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Heaven: In the Bible, the Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls



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Acworth, Georgia
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Christian Theology and History Adult Sunday School Courses

Robert Jones

www.sundayschoolcourses.com

I've always been a strong believer in adult Sunday School classes and Bible studies in our churches. And many churches have quality, Biblically-based adult-focused programs. Unfortunately, just as many churches tend to downplay adult education, focusing on children's education (not a bad thing in itself), or focusing on the needs of the "unchurched", where topics such as church history and theology are often purposely ignored.

Yet there is a strong need for adult education focused on both the Bible and the basic tenets and history of the Faith. Among the reasons:

- Not all adults come from a strong childhood background in the church – adult Sunday School classes/Bible studies may be their first serious introduction to what Christianity is all about
- Christianity (and especially Evangelical Christianity) is under constant attack from the media and popular culture (movies, music, etc.). We need to give fellow Christians the tools to defend the Faith against attack (or to provide a "ready defense" as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15)
- Even adult Christians that have a strong Biblical background often know little about the origins and history of their Faith

To better meet the needs of adult Christians (both those mature in their Faith, and those just starting out in the "School of Christ"), I've written a series of courses that focus on the history of the Christian Church (including the Jewish roots), as well as the development of doctrine in the Church. The topics represented in these courses are intended to both further the participant's walk in the Faith, as well as serve as a starting point for Christian apologetics.

While the primary purpose of these courses is for use in churches, they also may be useful for High School and College projects, especially the courses focused primarily on historical aspects.

One note: these courses are primarily written from an Evangelical Protestant viewpoint (I come from a Reformed Church background), but I hope I've given ample time to other points of view throughout the various courses.

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Introduction

This course examines early Jewish and Christian thought on the topic of heaven. In the Old Testament, heaven is a place where God and the angels reside – but not (seemingly) a place where the righteous go when they die. By the time of the New Testament, heaven is starting to assume its modern connotation as a paradise where the righteous go to be with God when they die. This view becomes even more prominent in apocryphal writings in the early church.

In addition to the Bible, I've also included references in this study to:

- The **Dead Sea Scrolls**, a set of 800 Jewish documents (600 never before seen) found in the Judean desert near Qumran from 1947-1956. The Scrolls may have been the library of the Jewish sect known as the Essenes.
- The **Apocrypha** – the set of 12-16 books, most of which appeared in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, but not in Hebrew versions of the Old Testament. Today, they appear in some Bibles (Roman Catholic, NRSV, Orthodox, etc.) but not all (NIV, KJV, etc.).
- **1 Enoch** - *1 Enoch* is a 1st or 2nd century B.C. Jewish work whose relative importance has been raised in recent years because at least 20 fragmentary copies of *1 Enoch* have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. *1 Enoch* does *not* appear in the Septuagint, and is not generally considered to be part of the collection of books known as the Apocrypha. However, it does hold a unique position among Inter-Testamental Jewish works – it is the only Inter-Testamental Jewish writing quoted in the New Testament (Jude 14-15).
- **Christian Apocrypha** – There were many apocryphal Acts, Gospels, and Apocalypses written in the first three centuries A.D. Some people refer to these as the *Christian Apocrypha* – non-Gnostic works that didn't make the New Testament canon. And while we shouldn't view them as divinely inspired or authoritative, they do help us trace the development of Christian thought on the subject of heaven. I refer to three of them in this course – the *Revelation of Peter*, *Apocalypse of Paul* and *the Revelation of John*.

While no Divine inspiration is claimed for the non-Biblical sources quoted herein, they *are* useful to trace the development of Jewish and early Christian thought on the topic of heaven.

One final introductory note: In this course, I'm primarily interested in focusing on the *characteristics* of heaven. So I've ignored the many generic references (particularly in the Old Testament) to things such as "the heavens opened and poured out rain" or "they turned their eyes to heaven and prayed".

Quiz on Heaven

1. T/F In the Pentateuch, heaven is described as a place that the righteous go after they die
2. T/F There are no visions of heaven in the Old Testament
3. T/F The only two Old Testament figures that ascend to heaven without dying are Elijah and Moses
4. Two people that have a vision of heaven in the New Testament are Paul and John
5. T/F There is no concept of a "Son of Man" figure being in heaven in the Old Testament
6. T/F *1 Enoch* was written by Enoch in 1st century B.C.
7. T/F The only place in the Bible that discusses seraphs is Revelation
8. T/F Revelation describes a war in heaven between Michael and Satan

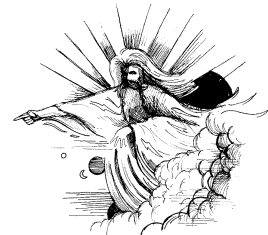
9. T/F Protestants typically believe that the fact that Peter received the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” means that the Church receives its authority from Peter
10. T/F There are more references to heaven in Genesis than in any other book of the Bible
11. T/F The New Testament teaches that heaven will always exist as it exists today
12. T/F Revelation teaches that the new Jerusalem will have a magnificent Temple from which to worship God
13. T/F Peter decides to preach to the Gentiles because of a vision from heaven
14. T/F The cherubim placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden are cuddly children

