, was combined with the hope of a blessed eschaton, and appears in the Apocrypha (2 Esdr 4:7; 6:2; 7:36, 123; 8:52) and frequently in other early Jewish writings (*Psalms of Solomon* 14; *Sib. Or.* frag. 3.46–48;

2 *Enoch* 8–9; 3 *Baruch* 4; *Joseph and Asenath* 18; 4 *Baruch* 9). In the NT, the religious meaning “Paradise” alone is evident (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:3; Rev 2:7).

The biblical Garden of Eden attracted non-Jewish conceptions of a paradisiac garden. The development of “Paradise” within Judaism was aided by the image of a special garden, Eden, free of any trouble or inconvenience, in which the human and divine were close and collegial, in which every tree was “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:8), and from which flowed four rivers (Gen 2:10–14). Mixed with these images were the following concepts: the Isaianic words that Zion will become like Eden and the garden of the Lord (Isa 51:3), that God’s people will be as a watered garden (Isa 58:11), and his planting (of special trees in the desert [Isa 41:18–19]) for his glory (Isa 60:13); Jeremiah’s vision that the righteous are those whom God will plant in the promised land in faithfulness (Jer 32:41). Related images are Ezekiel’s images of the garden of God, the trees of Eden,

Beṣa Beṣa (= *Yom Ṭob*)
B. Meṣ. Baba Meṣi ‘a

. *Baba Meṣi* ‘a
Sib. Or. Sibylline Oracles

and the trees by the waters (Ezek 31:8–9; cf. 36:35). Equally important for the understanding of the Jewish development of Paradise are the Psalmist's words, which were memorized by devout Jews: "Blessed is the man who ... delights ... in the Law of the Lord, ... He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Ps 1:1–3).

This symbolic language, as well as other images and myths, combined in numerous ways to produce the Jewish concept of Paradise. One of the earliest passages is *1 Enoch* 32, according to which Enoch journeys to the east and "came to the garden of righteousness and saw beyond those trees ... the tree of wisdom ... from which (his) precursors, ate and ... realized that they were naked and (so) ... were expelled from the garden" (*1 En.* 32:3–6). Another early image is found in *Jubilees*. Abraham "perceived that from him there would be a righteous planting for eternal

generations ..." (*Jub.* 17:16). One of the most interesting early examples is found in the sectarian psalms from Qumran called the Hodayoth. According to column 8, the Righteous Teacher probably looks back on his life and allegorically foresees his community as the one that will produce the eternal planting from which shall issue the shoot for the glorious Eden (1QH 8, cf. 1QS 8.4–5; CD 1.7–8). The image of Paradise is fully developed in *2 Enoch* 8, according to which Enoch is taken "up to the third heaven, and ... looked downward, and ... saw Paradise. And that place is inconceivably pleasant ... And in the midst ... the tree of life, at that place where the LORD takes a rest when he goes into paradise" (*2 En.* 8:1–3 [J]). According to the *Apocalypse of Moses*, Paradise is not only in the third heaven (40:2), it is also on the earth (38:5). Paradise is thus obviously situated in different places according to early Jewish documents. It is on the earth either far to the east (*1 En.*

1 *En.* 1 *Enoch* (*Ethiopic Apocalypse*)

Jub. *Jubilees*

1QH *Hōdāyōt* (*Thanksgiving Hymns*) from Qumran Cave 1

1QS *Serek hayyaḥad* (*Rule of the Community, Manual of Discipline*)

CD Cairo (Genizah), Damascus Document [= S. Schechter, *Documents of Jewish Sectaries*, vol. 1, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, Cambridge, 1910. Repr. New York, 1970]

2 *En.* 2 *Enoch* (*Slavonic Apocalypse*)

32:2–3, 2 *En.* 42:3–4), to the northeast perhaps (1 *En.* 61:1–13), between the northeast and the west (1 *En.* 70:3–4), to the north (1 *En.* 77:3–4), to the far west perhaps (Jos. *JW* 2.155–56), but never to the south (but see 1 *En.* 77:1–2). It can be readily seen, from this brief list, that the books collected together as 1 *Enoch* are a repository of many diverse Jewish ideas.

Paradise is sometimes perceived as the (post resurrection) intermediate abode of the righteous (1 *Enoch* 37–70), or as the hidden eschatological place of the righteous (2 *Enoch* 8). Other passages describe the righteous enjoying life in Paradise or Eden, but provide no indication of their duration there (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 21). It is also frequently portrayed as closed (4 *Ezra* 7), as one would expect from the Genesis account of the expulsion; note 2 *En.* 42:3[J], “And I ascended into the east, into the Paradise of Eden, where rest is prepared for the righteous. And it is open as far as the third heaven; but it is closed from this world.” This passage seems to result from an

attempt to resolve the tension arising from placing Paradise on the earth and also in the third heaven. Jews did not think about diverse places, but only one and the same Paradise. In 4 *Ezra*, Ezra is told, “for you ... Paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed ...” (8:52; cf. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 21). The Jewish apocalypses contain the conviction that the final (or second) age will be characterized by the blessed state at creation of the first age, but without the possibility of disobedience, disharmony, discomfort, and discontinuity. Only in this sense can it be said that the Paradise of the first age reappears in the second (final) age. The Jewish myth of Paradise is so developed by the end of the 1st century C.E. that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* freely borrowed from it in describing the garden beneath Aseneth’s tower.

Such creative ideas in early Jewish theology influenced Christians. According to Luke 23:43 Jesus tells the repentant thief that he will be with him that day in Paradise. Paul reveals

Jos. Josephus
JW Josephus, *The Jewish War* (= *Bellum Judaicum*)

that he was taken up into the third heaven, and thus probably into Paradise (2 Cor 12:3). The author of the *Odes of Solomon* describes Paradise; as also in the *Psalms of Solomon* but in contrast to many other texts according to which the righteous eat the fruit of the trees (see *T. Levi* 18:11; Rev 2:7), the righteous are portrayed as “blooming and fruit-bearing trees.” The poet proclaims, “Blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in your Land, and who have a place in your Paradise” (*Odes Sol.* 11:18; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 19).¹

PARADISE (Heb. *pardēs*; Gk. *parádeisos*; from O.Pers. *pairi-daēza* “enclosure”).† A term introduced into Greek by Xenophon to indicate the game parks and pleasure gardens of Persian kings and nobles. By the third century B.C., it came to mean any park or garden. The three occurrences of *pardēs* in the Old Testament are all late and all have a literal, secular meaning (Neh. 2:8; RSV “forest”;

Eccl. 2:5; RSV “parks”; Cant. 4:13; RSV “orchard”). The LXX uses *parádeisos* to translate Heb. *gan, gannâ* “garden,” including references to the garden of Gen. 2–3, as does Philo.

Speculations about Paradise/Eden, envisioned as hidden in some terrestrial or celestial location, were common in post-Old Testament Jewish writings (e.g., 2 Esdr. 4:7; 7:36; Adam And Eve 25, 29, 37ff.). Descriptions of revelatory journeys to Paradise also appeared in the literature (e.g., 2 En. 8; Apoc. Abr. 21:6). Paul’s rapture into the third heaven and Paradise (2 Cor. 12:2–4) is related to such speculations. According to the Talmud (*Hag.* 14b), four rabbis are said to have entered Paradise, usually interpreted as a metaphor for mystical or philosophical speculation; this is as close as rabbinic literature comes to a use of *pardēs* as a religious technical term, and even this instance may be a product of Hellenistic influence.

T. Levi Testament of Levi
Odes Sol. Odes of Solomon

Gos. Thom. Gospel According to Thomas (NHC II,2)

¹ Charlesworth, J. H. (1992). Paradise. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 5, pp. 154–155). New York: Doubleday.
O.Pers. Old Persian

† Major revision

LXX Septuagint

2 Esdr. 2 Esdras

Adam And Eve Life of Adam and Eve

2 En. 2 Enoch

Apoc. Abr. Apocalypse of Abraham

Along with “spatial” concerns with Paradise, eschatological ideas arose. Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35 compare the restoration of Israel to the garden of Eden (LXX *parádeisos* for Heb. *‘ēden* at Isa. 51:3). Some apocalyptic writings identified the messianic age with the original Paradise/Eden (e.g., T. Levi. 18:10; T. Dan. 5:12; 1 En. 25:4–6; Rev. 2:7). Paradise was also identified as the abode of the righteous dead (1 En. 70:4; 2 En. 42:3). As such it replaced Sheol/Hades, which came to be reserved for the wicked, as in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:22–26). One of the thieves crucified with Jesus asked to be remembered when Jesus came in his kingship, to which Jesus replied that the thief would that day be with him in Paradise (Luke 23:42–43). In this way it is said that Jesus is the one who makes Paradise accessible to human beings once more.²

PARADISE. Paradise is a loan-word from ancient Iranian

T. Levi. Testament of Levi (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs)

T. Dan. Testament of Dan (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs)

1 En. 1 Enoch

(*pairidaēza-*) and means a garden with a wall. The Gk. word *paradeisos* is used for the first time by Xenophon for the gardens of the Persian kings. LXX translates *gan’ēden* of Gn. 2:8 by *paradeisos*.

a. In the Old Testament

The word paradise (Heb. *pardēs*) appears in Ne. 2:8; Ec. 2:5; Ct. 4:13. RSV renders it by ‘king’s forest’ in Ne., ‘park’ in Ec. and ‘orchard’ in Ct. The actual word is thus nowhere used in the OT in an eschatological sense, which meaning developed in the later Jewish world. The following trends can be discerned. The word paradise (Aram. *pardēsā*) was used to give expression to the meaning of primeval times (German *Urzeit*) and then expanded to include fantastic speculations on the glory and bliss of those times. This was connected with the expectations of a wonderful Messianic time in the future. This coming age of glory would be identical with the garden of Eden of ancient times. The Jews believed also

² Myers, A. C. (1987). In *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (pp. 794–795). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

LXX Septuagint (Gk. version of OT)

RSV *Revised Standard Version*: NT, 1946; OT, 1952; *Common Bible*, 1973

that paradise was present in their own time, but concealed. This concealed paradise was the place to which the souls of the Patriarchs, the chosen and the righteous people, were taken. The ancient, future and present paradise were regarded as being identical.

b. In the New Testament

The word paradise (Gk. *paradeisos*) occurs in only three instances in the NT (Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:3; Rev. 2:7). The context shows that the predominating sense is that of the later development of the word. In Lk. 23:43 the word 'paradise' is used by Jesus for the place where souls go immediately after death, *cf.* the concealed paradise in later Jewish thought. The same idea is also present in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19–31).

In 2 Cor. 12:2–4 Paul wrote in the third person of his experience of being caught up into paradise where he heard unspeakable words (Gk. *arrhēta rhēmata*). In this case paradise is the 'third *HEAVEN' with its glory, perhaps the same as in Lk. 23. The only place where paradise is used in an

eschatological sense is in Rev. 2:7. The promise is made by Christ that he will give paradise as a gift to the one who overcomes. The present paradise will come in its full glory with the final consummation. The idea of a garden of God in the world to come is strongly emphasized in the last chapters of Revelation. The symbols of the tree of life, of life-giving water, and of the twelve kinds of fruit are all witnesses to the glory of the coming paradise (Rev. 22).³

Paradise in Scripture

Genesis 2:1–25

And heaven and earth and all their array were finished.² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.³ And God blessed the seventh day, and he sanctified it, because on it he rested from all his work [of creating that *there was to do*].

The Generations of Heaven and Earth

⁴ These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were created, in the day *that* Yahweh God made earth

³ Fensham, F. C. (1996). Paradise. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.,

pp. 869–870). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

and heaven—⁵ |before any plant of the field was| on earth, and *before* |any plant of the field| had sprung up, because Yahweh God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no human being to cultivate the ground, ⁶but a stream *would* rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground—⁷ when Yahweh God formed the man *of* dust from the ground, and he blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

⁸ And Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And Yahweh God caused to grow from the ground every tree *that* was pleasing to the sight and good for food. And the tree of life *was* in the midst of the garden, |along with| the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ Now a river flowed out from Eden that watered the garden, and from there it diverged and became four branches. ¹¹ The name of the first *is* the Pishon. It went around all the land of Havilah, where *there is* gold. ¹² (The gold of that land *is* good; bdellium and onyx stones *are* there.) ¹³ And the name of the second *is*

Gihon. It went around all the land of Cush. ¹⁴ And the name of the third *is* Tigris. It flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river *is* the Euphrates.

¹⁵ And Yahweh God took the man and set him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it. ¹⁶ And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, “From every tree of the garden |you may freely eat|, ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day |that you eat| from it |you shall surely die|.”

¹⁸ Then Yahweh God said, “*it is* not good *that* the man is alone. I will make for him a helper |as his counterpart|.” ¹⁹ And out of the ground Yahweh God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and he brought *each* to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called that living creature *was* its name. ²⁰ And the man |gave names| to every domesticated animal and to the birds of heaven and to all the wild animals. But for *the* man there was not found a helper |as his counterpart|. ²¹ And Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. While he slept, he took one of his ribs, and closed up |the flesh where it had been|. ²² And Yahweh God

fashioned the rib which he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ And the man said,

“[She is now] bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh; [she] shall be called ‘Woman,’ for [she was taken] from man.”

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cling to his wife, and they shall be as one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife, both of them, were naked, and they were not ashamed.

Nehemiah 2:8

⁸ Also, a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s land reserve, that he should give me timber for laying the beams for the gates of the citadel of the house and for the walls of the city, and for the house which I will enter.” And the king gave *permission* to me, according to the good hand of God on me.

Ecclesiastes 2:5

⁵ I made for myself gardens and parks, and I planted all *sorts of* fruit trees in them.

Song of Solomon 4:13

¹³ Your shoots *are* an orchard of pomegranates with [choice fruit], henna with nard;

Isaiah 51:3

³ For Yahweh will comfort Zion; he will comfort all its sites of ruins.

And he will [make] its wilderness like Eden, and its desert like the garden of Yahweh.

Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and *the* [sound] of song.

Luke 23:43

⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

2 Corinthians 12:2–4

² I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven, ³ and I know this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ that he was caught up to paradise and heard

words not to be spoken, which *it is* not permitted for a person to speak.

Revelation 2:7

⁷The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will grant to him to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.⁴

Heaven

HEAVEN [Heb *šāmayim* (שָׁמַיִם); Gk *ouranos* (οὐρανός)]. In the Bible the word “heaven” is used to describe both a physical part of the universe and the dwelling place of God. In Hebrew the word for heaven is plural; the LXX usually translates the Hebrew word by a singular noun. In the NT both the singular and plural forms occur with no difference in meaning.