Heaven in the Old Testament


Historical books/Pentateuch

In the earliest parts of the Old Testament, including the Pentateuch, heaven is presented as a place where God and his angels reside, but not as a place where the righteous go after they die. (In most of the Old Testament era, it was believed that humans receive their reward or punishment for their behavior in *this* life – hence, the skepticism of Job’s “friends” when he tells them that he’s done nothing wrong). Some other notes on the earliest writings on heaven:

- God created heaven
- God resides in heaven
- God can send angels out from heaven to communicate with and interact with humans
- God can speak from heaven to humans (Moses), and send down fire from heaven
- Heaven is “above”, earth “below”
- God sits on a throne in heaven (although we don’t get much of a description of the throne or environs)
- When humans decide that they’ll try to build a tower to heaven, God strikes down their efforts – thus, humans can only enter heaven as part of God’s will, not their own
- Humans can have dreams or visions about heaven



Reference	Notes
Genesis 1:1, 2:4, Exodus 20:11, 31:17, Genesis 14:19, Genesis 14:22, 2 Kings 19:15, 1 Chronicles 16:26, 2 Chronicles 2:12	God created heaven
Genesis 11:4-9	Tower of Babel
Genesis 21:17, 22:11, 22:15	“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven...”

Reference	Notes
Genesis 28:12	<p>"He [Jacob] had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven"</p> 
Exodus 16:14	Bread from heaven
Exodus 20:22	"You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you [Moses] from heaven..."
Deuteronomy 4:36	"From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you..."
Deuteronomy 4:39, 26:15, Judges 2:11	Heaven is "above", earth "below"
1 Kings 8:30, 8:43, 8:49, 2 Chronicles 6:21, 6:30, 6:33, 6:39, 30:27	God's dwelling place
1 Kings 22:19, 2 Chronicles 18:18	Throne in heaven
Genesis 19:24, 2 Kings 1:10, 1:12, 1:14, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1	Fire from heaven
1 Chronicles 29:11	"...everything in heaven and earth is yours..."
2 Kings 2:11-12	Ascension of Elijah
Genesis 5:24 (see also Hebrews 11:5)	"Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away..."

In the introduction to this section I said that in the historical/Pentateuch books of the Bible, heaven is not positioned as a place that the righteous go after they die. However, we *do* have two instances in the text where humans enter heaven, although both are still alive - Elijah and Enoch.

In the case of Enoch, the Old Testament is actually ambiguous as to whether Enoch was alive or dead when he was taken to heaven:

"When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." (Genesis 5:21-24)

However, the New Testament (and later Jewish thought – see *1 Enoch*) views that Enoch indeed was taken to heaven while still alive:

“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away...” (Hebrews 11:5)

In the case of Elijah, one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, his ascension to heaven is presented in a rather abrupt fashion. Elisha and Elijah are walking down the road, and sudden, Elijah is taken up!

“As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart.” (2 Kings 2:11-12)



So, why are these two singled out? Why Elijah, say, and not Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel? One can only speculate, but it is possible that Elijah was taken up because he would later return in the form of John the Baptist (thus, in a literal reading of Christ’s comments in Matthew 11:14, there is no hint of reincarnation). It is also possible that Enoch and Elijah are the “two witnesses” mentioned in Revelation – and that they are protected from death until the “end times”.

John Calvin argues that in the case of Enoch, “this translation was a proof of the Divine love towards Enoch, by connecting it immediately with his pious and upright life”. However, there have been many others since Enoch that have lived “pious and upright lives”, but they weren’t whisked away to heaven!

“He must be shamelessly contentious, who will not acknowledge that something extraordinary is here pointed out. All are, indeed, taken out of the world by death; but Moses plainly declares that Enoch was taken out of the world by an unusual mode, and was received by the Lord in a miraculous manner...Enoch, in the middle period of life, suddenly, and in an unexampled method, vanished from the sight of men, because the Lord took him away, as we read was also done with respect to Elijah. Since, in the translation of Enoch, an example of immortality was exhibited; there is no doubt that God designed to elevate the minds of his saints with certain faith before their death; and to mitigate, by this consolation, the dread which they might entertain of death, seeing they would know that a better life was elsewhere laid up for them.

... there was, in the translation of Enoch, an instruction for all the godly, that they should not keep their hope confined within the boundaries of this mortal life. For Moses shows that this translation was a proof of the Divine love towards Enoch, by connecting it immediately with his pious and upright life. Nevertheless, to be deprived of life is not in itself desirable. It follows, therefore, that he was taken to a better abode; and that even when he was a sojourner in the world, he was received into a heavenly country; as the Apostle, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, (Hebrews 11:5) plainly teaches.” (*Commentary on Genesis*, John Calvin)

The Psalms and Job

Most references to heaven in the Psalms and Job are made in passing, and are a subset of the information seen in the historical books/Pentateuch.