A. Heaven as a Physical Reality

In the Hebrew Bible “heaven” is sometimes used as a synonym for “firmament” (Heb *rāqī‘a*) to describe the dome-shaped covering

over the earth that separated the heavenly waters above from the earthly waters beneath (Gen 1:6–8; Ps 148:4). Heaven, or the firmament, was thought to be supported by pillars (Job 26:11) and had foundations (2 Sam 22:8) and windows. When the windows of heaven were opened, the waters above the firmament fell upon the earth as rain (Gen 7:11; 8:2; Isa 24:18). Through these windows God also poured out blessings upon the earth (Mal 3:10). The birds fly across the firmament (Gen 1:20; Deut 4:17) and the sun, moon, and stars were set in the firmament (Gen 1:14–18).

Whereas the firmament referred specifically to the canopy covering the earth, heaven often had a broader meaning, referring to all that was above the earth, including the firmament. Rain, snow, hail, and thunder come from heaven (Exod 9:22–35; Isa 55:10; Josh 10:11; Rev 11:19). Heaven contained the storehouses of the winds, the snow, and the hail (Job 37:9; 38:22; Ps 135:7; Jer 10:13).

⁴ Harris, W. H., III, Ritzema, E., Brannan, R., Mangum, D., Dunham, J., Reimer, J. A., & Wierenga, M. (Eds.). (2012). *The Lexham English*

Bible (Ge 2:1–Re 2:7). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
LXX Septuagint

Heaven is also a place for signs. God placed the rainbow in the heavens as a sign to Noah of the covenant which God made with him (Gen 9:12–17). God’s power is displayed in the signs and wonders which are performed in heaven and on earth (Dan 6:27). Signs in the heavens also portend God’s judgment on the earth, particularly the eschatological judgment (Joel 3:3–4; Matt 24:30; Luke 21:11, 25; Acts 2:19; Rev 15:1).

The phrase “heaven and earth” was used to denote the entire universe, the totality of God’s creation (Gen 1:1; Deut 4:26; Ps 121:2; 146:6; Mark 13:31; Acts 17:24). Because heaven is a part of the created order, it too suffers the judgment of God. The heavens are shaken by the anger of God (2 Sam 22:8); the sun and moon will be darkened (Amos 8:9; Jer 4:23, 28; Isa 51:6; Mark 13:24–26; Rev 8:12); heaven and earth will pass away (Matt 24:35; Luke 16:17; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1). Eschatological hope envisioned a new heaven and earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1).

B. Heaven as the Dwelling Place of God

Whereas the Israelites could speak of God as dwelling on Mount Sinai (Deut 33:2; Ps 68:17), in the temple (1 Kgs 8:12–13; Ps 68:17–18; Ezek 43:7), or in Zion (Ps 74:2; Isa 8:18; Joel 4:17, 21), the supreme abode of God was in heaven. In the heavenly palace or temple is God’s throne, from which God reigns as king over heaven and earth (Isa 6:1; Ps 11:4). Heaven is God’s throne and the earth God’s footstool (Isa 66:1). From heaven, “above the circle of the earth,” God looks down upon the earth, where the people appear as grasshoppers (Isa 40:22; Ps 102:19).

To describe God as dwelling in heaven is to recognize the transcendence of God, God’s separateness from the created order. At times, some individuals within Israel wondered if the clouds of heaven shielded the earth from God; God was shut up in the heavens. Eliphaz accuses Job of thinking, “Is not God high in the heavens? See the highest stars, how lofty they are! Therefore you say, ‘What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven’ ” (Job 22:12–14; cf. Lam 3:44). The author of Isa

64:1 calls on God to “rend the heavens and come down” in order to make God’s power known.

Even the vast expanse of heaven, however, is not large enough to contain God (1 Kgs 8:27). The “God of heaven” (2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Jonah 1:9) is also the God of earth, who on occasions was described as coming down from heaven to visit the earth (Gen 11:5, 7; Exod 19:18; Isa 64:3). Moreover, even with the belief in Yahweh’s transcendence, Israel always saw God as one who was involved in the world which God had created. The whole history of God’s dealing with the people of Israel and Judah demonstrated God’s activity in the world. God dwelt not only in heaven, but also among God’s people (Exod 29:45–46; 1 Kgs 6:13; Zech 2:10–11). The NT, which also speaks of God as residing in heaven (Matt 5:16; 6:9; Mark 11:25; Rev 3:12; 4:2), likewise emphasizes the presence of God in the world, with special emphasis given to God’s dwelling in the Church, God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21–22).

Since heaven is the abode of God, heaven is also the source and locus of

salvation. The bread which fed the Israelites in the wilderness came from heaven (Exod 16:4). Blessings upon God’s people come from heaven (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13). Elijah is taken up into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:11). When the idea of life after death developed within Judaism, the location of such existence was often situated in heaven with God (*T. Ab.* 11:10; 2 Esdras 7; cf. Dan 12:2–3). The idea of heaven as the place of eternal reward for the faithful is well attested in the NT, which describes heaven as having many rooms (John 14:2), as containing the believer’s eternal house (2 Cor 5:1–10), and as being the location of the believer’s commonwealth (Phil 3:20; see also Heb 11:16; Rev 11:12).

Postexilic Jewish literature manifests an intense curiosity about the contents of heaven. Various writings describe heavenly visions or journeys of revered individuals such as Enoch, Abraham, and Baruch (*1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, *Testament of Abraham*, *3 Baruch*). The topography of heaven, the inhabitants of heaven, the places of judgment, as well as other heavenly secrets are revealed to

these persons. Many of these writings describe heaven as containing various levels, referred to as different heavens. The most popular number of heavens was seven. (Compare Paul's statement in 2 Cor 12:2 concerning the third heaven.) The various heavens contain not only the throne room of God, paradise (the intermediate reward for the righteous), and the eternal abode of the righteous, but in many cases one or more of the heavens also contain the places of punishment for the wicked.

Certain non-canonical Christian writings also contain elaborate descriptions of heaven (*The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Apocalypse of Paul*, *The Ascension of Isaiah* 6–11). In the NT book of Revelation, John of Patmos describes his vision of God seated on the heavenly throne surrounded by various members of the heavenly court (Revelation 4–5). John's description of the New Jerusalem, which comes "down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21:1–22:5), has been the source for many later popular ideas about heaven.

HEAVEN, ASCENT TO. The motif of the journey to heaven is a vitally important phenomenon of ancient Mediterranean religions. There are five figures in the Bible who, according to standard Jewish and Christian interpretation, are reported to have ascended to heaven: Enoch (Gen 5:24); Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1–12); Jesus (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9); Paul (2 Cor 12:2–4); and John (Rev 4:1). There are also four related accounts in which individuals behold the throne, or heavenly court, of Yahweh: Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (Exod 24:9–11); Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19–23); Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13); and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1, 10). Finally, there is the scene in which an otherwise unidentified "son of man" comes before the throne of God in an apocalyptic vision of Daniel (Dan 7:11–14). The notion that mortals enter into, or behold, the realm of the immortal God (or gods) undergoes various complicated developments from the earlier ANE periods into the Hellenistic period. It is closely related to a number of other topics such as

the descent or journey to the underworld of the dead (see DESCENT TO THE UNDERWORLD), the heavenly destiny of the immortal soul, the apotheosis or divinization of selected mortals (rulers, philosophers, divine men), and aspects of Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian mysticism. Sorting through this complex conceptual web and trying to understand these biblical texts with their contexts and complicated traditional development has occupied historians of ancient religions for the past 150 years (Bousset 1901; *ANRW* 23: 1333–94).