Reference	Notes
Job 37:3	Lightning from heaven

Reference	Notes
Psalms 18:13	"The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded..."
Psalms 76:8	"From heaven you pronounced judgment..."
Psalms 78:24, 105:40	Manna from heaven
Psalms 103:19, 123:1	"The LORD has established his throne in heaven..."
Psalms 33:6, 115:15, 121:2, 124:8, 134:3, 146:6	God made heaven

The Prophets

In the Old Testament writing of the prophets, which include some of the last books written for the Old Testament (Daniel, Malachi, Zechariah), we start to see glimpses of the theology of heaven and the descriptions of heaven that would later flower in the late inter-Testamental period, including discussion of issues such as:

- It is possible to fall from heaven (Satan?)
- Detailed descriptions of God's heavenly attendants
- An introduction to a "Son of Man" figure in heaven
- A description of God on his throne
- The concept of atonement and forgiveness of sins through the intercession of a heavenly being
- The concept of "open books" in heaven is introduced

Reference	Notes
Nehemiah 9:6	"...the multitudes of heaven worship you..."
Nehemiah 9:6	God made heaven
Nehemiah 9:15	Bread from heaven
Isaiah 14:12, Ezekiel 28:12-19	It is possible to fall from heaven (Satan?)
Isaiah 66:1	Throne in heaven
Jeremiah 33:25	"...fixed laws of heaven and earth..."
Daniel 4:31	"...a voice came from heaven..."
Daniel 4:37	God is the "King of Heaven"
Daniel 7:2, 8:8, 11:4, Zechariah 2:6	"four winds of heaven"
Daniel 7:9-10	Ancient of Days
Daniel 7:13-14	Son of Man in heaven
Zechariah 6:5-7	Four spirits of heaven
Malachi 3:10	Floodgates of Heaven
Isaiah 6:1-7	God on his throne; seraphs w/ hot coals; atonement for sin
Ezekiel 1	Wheels within wheels
Ezekiel 28:12-19	Guardian cherub cast out from heaven

Isaiah 6:1-7 describes heavenly beings named seraphs (mentioned nowhere else in the Bible), and introduces the concept of heavenly atonement for sin.

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:1-7)

Perhaps the most vibrant description of heaven and heavenly beings in the Old Testament is in the first two chapters of Ezekiel. In the first chapter, we're introduced to the "four living creatures" (compare to Revelation 4:6-8):

"I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved." (Ezekiel 1:4-9)

Accompanying the four living creatures are "wheels in wheels":

"As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around."

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." (Ezekiel 1:15-21)



We are also given a description of God on his throne in the first chapter of Ezekiel:

“Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.” (Ezekiel 1:25-28)

In Daniel 7 (perhaps the last section of the Old Testament to be written), we get a detailed description of God on his throne, the multitudes that attend him, and the “books [that] were opened”. These are all themes that would be enlarged upon in New Testament writings, such as Revelation 4 and 5.

“As I looked,
“thrones were set in place,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.
A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.
Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
The court was seated,
and the books were opened.” (Daniel 7:9-10)

In the same chapter of Daniel, we’re introduced to another heavenly figure – “one like a son of man”. Later Christian theology would associate this figure with Christ.

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

In Zechariah, we get a description of yet more types of heavenly beings – the “four spirits” of heaven, associated with four different colored horses. Compare to Revelation 6:1-7:

“The angel answered me, “These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south.”

When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, “Go throughout the earth!” So they went throughout the earth.” (Zechariah 6: 5-7)

So, the Old Testament provides interesting glimpses into what heaven looks like, and activities therein, but it still doesn’t appear to be positioned as a place that believers go after they die. Old Testament belief appears to have been that everyone went to the shadowy place named *sheol* (“abode of the dead”) after they died – good or evil. *Sheol* seems to have different meanings in different contexts in

the Old Testament (sometimes used as a metaphor, sometimes referring to a place, etc. – see below). But Psalms 139:8 says that God is still with people in Sheol.

Reference	Notes
Job 30:23	"place appointed for all the living."
Psa 88:3-6	"those who go down to the pit"
Ezek 26:20	"dwell in the earth below"
Psa 30:9, Job 17:16	Place of dust
Job 10:21	"place of no return"
Psa 88:10-12	"land of oblivion"
Eccl 9:10	No knowledge or wisdom in the grave
Psa 31:17, 94:17	Silence in death
Psa 139:8	God is still with people in Sheol
Psa 49:15	God can raise people from the grave

Heaven as a place for the righteous to go after they die to be with God in eternity is a concept that grew in the Inter-Testamental period, and in the New Testament.

The Inter-Testamental writings

The inter-Testamental period can be defined as the time between the end of the Old Testament (c. 430 B.C.), and the time of Jesus (1st century A.D.) The development of certain theological viewpoints in the Inter-Testamental period that would later flourish under Christianity, such as resurrection of the dead, belief in the devil, demons, and hell, a focus on the end times, belief in a divine Messiah, and a highly developed “angel-ology” occurred in this time, in documents such as the Apocrypha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and *1 Enoch*.

Is there a similar development in these inter-Testamental writings in the theology of heaven? Well examine that question next.

Heaven in the Apocrypha

Angels from heaven intervening in human affairs

An important theme that runs through several of the Maccabees is that God will send help from heaven to protect his faithful. This is explicitly outlined in 2nd Maccabees:

“For he who has his dwelling in heaven watches over that place [the Temple treasury] himself and brings it aid, and he strikes and destroys those who come to do it injury. This was the outcome of the episode of Heliodorus and the protection of the treasury.” (2 Maccabees 3:39-40, NRSV)

Here are three examples of divine intervention from heaven in the Maccabees, the first two in Judea, the third in Egypt:

“He said that he had come with the king’s authority to seize the private funds in the treasury. The people indignantly protested his words, considering it outrageous that those who had committed deposits to the

sacred treasury should be deprived of them, and did all that they could to prevent it. But, uttering threats, Apollonius went on to the temple. While the priests together with women and children were imploring God in the temple to shield the holy place that was being treated so contemptuously, and while Apollonius was going up with his armed forces to seize the money, **angels on horseback with lightning flashing from their weapons appeared from heaven, instilling in them great fear and trembling.** Then Apollonius fell down half dead in the temple area that was open to all, stretched out his hands toward heaven, and with tears begged the Hebrews to pray for him and propitiate the wrath of the heavenly army.” (4 Maccabees 6-11, NRSV, emphasis added)

“When the battle became fierce, **there appeared to the enemy from heaven five resplendent men on horses with golden bridles, and they were leading the Jews.** Two of them took [Judas] Maccabeus between them, and shielding him with their own armor and weapons, they kept him from being wounded. They showered arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy, so that, confused and blinded, they were thrown into disorder and cut to pieces. Twenty thousand five hundred were slaughtered, besides six hundred cavalry.” (2 Maccabees 10:29-31, NRSV, emphasis added)

“And when the Jews observed this they raised great cries to heaven so that even the nearby valleys resounded with them and brought an uncontrollable terror upon the army. Then the most glorious, almighty, and true **God revealed his holy face and opened the heavenly gates, from which two glorious angels of fearful aspect descended, visible to all but the Jews.** They opposed the forces of the enemy and filled them with confusion and terror, binding them with immovable shackles. Even the king began to shudder bodily, and he forgot his sullen insolence. The animals [drunken elephants!] turned back upon the armed forces following them and began trampling and destroying them.” (3 Maccabees 6:17-21, NRSV, emphasis added)

Heaven as a place for the righteous

Even fairly late in the Inter-Testamental period (1st or 2nd century B.C.), there still seemed to be the attitude that heaven was a place for God and his heavenly attendants – not a place for the saved righteous:

“For your dwelling is the heaven of heavens, unapproachable by human beings.” (3 Maccabees 2:15)

However, in 2 Esdras (which describes a vision of Ezra), we finally (parts of 2 Esdras were probably written in 1st century A.D.) see a clear harbinger of the later Christian theology of heaven as a paradise for the righteous – and hell as an abode for the sinful.

“The pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be disclosed, and **opposite it the paradise of delight.** Then the Most High will say to the nations that have been raised from the dead, ‘Look now, and understand whom you have denied, whom you have not served, whose commandments you have despised. **Look on this side and on that; here are delight and rest,** and there are fire and torments.’ Thus he will speak to them on the day of judgment...” (2 Esdras 7:36-38, NRSV, emphasis added)

Judgment Day

Finally, 2 Esdras discusses one of the most momentous future events in heaven – Judgment Day:

“The Most High shall be revealed on the seat of judgment, and compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn. Only judgment shall remain, truth shall stand, and faithfulness shall grow strong.” (2 Esdras 7:33-34, NRSV)

Heaven in the Dead Sea Scrolls

One of the most apocalyptic and eschatological documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls is the *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*, often contracted to simply the *War Scroll*. The tone of one of the passages in the *War Scroll* echoes the passages we've already examined in the Maccabees - the direct intercession of heavenly figures to assist humans in times of military crisis. Note that in the following passage, the angelic host fights alongside the faithful:

"For Thou wilt fight with them from heaven... For the multitude of the Holy Ones [is with Thee] in heaven, and the host of the Angels is in Thy holy abode, praising Thy Name. And Thou hast established in [a community] for Thyself the elect of Thy holy people. [The list] of the names of all their host is with Thee in the abode of Thy holiness; [the reckoning of the saints] is in Thy glorious dwelling-place. Thou hast recorded for them, with the graving-tool of life, the favours of [Thy] blessings and the Covenant of Thy peace, that Thou mayest reign [over them] for ever and ever and throughout all the eternal ages. Thou wilt muster the [hosts of] Thine [el]ect, in their Thousands and Myriads, with Thy Holy Ones [and with all] Thine Angels, that they may be mighty in battle, [and may smite] the rebels of the earth by Thy great judgements, and that [they may triumph] together with the elect of heaven.

For Thou art [terrible], O God, in the glory of Thy kingdom, and the congregation of Thy Holy Ones is among us for everlasting succour. We will despise kings, we will mock and scorn the mighty; for our Lord is holy, and the King of Glory is with us together with the Holy Ones. Valiant [warriors] of **the angelic host are among our numbered men**, and the Hero of war is with our congregation; the host of His spirits is with our foot-soldiers and horsemen. [They are as] clouds, as clouds of dew (covering) the earth, as a shower of rain shedding judgement on all that grows on the earth." (*War Scroll*, XII, Vermes translation, emphasis added)

An interesting section in the Thanksgiving Hymns discusses how at the time of Judgment Day, "the everlasting gates [assumedly, the gates of heaven] shall send out weapons of war". Compare this with Chapter 19 of Revelation ("I saw heaven standing open...The armies of heaven were following him...")

"And then at the time of Judgement the Sword of God shall hasten, and all the sons of His truth shall awake to [overthrow] wickedness; all the sons of iniquity shall be no more. The Hero shall bend his bow; the fortress shall open on to endless space and the everlasting gates shall send out weapons of war." (*Thanksgiving Hymn*, Section XIV, Vermes Translation)

A passage in the *Testament of Amram*, while it doesn't actually mention heaven, establishes a dichotomy between those that will go towards the light, and those that go toward perdition. If we assume that that place they are going is heaven or hell, then this shows a development of theological thought from the Old Testament *sheol*.

"..I an[nou]nce (this) to you [and al]so I will indeed inform y[ou]...For the Sons of Light] will shine, [and all the Sons] of Darkness will be dark. [For all the Sons of Light]...and by all their knowledge they will...and the Sons of Darkness will be burnt...For all folly and wicked[ness are dar]k, and all [pea]ce and truth are brigh[t. **For all the Sons of Light g]o towards the light, towards [eternal] jo[y and rej]oicin[g], and all the Sons of Dar[kness go towards death] and perdition...**The people shall have brightness...and they will cause them to live..." (*The Testament of Amram*, 4Q548, Vermes translation, emphasis added)

Finally, in a scroll called *The New Jerusalem*, we see a description of Jerusalem during the end times (compare with Revelation 21 - "It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel."). The text itself doesn't

break any new theological ground – it simply describes the new Jerusalem – but the very fact of *belief* in a new Jerusalem is an interesting theological development.

“[And they] c[a]l[ed] [the name of] this (one) [Gate] of Naphtali. And from this gate he measured to the [eastern] gate 25 [s]tadia. And they call this gate Gate of Asher. And he measu[red from] this [ga]te to the eastern corner 25 stadia. *vacat* And he led me into the city, and he measured each block of houses for its length and width, fifty-one reeds by fifty-one, in a square a[nd]...” (*The New Jerusalem*, 4Q554, Geza Vermes translation)

Heaven in 1 Enoch

1 Enoch purports to be written by Enoch, describing his vision of heaven (see Genesis 5:24):

“Concerning these things will I speak, and these things will I explain to you, my children: I who am Enoch. In consequence of that which has been shewn to me, from my heavenly vision and from the voice of the holy angels have I acquired knowledge; and from the tablet of heaven have I acquired understanding.” (*1 Enoch* 92:2-3, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821)

Most scholars today believe that several authors wrote *1 Enoch*, perhaps over a period of some years.

Unlike the Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls, *1 Enoch* displays a significant development of theological thought regarding heaven when compared with the Old Testament. It contains many descriptions of heaven, God on his throne, God’s heavenly attendants, and various archangels. It also firmly positions heaven as a place for the faithful and righteous to be with God – in distinction to hell, which is for sinners and nonbelievers. Note also that *1 Enoch* seems to come down on the side of those people that believe that we don’t go to heaven until Judgment Day.

Chapter 13 describes Enoch’s entry into heaven and his description of God on the throne:

9. Behold, in that vision clouds invited me, and a mist invited me; the running of the stars and flashes of lightning impelled and pressed me forwards, while winds in the vision assisted my flight, hastening me.
10. They elevated me aloft to heaven...
16. ...Its floor was on fire; above were lightnings and agitated stars, while its roof exhibited a blazing fire.
17. Attentively I surveyed it, and saw that it contained an exalted throne;
18. The appearance of which was like that of frost; while its circumference resembled the orb of the brilliant sun; and there was the voice of the cherubim.
19. From underneath this mighty throne rivers of flaming fire issued.
20. To look upon it was impossible.
21. One great in glory sat upon it
22. Whose robe was brighter than the sun, and whiter than snow.
23. No angel was capable of penetrating to view the face of Him, the Glorious and the Effulgent; nor could any mortal behold him. A fire of flaming fire was around Him.
24. A fire also of great extent continued to rise up before Him; so that not one of those who surrounded Him was capable of approaching Him, among the myriads of myriads who were before Him. And He required not holy counsel. Yet did not the sanctified, who were near Him, depart far from Him either by night or by day; nor were they removed from Him. I also was so far advanced, with a veil on my face, and trembling. Then the Lord with his own mouth called me, saying: Approach hither, Enoch, at my holy word.
25. And He raised me up, making me near even to the entrance. My eye was directed to the ground.” (*1 Enoch*, Chapter 13, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821)

1 *Enoch* introduces the concept of a holding place (“delightful places”) for the righteous dead, awaiting their resurrection on Judgment Day:

- “1. From thence I proceeded to another spot, where I saw on the west a great and lofty mountain, a strong rock, and four delightful places.
2. Internally it was deep, capacious, and very smooth; as smooth as if it had been rolled over; it was both deep and dark to behold.
3. Then Raphael, one of the holy angels who were with me, answered and said: These are the delightful places where the spirits, the souls of the dead, will be collected; for them were they formed; and here will be collected all the souls of the sons of men.
4. **These places, in which they dwell, shall they occupy until the day of judgment, and until their appointed period.**” (1 *Enoch*, Chapter 22, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821, emphasis added)

Chapter 39 clearly paints heaven as a place for the righteous. The reward of the righteous – to be “in the presence of God for ever and for ever”:

- “4. There I saw another vision; I saw the habitations and resting places of the saints. There my eyes beheld their habitations with the angels, and their resting places with the holy ones. They were entreating, supplicating, and praying for the sons of men; while righteousness like water flowed before them, and mercy like dew was scattered over the earth. And thus shall it be with them for ever and for ever.
5. At that time my eyes beheld the dwelling of the elect, of truth, faith, and righteousness.
6. Countless shall be the number of the holy and the elect, in the presence of God for ever and for ever.
7. Their residence I beheld under the wings of the Lord of spirits. All the holy and the elect sung before him, in appearance like a blaze of fire; their mouths being full of blessings, and their lips glorifying the name of the Lord of spirits. And righteousness incessantly dwelt before him.” (1 *Enoch*, Chapter 39, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821)