The motif of the heavenly journey can be divided into four basic types or categories, based upon the fundamental purpose or outcome of the ascent as reported in a given text. Generally speaking, the first two categories are more characteristic of the ANE or archaic period, which would include most texts of the Hebrew Bible (OT). The latter two categories are more typical of the Hellenistic period, which reflects the perspective of the NT.

- A. Ascent as an Invasion of Heaven
- B. Ascent to Receive Revelation
- C. Ascent to Immortal Heavenly Life
- D. Ascent as a Foretaste of the Heavenly World

A. Ascent as an Invasion of Heaven

In the cosmology reflected throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, mortal humankind belongs on earth, not in heaven, and at death descends below to the netherworld known as Sheol. Psalm 115 expresses this succinctly:

The heaven's are the LORD's
heavens,
but the earth he has given to
the sons of men. The dead do
not praise the LORD,
nor do any that go down into
silence.
But we will bless the LORD
from this time forth and for
evermore.

Generally speaking, just as there is no coming back from the dead, there is no idea or expectation that humans can go to heaven, a place reserved for God and his angelic attendants. This

ANRW Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase, Berlin, 1972–

ANE Ancient Near East (ern)

means that any report of a human being ascending to heaven would be seen as not only extraordinary, but often even as an intrusion or invasion of the divine realm. In an Akkadian text, Adapa, the son of Ea, attempts to ascend to heaven to obtain eternal life but is cast back down to earth (ANET, 101–3). A somewhat similar story is told of Etana, one of the legendary rulers of the Sumerian dynasty of Kish (ANET, 114–18). A direct protest against such an ascent is found in Isa 14:12–20 (compare Ezek 28:11–19). There the prideful King of Babylon, who wants to ascend to heaven and become like God, is cast down to the netherworld of worms and maggots (v 11). The ironic language of Prov 30:2–4 (compare Job 26; 38:1–42:6), though not a tale of ascent, emphasizes the contrast between the human and divine realms. A similar idea lies behind Deut 29:28 and 30:11–14. There is no need for one to ascend to heaven to learn the “secret things” which belong to God (compare Sir 3:21–

22). Lucian’s tale, *Icaromenippus*, though from the Roman imperial period, typifies this understanding of ascent to heaven as an invasion of the realm of the gods.

The accounts of Enoch and Elijah are best understood in this context. First and foremost, they are extraordinary. The normal fate, even of great heroes of the Hebrew Bible such as Abraham, Moses, and David, is death or “rest” in Sheol (Gen 25:7–9; Deut 34:6; 1 Kgs 2:10, cf Acts 2:29–34). Furthermore, both texts, particularly the one about Enoch, are ambiguous. Gen 5:24, from the P source, in lieu of recording Enoch’s death, simply says “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” The text does not say where he was taken. Though the bulk of later Jewish and Christian tradition understood this text as an ascent to heaven (OTP 1: 3–315; Tabor 1989), this was not universally the case (compare Heb 11:5, 13–16). The author might have had in mind a

ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. with suppl., ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969

ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. with suppl., ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969

P Peshier (commentary)

OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., ed. J. Charlesworth. Garden City, NY, 1983–87

journey “beyond,” to some special region on this earth (e.g., “Isles of the Blessed”), as in the cases of Gilgamesh’s Utnapishtim or Menelaus in Homer. Such might also be the case with Elijah. Though it is clear he is taken from the earthly scene in a chariot of fire that rises to heaven like a whirlwind, the author might well have had in mind his removal or “retirement” to some remote area. If so, “heaven” in this text is equivalent to “sky,” and the author does not intend to imply that Elijah joined Yahweh as an immortal in the heavenly court. This appears to be the understanding of the Chronicler, who reports that much later, Jehoram, king of Judah, receives a letter written by Elijah (2 Chr 21:12–15).

B. Ascent to Receive Revelation

This type of ascent involves a “round trip” from earth to heaven and back again, or some visionary experience of the heavenly court from which one returns to normal experience (ascent/descent). In contrast to the previous type, the journey or experience is appraised most positively. The earth, not

heaven, is still understood as the proper human place, so that the ascent remains a “visit,” though not an intrusion, into the divine realm.

The complex literary traditions surrounding the ascent of Moses on Mount Sinai, now found in Exodus 24, though not explicitly referring to a journey to heaven, are closely related to this category. Moses (or alternatively Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders), in ascending the mountain, enter the presence of God, the realm of the divine. He is given revelation in the form of heavenly tablets, then descends back to the mortal realm. Though he is not explicitly deified or enthroned, he becomes a semi-divine figure, eating and drinking in the divine presence and returning from the mountain with his face transformed like an immortal (Exod 24:11; 34:29–30). In later interpretation this was understood as full deification (see Philo, *vita Mos* 2.290–91; *virt.* 73–75; *Ezekiel the Tragedian* 668–82). The prophetic call of Isaiah is a further example of this same pattern (Isa 6:1–3). Since there is no specific reference to Isaiah being “taken up,” this is a “visionary

ascent,” though the distinction between the two types is not always clear (see 2 Cor 12:2–4). He sees “The LORD sitting on a throne, high and lifted up ...” (v 1). He is then given a message with a corresponding prophetic commission. As a mortal, he is out of place in the divine realm; he cries out “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips ... for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (v 5). The throne visions of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1, 10) should be compared here, as well as the scene before the throne of the “Ancient of Days” in Dan 7:14 where a “son of man” is given cosmic rulership over all nations. Micaiah’s vision of the heavenly court also belongs under this category (1 Kgs 22:19–23). In all these texts the ascent or vision of the heavenly throne serves as a way of claiming the highest and most direct heavenly authority for the message. Such experiences are clearly evaluated as more noteworthy than the epiphany of an angelic messenger or receipt of a prophetic “word of the LORD.”

Widengren (1950) has traced this motif of royal or prophetic

enthronement (ascent, initiation into heavenly secrets, receipt of a divine commission) into later Jewish traditions involving kingship, prophetic commissions, and the revelation of secret heavenly lore. This understanding of ascent dominates one of the oldest sections of *1 Enoch*, the Book of the Watchers (chaps. 1–36). The legendary figure Enoch is taken through the heavenly realms and shown cosmic secrets, even appearing before God’s lofty throne. The Greek version of the *Testament of Levi* (2d century B.C.E.) draws upon the ascent motif in a similar way, as does the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* (1st century C.E.) and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. In each of these texts the ascent to heaven functions as a vehicle of revelation, offering divine authority to the cosmological and eschatological lore the authors were expounding.

The closest non-Jewish, or Greek, parallel to this notion of ascent is probably Parmenides’ *prooemium*, which survives in only a few fragments (Taran 1965). He tells of being taken in a chariot through the gate leading to daylight, where he is received and

addressed by a goddess. On the whole, for Greeks in the archaic period, revelations came through epiphanies, oracles, dreams, omens, and signs of various sorts, not by being taken before the throne of Zeus. The fair number of Jewish (and Jewish-Christian) texts which make use of the ascent to heaven motif as a means of legitimating rival claims of revelation and authority is likely due to the polemics and party politics that characterized the Second Temple period. It became a characteristic way, in the Hellenistic period, of claiming “archaic” authority of the highest order, equal to a Enoch or Moses, for one’s vision of things.

C. Ascent to Immortal Heavenly Life

This type of ascent to heaven is final or “one way”: a mortal obtains immortality, or release from mortal conditions, through a permanent ascent to the heavenly realms. Broadly, there are two overlapping ideas involved here, both of which have been extensively investigated: first, that a hero, ruler, or extraordinary individual has obtained immortal heavenly existence (Farnell

1921; Guthrie 1950; Bieler 1935–36; Smith 1971; Gallagher 1982); and second, the more general idea that the souls of humankind, bound by mortal conditions, can obtain release to immortal heavenly life (Rhode 1925; Bousset 1901; Burkert 1985). The second is not merely a later democratization of the first; rather, the two exist side by side throughout the Hellenistic period. While they are distinct from one another, both are related to a fundamental shift in the perception of the proper human place. Increasingly in this period one encounters the notion that humans actually belong in heaven, with life on earth seen as either a “fall” or temporary subjection to mortal powers (Nilsson 1969: 96–185; *EncBrit* 8: 749–51).

The only candidates for such immortalization in the Hebrew Bible are Enoch and Elijah, though, as noted above, both texts are ambiguous. As early as the Maccabean period (2d century B.C.E.) Daniel speaks of the righteous dead being resurrected and “shining like the stars forever and ever,” having obtained immortality (12:3). A

similar notion is found in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the “souls of the righteous” are promised immortal life (3:1–9). Gradually, in Jewish and Christian texts of the Hellenistic period, the older idea of the dead reposing in Sheol forever is replaced with either a notion of the resurrection of the dead or the immortality of the soul or some combination of the two (Nickelsburg 1972). Both ideas involve the notion of a final ascent to heaven.

The NT reflects this Hellenistic perspective in which mortals can obtain heavenly immortality. Matthew 13:43, reflecting the language and influence of Daniel, asserts that “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Eternal life is promised to the righteous throughout the NT corpus (Mark 9:42–48; Q [Matt 10:32–33 = Luke 12:8]; Matt 25:46; Acts 13:48; John 3:16; 14:1–3; Rom 6:23; Col 3:1–4; 1 Tim 1:16; Heb 12:22–23; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 1:4; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 5:11; Jude 21; Rev 20). In most cases this involves ascent to heaven and life before the throne of God (1 Thess

4:13–18; Rev 7:9–17). According to the NT, the righteous of the OT, such as Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, are included in this promised resurrection to immortal heavenly life (Hebrews 11).

In the NT the ascent of Jesus to heaven is the paradigm for all those righteous mortals who follow. Just as he was raised from the dead, made immortal, and ascended to the Father, so will followers experience the same at his return (John 14:1–3; 1 Cor 15:20–28; Rom 8:29–30). The state of the righteous souls who have died prior to the time of the end and the resurrection and ascent to heaven is not always clear. Paul seems to prefer the metaphor of “sleep,” which parallels the Hebrew Bible notion of Sheol (1 Thess 4:13; 5:10; 1 Cor 15:18–20). But in two places he might imply that these “souls” or “spirits” depart immediately at death and ascend to the presence of Christ in heaven (Phil 1:21–24; 2 Cor 5:1–10). In Revelation the “souls of the martyrs” are pictured as under the altar, presumably in heaven, longing for their time of vindication (6:9–11).

Q Qere; “Q”-source; Qumran texts (e.g., 4QTestim)

In distinction to both of these views, the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, unique to Luke, pictures the Hadean world of the dead, which is below, not above, as a place in which rewards and punishments are already being experienced prior to the final resurrection and judgment (Luke 16:19–31). This latter text is more in keeping with other Jewish materials of the period which see the “dead” as conscious, but in the Hadean world below, awaiting the resurrection and last judgment (cf. Rev 20:11–15). There is no uniform NT view of the “state of the dead.”

Surprisingly, an actual narrative account of the ascent of Jesus to heaven occurs only in Luke (24:51, but see textual variants; Acts 1:9). It is assumed in Matthew and Mark and spoken of in John (20:17) and Paul (Rom 8:34). A similar resurrection from the dead followed by bodily ascension to heaven is prophesied for the “two witnesses” in the book of Revelation (11:7–12). They are God’s final prophets before the return of Christ and the last judgment.

The contrast between the NT and the Hebrew Bible regarding this

expectation of ascent to heaven could not be more striking. Other than the doubtful examples of Enoch and Elijah, it is not until the book of Daniel, which is perhaps the latest text in the canon of the Hebrew Bible, that one finds any reference to mortals ascending to heavenly life (some would include Isa 26:19; Job 14:14–16 is a longing, not an affirmation). The NT is fully a part of the process of Hellenization in which notions of resurrection from the dead, immortality of the soul, and ascent to heaven were the norm rather than the exception.

D. Ascent as a Foretaste of the Heavenly World

This type of ascent involves a journey or “visit” to heaven which functions as a foretaste or anticipation of a final or permanent ascent to heavenly life. Though related to the second category, ascent to receive revelation, it is fundamentally different. For example, when Isaiah is taken before God’s throne, though he receives a commission and experiences the glories of the heavenly world, there is no idea that he will return to that realm. He remains a mortal who dies and

descends to Sheol with all the other dead.

The earliest example of this notion of ascent is in the Similitudes of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 37–71), probably dating from the 1st century B.C.E. In chapter 39 Enoch relates how he was taken to heaven. The experience transforms him (39:14) and he is told that he will later ascend to heaven permanently and receive glory and immortal heavenly life (chaps. 70–71). *2 Enoch* (Slavonic) also reflects a similar pattern. Enoch's journey through the seven heavens, which lasts 60 days (chaps. 1–20), is followed by a return to earth. The experience transforms him and functions in anticipation of his final translation to heaven. Christians later took up and elaborated this understanding of ascent from such Jewish models, as seen in texts such as the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

In the NT we have the striking firsthand account of Paul's own experience of ascent to Paradise (2 Cor 12:2–4). This text provides evidence for the actual "practice" of ascent to heaven in Jewish-Christian circles during this period, in contrast

to a purely literary motif adopted to lend heavenly authority to a text. Obviously Paul's experience functions as a highly privileged foretaste of the heavenly glorification which he expected at the return of Christ (Tabor 1986).

There are definite links from the language and ideas of these Jewish texts from Second Temples times and the testimony of Paul to and the Tannaitic and Amoraic *Merkabah* (and later *Hekhalot*) traditions (Scholem 1960; Gruenwald 1980; Halperin 1980).

There are also examples of this type of ascent to heaven in non-Jewish/Christian materials. Perhaps the clearest is Cicero's report of the "Dream of Scipio Africanus" in his *Republic* (6. 9–26). The text was highly influential and functions as a kind of universal declaration of the gospel of astral immortality (Luck 1985). Scipio travels to the heavenly world above and returns with a revelation that all humans are immortal souls, trapped in mortal bodies, but potentially destined for heavenly life above. The gnostic text *Poimandres*, found in the *Corpus*

Hermeticum, also fits this category of ascent. There is also an important text in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, mistakenly called the “Mithras Liturgy” (PGM 4. 624–750). It provides the initiate who desires to ascend to heaven with an actual guide for making the journey with all its dangers and potentials. There are Jewish texts such as *Hekhalot Rabbati* which have strong parallels with such magical materials, showing that we are dealing here with an international phenomenon of late antiquity (Smith 1963). It is also likely that the rites of initiation into certain of the so-called “mystery religions,” such as that of Isis, involved such proleptic experiences of ascent to heaven (see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11, and discussion of Tabor 1986: 89–92).