Chapter 46 describes the “Ancient of Days”, and discusses the “Son of man” (compare with Daniel 7):

- “1. There I beheld the Ancient of days, whose head was like white wool, and with him another, whose countenance resembled that of man. His countenance was full of grace, like that of one of the holy angels. Then I inquired of one of the angels, who went with me, and who showed me every secret thing, concerning this Son of man; who he was; whence he was and why he accompanied the Ancient of days.
2. He answered and said to me, This is the Son of man, to whom righteousness belongs; with whom righteousness has dwelt; and who will reveal all the treasures of that which is concealed: for the Lord of spirits has chosen him; and his portion has surpassed all before the Lord of spirits in everlasting uprightness.” (1 *Enoch*, Chapter 46, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821)

Chapter 70 describes God’s heavenly attendants, and gives a further description of the Ancient of Days:

- “7. There I beheld, in the midst of that light, a building raised with stones of ice;
8. And in the midst of these stone vibrations of living fire. My spirit saw around the circle of this flaming habitation, on one of its extremities, that there were rivers full of living fire, which encompassed it.
9. Then the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and Ophanin [four living creatures/wheels] surrounded it: these are those who never sleep, but watch the throne of his glory.
10. And I beheld angels innumerable, thousands of thousands, and myriads and myriads, who surrounded that habitation.
11. Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel and the holy angels who were in the heavens above, went in and out of it. Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel went out of that habitation, and holy angels innumerable.
12. With them was the Ancient of days, whose head was white as wool, and pure, and his robe was indescribable.” (1 *Enoch*, Chapter 70, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821)

Chapter 92 of *1 Enoch* describes a “new heaven”, which is to come since “the former heaven shall depart and pass away” (compare with Revelation 21):

17. The former heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the celestial powers shall shine with sevenfold splendour for ever. Afterwards likewise shall there be many weeks, which shall externally exist in goodness and in righteousness.” (*1 Enoch*, Chapter 92, translation by Richard Laurence, LL.D., 1821)

And finally, *1 Enoch* has several references to the final judgment:

“And after this, on the seventh day of the tenth week, there shall be an everlasting judgment, which shall be executed upon the Watchers; and a spacious eternal heaven shall spring forth in the midst of the angels.” (*1 Enoch*, Chapter 92, Laurence)

“O ye kings, O ye mighty, who inhabit the world, you shall behold my Elect one, sitting upon the throne of my glory. And he shall judge Azazel [Satan] all his associates, and all his hosts, in the name of the Lord of spirits.” (*1 Enoch* 54:5, Laurence)

“He sat upon the throne of his glory; and the principal part of the judgment was assigned to him, the Son of man.” (*1 Enoch* 68:39, Laurence)

Heaven in the New Testament


Synoptic Gospels

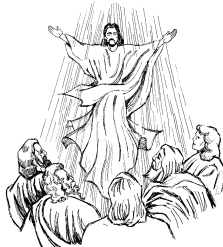
Like in the Old Testament, the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) discuss heaven as a place where God reigns on his throne, surrounded by the heavenly hosts. Also like the Old Testament, people can be cast out of heaven (“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven...”), destructive forces can be unleashed from heaven, and God can talk to humans from heaven.

However, there are elements in the Synoptic Gospels that are generally *not* in the Old Testament (although some exist in late inter-Testamental writings), including:

- Believers are encouraged to store up treasure in heaven
- After the resurrection of the dead, humans will become like angels in heaven
- A specific apostle (Peter) is told he is being given “keys to the kingdom of heaven”
- Jesus ascends to heaven – and will return from there during the end times
- Jesus, the Son of God, reigns in heaven with God (much more specific than the passages in Daniel 7)
- Heaven will not always exist(!)
- There are many references to the “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew – a concept not mentioned in the Old Testament. I’ve noted them in the table below, but the phrase probably doesn’t refer to a place, but rather God’s omnipotent rule.



Reference	Notes
Matthew 3:2	"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (John the Baptist)
Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:9, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:33-34	<p>"At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him"</p> 
Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:33-34, John 12:48	Voice from heaven
Matthew 4:17, 5:3, 5:10, 5:19-20, 8:11, 10:7, 11:11-14, 13:11, 13:24, 13:31, 13:33, 13:44, 13:45, 13:47, 13:52, 18:1-4, 18:23, 19:12, 19:14, 19:23, 20:1, 22:2, 25:1	Kingdom of heaven
Matthew 5:12, Luke 6:23	Reward in heaven
Matthew 5:34	Heaven is God's throne
Matthew 6:9	Our Father in Heaven
Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21	"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy..."
Matthew 16:19	Keys to the kingdom of heaven
Matthew 18:10	"For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven..."
Matthew 18:18	"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
Matthew 19:21, Luke 12:33, Luke 18:22	Treasure in heaven
Matthew 22:30	"At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."
Matthew 23:9, Luke 11:13	The Father is in heaven
Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33	Heaven will not always exist