It is noteworthy that Paul’s testimony in 2 Cor 12:2–4 remains our only firsthand autobiographical account of such an experience from the Second Temple period.⁵

HEAVEN. Several words are translated ‘heaven’, but the only important ones are the Heb. *šāmayim*

and the Gk. *ouranos*. The former is plural, and the latter often occurs in the plural. But, just as in Eng., there does not seem to be any great difference between ‘heaven’ and ‘the heavens’. The term is used of the physical heaven, especially in the expression ‘heaven and earth’ (Gn. 14:19; Mt. 5:18). Some suggest that the Bible writers thought of heaven in this aspect as solid, and rather like an inverted bowl (the ‘firmament’, Gn. 1:8). The sun makes his daily pilgrimage across it (Ps. 19:4–6), and there are windows through which the rain might descend (Gn. 7:11). Some Hebrews may well have held this idea, but it must not be forgotten that the men of the OT were capable of vivid imagery. It will never do to treat them as wooden literalists. The theological meaning of their language about heaven can be understood without recourse to such hypotheses.

Heaven is the abode of God, and of those closely associated with him. The Israelite is to pray, ‘Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven’ (Dt. 26:15). God is ‘the God of heaven’ (Jon. 1:9), or ‘the Lord, the

PGM *Papyri graecae magicae*, 3 vols., ed. K. Preisendanz. Leipzig, 1928–41

⁵ Tabor, J. D. (1992). Heaven, Ascent to. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, pp. 90–93). New York: Doubleday.

God of heaven' (Ezr. 1:2), or the 'Father who is in heaven' (Mt. 5:45; 7:21, *etc.*). God is not alone there, for we read of 'the host of heaven' which worships him (Ne. 9:6), and of 'the angels in heaven' (Mk. 13:32). Believers also may look forward to 'an inheritance kept in heaven' for them (1 Pet. 1:4). Heaven is thus the present abode of God and his angels, and the ultimate destination of his saints on earth.

Among many ancient peoples there was the thought of a multiplicity of heavens. It has been suggested that the NT bears witness to the rabbinic idea of seven heavens, for there are references to Paradise (Lk. 23:43), and to 'the third heaven' (2 Cor. 12:2; this was called Paradise on the rabbinic reckoning, *cf.* 2 Cor. 12:3). Jesus also is said to have passed 'through the heavens' (Heb. 4:14). These, however, are slender bases on which to erect such a structure. All the NT language is perfectly capable of being understood along the lines of heaven as the place of perfection.

Heaven comes to be used as a reverent periphrasis for God. Thus when the prodigal says 'I have sinned against heaven' (Lk. 15:18, 21), he means 'I have sinned against God'. So with Jn. 3:27, 'what is given him from heaven'. The most important example of this is Matthew's use of the expression 'the kingdom of heaven', which seems to be identical with 'the kingdom of God'.

Finally, we must notice an eschatological use of the term. In both OT and NT it is recognized that the present physical universe is not eternal, but will vanish away and be replaced by 'new heavens and a new earth' (Is. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:10–13; Rev. 21:1). We should understand such passages as indicating that the final condition of things will be such as fully expresses the will of God.⁶

HEAVEN (Heb. *šāmayim*; Gk. *ouranós*).

According to the threefold Semitic worldview, heaven was the firmament, a tentlike vault (*cf.* Isa. 40:22; Ps. 104:2) supported by pillars

⁶ Morris, L. L. (1996). Heaven. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p.

457). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

(Job 26:11) and separating the subterranean waters from those above (Gen. 1:6–8). From this canopy were suspended the planets and stars (vv. 14–17), and through its windows were dispensed various forms of precipitation (e.g., Gen. 7:11; Josh. 10:11; cf. Job. 38:22, 29). At times the term simply denotes the sky (e.g., Ps. 147:8). As in Akkadian, the expression “heaven and earth” refers to everything that exists, the universe in its totality (e.g., Gen. 1:1; Matt. 5:18; Acts 7:24). Although later Judaism envisioned as many as seven strata of heaven (e.g., Test. Levi 2:7–3:9; Isa. 6:13; 7:13ff.; cf. 2 Cor. 12:2), the plural form of the Hebrew term as well as the occasional use of the Greek plural (e.g., Matt. 3:16; 24:29; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 4:10) and the Hebrew expression “heaven of heavens” (e.g., Deut. 10:14; Neh. 9:6; cf. 1 Kgs. 8:27 par. 2 Chr. 6:18; Ps. 148:4; RSV “highest heaven”) represent merely a superlative or intensified application of the name.

Heaven is the dwelling place of God (e.g., Jonah 1:9; Matt. 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9), the site of his throne (Ps. 11:4; Isa. 66:1) from which he looks

down upon human affairs (Ps. 14:2; 33:13) and issues his ordinances (Deut. 4:36; Neh. 9:13; cf. Ps. 2:4). The Israelite tabernacle and temple were held to be patterned after this divine abode (Heb. 8:5; 9:24). God is accompanied in heaven by his angels, who execute his commands (Gen. 21:17; 22:11; Matt. 18:10), and here the heavenly tribunal holds forth (1 Kgs. 22:19–22; Job 1:6ff.; 2:1ff.; Zech. 3:1–2).

At the incarnation Jesus descended from heaven to earth (John 3:13; cf. 1:2), and after completing his ministry of redemption he returned there (Acts 1:11), to return at the end of time (Matt. 24:30; 1 Thess. 1:10).

The concept of heaven as a place of reward for the faithful is rare in the Old Testament (Elijah, 2 Kgs. 2:11; cf. Gen. 5:24; Ps. 73:24). In Christian interpretation it becomes the believer’s inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4), an abode provided by God (2 Cor. 5:1–5; cf. John 14:2; Phil. 3:20) as a reward for faithful service (Matt. 5:12; 6:20; cf. Col. 1:5).

Heaven itself is to experience the turmoil of the final days (e.g., Hag. 2:6; Mark 13:31; Rev. 12:7–12), giving way to the creation of a new order, a “new heaven and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

As Jewish reverence for the divine name increased, “heaven” was employed occasionally as a substitute (Dan. 4:23 [MT 20]; Mark 11:30; Luke 15:18, 21; John 3:27). This may account for Matthew’s use of the expression “kingdom of heaven” (e.g., Matt. 3:2) as the equivalent of the “kingdom of God” in Mark and Luke.⁷

Heaven in scripture

The Creation

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth—

Genesis 1:14–20

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the vaulted dome of heaven [to separate day from night], and let them be as signs and for appointed times, and for days and years, ¹⁵and they shall be as lights in the vaulted

dome of heaven to give light on the earth.” And *it was so*. ¹⁶And God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the smaller light to rule the night, and the stars. ¹⁷And God placed them in the vaulted dome of heaven to give light on the earth ¹⁸and to rule over the day and over the night, and to [separate light from darkness]. And God saw that *it was good*. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters swarm *with* swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly over the earth across the face of the vaulted dome of heaven.

Deuteronomy 10:14

¹⁴Look! For to Yahweh your God [belong] heaven and the [highest heavens], the earth and all that *is* in it.

Deuteronomy 26:15

¹⁵Look down from the dwelling place of your holiness, from heaven, and bless your people Israel, and the land that you have given to us, as you swore to our ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey.’

2 Samuel 22:7–8

MT Masoretic Text

⁷ Myers, A. C. (1987). In *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (p. 472). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁷In my distress I called *upon*
Yahweh, and to my God I
called.

He heard my voice from his
temple,
and my cry for help *was* to his
ears.

⁸The earth heaved and shook,
the foundations of heaven
trembled and heaved
because [he was angry].

1 Kings 8:27–30

²⁷For will God really dwell on the
earth? Behold, the heavens and the
heaven of heavens could not contain
you! [How could] this house that I
have built? ²⁸You must regard the
prayer of your servant and his plea! O
Yahweh my God, listen to the
pleading and to the prayer that your
servant *is* praying before you this day,
²⁹so that your eyes *will* be open to this
house night and day, to the place
which you said, ‘My name will be
there,’ to hear the prayer that your
servant prays toward this place. ³⁰You
must listen to the plea of your servant
and your people Israel which they
pray *toward* this place; and you must
hear from the place where you live,

from heaven you must hear and you
must forgive.

Nehemiah 9:6

⁶“You alone are Yahweh. You
alone have made the heavens, the
heavens of the heavens, and all of
their army, the earth and all that is in
it, the waters and all that is in them.
You give life to all of them, and the
army of the heavens worship you.

Psalms 148:4

⁴Praise him, [highest heavens],
[and waters above the
heavens.

Isaiah 65:17

New Creation

¹⁷For look! I *am* about to create
new heavens and a new
earth,
and the former things shall
not be remembered,
and they shall not [come to
mind].

Isaiah 66:1

Proper Worship

66 Thus says Yahweh:

“Heaven *is* my throne,
and the earth *is* the
footstool for my feet.

Where *is* this house that you
would build for me?
And where *is* this resting
place for me?

Isaiah 66:22

²²“For just as the new heavens and earth that I *am* about to make shall stand before me,” [declares] Yahweh, “so shall your descendants and your name stand.

Matthew 3:16–17

¹⁶Now *after he* was baptized, Jesus immediately went up from the water, and behold, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon him. ¹⁷And behold, *there was* a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 6:9–10

⁹Therefore you pray in this way:

“Our Father who is in heaven,
may your name be treated
as holy.

¹⁰May your kingdom come,
may your will be done
on earth as *it is* in heaven.

Matthew 18:8–10

⁸And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw *it* from

you! It is better for you to enter into life crippled or lame than, having two hands or two feet, to be thrown into the eternal fire! ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw *it* from you! It is better for you to enter into life one-eyed than, having two eyes, to be thrown into fiery hell!

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

¹⁰“See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven constantly see the face of my Father *who is* in heaven.

Luke 15:18

¹⁸I will set out *and* go to my father and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and [in your sight]!’

John 14:1–3

Jesus’ Farewell Discourse

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places; but if not, I would have told you, because I am going away to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive

you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.

2 Corinthians 5:1–2

Absent from the Body and at Home with the Lord

S For we know that if our earthly house, the tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For indeed, in this *house* we groan, *because we* desire to put on our dwelling from heaven,

2 Corinthians 12:2–4

²I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven, ³and I know this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—⁴that he was caught up to paradise and heard words not to be spoken, which *it is* not permitted for a person to speak.

Ephesians 6:12

¹²because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Philippians 3:20–21

²⁰For our commonwealth exists in heaven, from which also we eagerly await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our humble body *to be* conformed to his glorious body, in accordance with the power that enables him even to subject all *things* to himself.

1 Peter 1:4

⁴into an inheritance imperishable and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for you

2 Peter 3:7–13

⁷But by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people.

⁸Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your *notice*, that one day with the Lord *is* like a thousand years, and a thousand years *is* like one day. ⁹The Lord is not delaying the promise, as some consider slowness, but is being patient toward you, *because he* does not want any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will disappear with a rushing noise, and

the celestial bodies will be destroyed by being burned up, and the earth and the deeds *done* on it will be disclosed.

¹¹ *Because* all these things are being destroyed in this way, what sort of *people* must you be in holy behavior and godliness, ¹² *while* waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed *by* being burned up and the celestial bodies will melt *as they* are consumed by heat! ¹³ But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness resides.

Revelation 21:1–4

The New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem

21 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea did not exist *any* longer. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“Behold, the dwelling of God is with humanity,
and he will take up
residence with them,

and they will be his people
and God himself will be
with them.

⁴ And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
and death will not exist *any* longer,
[and mourning or wailing or pain will not exist *any* longer.
The former *things* have passed away.”

Revelation 21:27–22:5

²⁷ And every unclean thing and one who practices detestable things and falsehood will never enter into it, except those who are written in the book of life of the Lamb.

Paradise Restored

22 And he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² in the middle of its street, and [on both sides of the river] *is* the tree of life, producing twelve fruits—yielding its fruit according to every month—and the leaves of the tree *are* for the healing of the nations. ³ And there will not be any curse *any* longer, and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his slaves

will serve him, ⁴ and they will see his face, and his name *will be* on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will not exist *any* longer, and they will not have need of the light of a lamp and the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give light to them, and they will reign [forever and ever]. ⁸

Heaven

Church Teaching

Catechism CCC 1023–1026, 2794–2796, 325–326, 541, 567, 659–667, 763, 1042–1050, 2802, 32, 198, 212, 216, 269, 279, 287, 290, 440, 544, 553, 577, 769, 778, 865, 954–959, 962, 1001, 1053, 1331, 1355, 1419, 1579, 1618–1619, 1716, 1724–1725, 1729, 1817–1818, 1821, 1964, 2053, 2544, 2547, 2556, 2826, 2837; Glossary “Heaven”; Index “Heaven”

Denzinger DS 1304–1306, 1000–1001, 895*

Roman Catechism RC 4.9.18–19, RC 1.10.22–23, 2.16, 7.5, 13, 10.25, RC 3.2.14

Vatican II LG 48–51, GS 39

Ecclesiastical Writers

Apostolic Fathers Diog 5.9

St. Irenaeus Adv. Haer. 5.7.2, 32.1

St. Cyprian De orat. dom. 16

St. Cyril of Jerusalem Cyr. Hier., Cat. Lect. 23.11, 18.29

St. Jerome Adv. Jov. 2.18–34

St. John Chrysostom Hom. Heb. 16.6–8, Theod. laps. 1.11

St. Augustine De serm. Dom. in mont. 2.5.17–18, Conf. 12.2, De civ. Dei 12.13.1, 22.29, Tract. in ev. Joan. 67.2, Augustine, Serm. (Ben.) 137.1.1, Augustine, Serm. (Ben.) 57.7.7

St. John Cassian Collat. 1.9.20

St. John Damascene De Fide Orth. 2.6

St. Bonaventure Brev. 7.7

St. Thomas Aquinas STh., I q.12 a.3–a.6, q.68 a.4, Supplementum q.92–q.93, q.96 a.1

See also: Beatific Vision; Eternal Life; Beatitude; Paradise

Catechism of the Catholic Church

⁸ Harris, W. H., III, Ritzema, E., Brannan, R., Mangum, D., Dunham, J., Reimer, J. A., & Wierenga, M. (Eds.). (2012). *The Lexham English*

Bible (Ge 1:1–Re 22:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

HEAVEN: Eternal life with God; communion of life and love with the Trinity and all the blessed. Heaven is the state of supreme and definitive happiness, the goal of the deepest longings of humanity (1023).