Reference	Notes
Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32	Angels in heaven do not know the time
Matthew 25:64, Mark 14:62	"...the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One..."
Matthew 28:2	"...an angel of the Lord came down from heaven..."
Matthew 28:18	"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"
Mark 12:25, Luke 2:15, Luke 22:43	Angels in heaven
Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51	Jesus ascends to heaven
Luke 9:51	"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven..."
Luke 9:54	James and John want to call down fire from heaven
Luke 10:18	"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven..."
Luke 10:20	"...rejoice that your names are written in heaven..."
Luke 10:21	The Father is Lord of heaven and earth
Luke 15:7	Rejoicing in heaven
Luke 17:29	Fire from heaven
Luke 21:11	"There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven."
Luke 24:51	<p>"While he was blessing them, he [Jesus] left them and was taken up into heaven."</p> 
John 1:51	"...you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."
John 3:13	"No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man."
John 6:31-33, John 6:41, John 6:50-51, 6:58	Manna from heaven

Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

As noted above, Matthew 16:19 says that Peter is to be given “the keys of heaven”. It is worth noting the different ways that Protestants and Catholics have interpreted those verses over the years.

(Mat 16:18 NIV) “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

(Mat 16:19 NIV) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

These verses have been traditionally interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church as indicating that the Christian Church has received its authority from the legacy of Peter. The Roman Church also points to passages such as John 21:16, where Jesus says to Peter “Take care of my sheep”, as further justification that Peter is the founder of the Christian Church.



Protestants have traditionally interpreted the “rock” and “keys” passages to indicate that the *faith* of Peter is the “rock upon which I will build my church”, and that *faith* is the “keys to the kingdom.” Protestants often view that Paul, not Peter, is the founder of the Christian Church as we know it today.

Acts

Acts, being a history of the early church, doesn’t contain a lot of material about heaven, but there are a few items of interest:

- At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends from heaven (“...a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house...”)
- Jesus will remain in heaven until the end times
- As part of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, he sees a light from heaven
- Peter receives a vision of heaven which results in his taking his ministry to the Gentiles

Reference	Notes
Acts 1:2, 1:11	Jesus’ ascension into heaven
Acts 2:2	“...a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house...”
Acts 2:34	“For David did not ascend to heaven...”
Acts 3:21	“He [Jesus] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything...”
Acts 4:12	“...there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”
Acts 4:24, 14:15	God made heaven
Acts 7:49	“‘Heaven is my throne’...”

Reference	Notes
Acts 7:55-56	"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God..."
Acts 9:3, 22:6, 26:13, 26:19	A light from heaven on the road to Damascus
Acts 10:11, 10:16, 11:5, 11:10	Peter's vision: "I saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners."
Acts 11:9	Peter hears a voice from heaven
Acts 17:24	God is Lord of heaven

Letters

The letters of Paul, James, Peter, and whoever wrote Hebrews add some interesting information – and theology - about heaven, including:

- Jesus came from heaven
- Paul has a vision where he's taken to the "third heaven" (we'll examine this passage in more detail below)
- Paul discusses a "citizenship in heaven"
- Christ (as part of the triune God) created all things in heaven
- At some point the faithful will be taken up to heaven
- The concept of "a new heaven and a new earth" is introduced in Peter. This concept will be greatly enlarged upon in Revelation.

Reference	Notes
Romans 1:18	"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven..."
1 Corinthians 15:47-48	"The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven..."
2 Corinthians 5:1	"an eternal house in heaven"
2 Corinthians 12:2	The third heaven
Galatians 1:8	An angel from heaven
Ephesians 3:15	"I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name."
Philippians 3:20	"...our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ..."
Colossians 1:5	Hope stored in heaven
Colossians 1:16	"...by him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible..."
1 Thessalonians 1:10	Christ will return from heaven

Reference	Notes
Thessalonians 4:16-17	"...we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..."
2 Thessalonians 1:7	"This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels"
Hebrews 1:3, 8:1	Jesus sits at the "right hand of the Majesty in heaven"
Hebrews 9:24	"Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary [the Temple] that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself..."
Hebrews 12:23	Names written in heaven
Hebrews 12:25	Christ warns us from heaven
James 3:17	Wisdom from heaven
James 5:12	"...do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else..."
1 Peter 1:4	An inheritance kept in heaven for us
1 Peter 1:12	Holy Spirit sent to us from heaven
1 Peter 3:21-22	"Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand"
2 Peter 1:18	Voice from heaven
2 Peter 3:13	A new heaven and a new earth

The "third heaven"

So much mischief has been created over the years regarding Paul's vision of the "third heaven" that I'm compelled to discuss it in more detail here. Here is the passage:

"I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.** Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses." (2 Corinthians 12:1-5, emphasis added)

This is not the first time in the Bible that someone has a vision of heaven – Isaiah, Ezekiel and Peter all had visions of heaven. What is intriguing about this vision is the reference to the "third heaven". Some people use this passage as a justification for postulating that heaven has multiple levels (and the passages above could be interpreted that "paradise" and the "third heaven" are two different places!)