II. HEAVEN

1023 Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they “see him as he is,” face to face.⁵⁹⁸ (954)

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints ... and other faithful who died after receiving Christ’s holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, ... or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death, ...) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general

judgment—and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven—have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.⁵⁹⁹

1024 This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity—this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed—is called “heaven.” Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness. (260, 326; 2794, 1718)

1025 To live in heaven is “to be with Christ.” The elect live “in Christ,”⁶⁰⁰ but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name.⁶⁰¹ (1011)

⁵⁹⁸ 1 Jn 3:2; cf. 1 Cor 13:12; Rev 22:4.

⁵⁹⁹ Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (1336): DS 1000; cf. LG 49.

⁶⁰⁰ Phil 1:23; cf. Jn 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Rev 2:17.

For life is to be with Christ;
where Christ is, there is life,
there is the kingdom.⁶⁰²

1026 By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has “opened” heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ. (793)

1027 This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”⁶⁰³ (959, 1720)

1028 Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man’s

immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory “the beatific vision”: (1722, 163)

How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ your Lord and God, ... to delight in the joy of immortality in the Kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God’s friends.⁶⁰⁴

1029 In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God’s will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him “they shall reign for ever and ever.”⁶⁰⁵ (956; 668)⁹

2794 This biblical expression does not mean a place (“space”), but a way of being; it does not mean that God is distant, but majestic. Our Father is not “elsewhere”: he transcends everything we can conceive of his holiness. It is precisely because he is

⁶⁰² St. Ambrose, *In Luc.*, 10, 121: PL 15, 1834A.

⁶⁰³ 1 Cor 2:9.

⁶⁰⁴ St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 58, 10, 1: CSEL 3/2, 665.

⁶⁰⁵ *Rev* 22:5; cf. *Mt* 25:21, 23.

⁹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., pp. 267–268). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

thrice-holy that he is so close to the humble and contrite heart. (326)

“Our Father who art in heaven” is rightly understood to mean that God is in the hearts of the just, as in his holy temple. At the same time, it means that those who pray should desire the one they invoke to dwell in them.⁵⁴

“Heaven” could also be those who bear the image of the heavenly world, and in whom God dwells and tarries.⁵⁵

2795 The symbol of the heavens refers us back to the mystery of the covenant we are living when we pray to our Father. He is in heaven, his dwelling place; the Father’s house is our homeland. Sin has exiled us from the land of the covenant,⁵⁶ but conversion of heart enables us to return to the Father, to heaven.⁵⁷ In Christ, then, heaven and earth are reconciled,⁵⁸ for the Son alone

“descended from heaven” and causes us to ascend there with him, by his Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension.⁵⁹ (1024)

2796 When the Church prays “our Father who art in heaven,” she is professing that we are the People of God, already seated “with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” and “hidden with Christ in God;”⁶⁰ yet at the same time, “here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling.”⁶¹ (1003)

[Christians] are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their lives on earth, but are citizens of heaven.⁶²¹⁰

659 “So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”⁵³² Christ’s body was glorified at the moment of his Resurrection, as proved by the new

⁵⁴ St. Augustine, *De serm. Dom. in monte* 2, 5, 18: PL 34, 1277.

⁵⁵ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. myst.* 5:11: PG 33, 1117.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Gen* 3.

⁵⁷ *Jer* 3:19–4:1a; *Lk* 15:18, 21.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Isa* 45:8; *Ps* 85:12.

⁵⁹ *Jn* 3:13; 12:32; 14:2–3; 16:28; 20:17; *Eph* 4:9–10; *Heb* 1:3; 2:13.

⁶⁰ *Eph* 2:6; *Col* 3:3.

⁶¹ 2 *Cor* 5:2; cf. *Phil* 3:20; *Heb* 13:14.

⁶² *Ad Diognetum* 5: PG 2, 1173.

¹⁰ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., pp. 670–671). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

⁵³² *Mk* 16:19.

and supernatural properties it subsequently and permanently enjoys.⁵³³ But during the forty days when he eats and drinks familiarly with his disciples and teaches them about the kingdom, his glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity.⁵³⁴ Jesus' final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God's right hand.⁵³⁵ Only in a wholly exceptional and unique way would Jesus show himself to Paul "as to one untimely born," in a last apparition that established him as an apostle.⁵³⁶ (645; 66; 697; 642)

660 The veiled character of the glory of the Risen One during this time is intimated in his mysterious words to Mary Magdalene: "I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."⁵³⁷

This indicates a difference in manifestation between the glory of the risen Christ and that of the Christ exalted to the Father's right hand, a transition marked by the historical and transcendent event of the Ascension.

661 This final stage stays closely linked to the first, that is, to his descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Only the one who "came from the Father" can return to the Father: Christ Jesus.⁵³⁸ "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man."⁵³⁹ Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the "Father's house," to God's life and happiness.⁵⁴⁰ Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us.⁵⁴¹ (461; 792)

662 "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to

⁵³³ Cf. *Lk* 24:31; *Jn* 20:19, 26.

⁵³⁴ Cf. *Acts* 1:3; 10:41; *Mk* 16:12; *Lk* 24:15; *Jn* 20:14–15; 21:4.

⁵³⁵ Cf. *Acts* 1:9; 2:33; 7:56; *Lk* 9:34–35; 24:51; *Ex* 13:22; *Mk* 16:19; *Pss* 110:1.

⁵³⁶ *1 Cor* 15:8; cf. 9:1; *Gal* 1:16.

⁵³⁷ *Jn* 20:17.

⁵³⁸ Cf. *Jn* 16:28.

⁵³⁹ *Jn* 3:13; cf. *Eph* 4:8–10.

⁵⁴⁰ *Jn* 14:2.

⁵⁴¹ *Roman Missal*, Preface of the Ascension: "sed ut illuc confideremus, sua membra, nos subsequi quo ipse, caput nostrum principiumque, praecessit."

myself.”⁵⁴² The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, “entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands ... but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”⁵⁴³ There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he “always lives to make intercession” for “those who draw near to God through him.”⁵⁴⁴ As “high priest of the good things to come” he is the center and the principal actor of the liturgy that honors the Father in heaven.⁵⁴⁵ (1545; 1137)

663 Henceforth Christ is *seated at the right hand of the Father*: “By ‘the Father’s right hand’ we understand the glory and honor of divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified.”⁵⁴⁶ (648)

⁵⁴² Jn 12:32.

⁵⁴³ Heb 9:24.

⁵⁴⁴ Heb 7:25.

⁵⁴⁵ Heb 9:11; cf. Rev 4:6–11.

664 Being seated at the Father’s right hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah’s kingdom, the fulfillment of the prophet Daniel’s vision concerning the Son of man: “To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”⁵⁴⁷ After this event the apostles became witnesses of the “kingdom [that] will have no end.”⁵⁴⁸ (541)

IN BRIEF

- 665** Christ’s ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).
- 666** Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the

⁵⁴⁶ St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.*, 4, 2: PG 94, 1104C.

⁵⁴⁷ Dan 7:14.

⁵⁴⁸ Nicene Creed.

Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.

667 Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit.¹¹

¹¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., pp. 172–174). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.