Early Church Father Papias, 2nd century bishop of Hieropolis, seems to have taken the view that there are multiple levels within heaven (and that paradise and heaven are two distinct places):

"As the presbyters say, then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of Paradise, and others shall possess the splendor of the city; for everywhere the Savior will be seen, according as they shall be worthy who see Him. But that there is this distinction

between the habitation of those who produce an hundredfold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold; for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second class will dwell in Paradise, and the last will inhabit the city; and that on this account the Lord said, "In my Father's house are many mansions:" for all things belong to God, who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place, even as His word says, that a share is given to all by the Father, according as each one is or shall be worthy. And this is the couch in which they shall recline who feast, being invited to the wedding. The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, say that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature..." (*Fragments of Papias*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., Editors)

However, a simpler explanation is put forward by 19th century commentators Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, that requires no diversions into multiple levels of heaven:

"The first heaven refers to the clouds or the air; the second to the stars and the sky, and the third to a spiritual realm (Eph. 4:10)." (*New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Based on the classic commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 19th century. Note: the New Scofield Reference Bible (1967) has a similar interpretation)

One other note on the "third heaven" passages - The word translated into English as "caught up" is the same word used in the passage in 1 Thessalonians that many people believe describes the rapture:

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, emphasis added)

G726

ἁρπάζω

harpazō

Thayer Definition:

- 1) to seize, carry off by force
- 2) to seize on, claim for one's self eagerly
- 3) to snatch out or away

Part of Speech: verb (Thayer's Greek Definitions)

Revelation

There are more descriptions of heaven (and the heavenly hosts) in Revelation than in any other book of the Bible. Revelation presents the vision of heaven of John the Apostle, and adds these elements to the Biblical references on the topic of heaven:

- Detailed descriptions of heaven, God on his throne, the heavenly hosts, and the Son of God in heaven
- The opening by Jesus of the seven seals that trigger off the end times
- The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride down from heaven to earth (compare with Zechariah 6:5-7)
- Mighty angels from heaven bringing battle to earth
- The two witnesses "...went up to heaven in a cloud..."



- A description of “God's temple in heaven...and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant”
- A detailed description of the war in heaven between the Archangel Michael and Satan
- Christ’s triumphant Second Coming from heaven
- Judgment Day
- The new heaven, the new earth, the new Jerusalem

Reference	Notes
Revelation 3:12	“... the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God...”
Revelation 4, Revelation 5	John enters a “a door standing open in heaven”
Revelation 6	Four horsemen
Revelation 8:1	“When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour”
Revelation 10:1	“I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven”
Revelation 10:4, 10:8, 11:12, 11:15, 14:13, 18:4	A voice (or voices) from heaven
Revelation 11:12	The two witnesses “...went up to heaven in a cloud...”
Revelation 11:19, 15:5	“Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant”
Revelation 12	Signs in heaven; Satan’s fall; war in heaven
Revelation 14:2	“I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder”
Revelation 14:17	The Grim Reaper comes out of the temple in heaven
Revelation 15:1	“...seven angels with the seven last plagues...”
Revelation 18:1, 20:1	An angel from heaven
Revelation 19:1-10	“...the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting...”
Revelation 19:11-21	“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True...”
Revelation 20:9	Satan’s followers destroyed by fire from heaven
Revelation 21	The new heaven and the new earth
Revelation 22:1-5	River of life

Many people (myself included) believe that Revelation describes a sequence of events that have not yet occurred. The sequence looks something like this:

- Opening of the scroll with 7 seals by the Lion of Judah (Chapter 5 onwards)
- God causes a time of tribulation on earth
- God sends two witnesses to prophesize to mankind
- Satan and his forces fight back
- Christ Returns, and defeats the earthly powers at the battle of Armageddon
- Satan is bound in the abyss for 1000 years
- Millennial Rule of Christ and the Martyrs
- Satan is released, and consigned to Hell
- Judgment Day
- The New Heaven, the New Earth, the New Jerusalem

Many of the references to heaven in Revelation occur in the passages that fill out this timeline.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain the most explicit descriptions of heaven in the whole Bible. Chapter 5 also discusses the opening of the seals that start the sequence of events known as the end times.

“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures [compare with Ezekiel 1], and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”

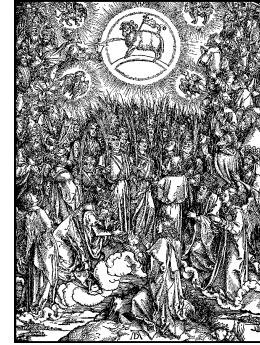
Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.” (Revelation 4, NIV)

“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look

inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song:



“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.” (Revelation 5, NIV)

Chapter 12 of Revelation gives an account of the war in heaven between the Archangel Michael and Satan, which results in the expulsion of Satan from heaven.

“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him...” (Revelation 12:7-8)



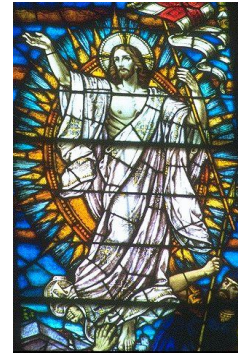
Chapter 19 of Revelation describes the triumphant return from heaven to earth of Jesus. Note also the reference to the “armies of heaven”:

"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:



KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."



Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh." (Revelation 19:11-21)

One of the great events in heaven in the future is Judgment Day, described (although not so named) in Revelation 20:

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:11-15)



This event is also discussed in the inter-Testamental works 2 Esdras and 1 Enoch.

Revelation ends with a detailed description of the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem. The text is a bit unclear as to what the relationship between the three is – are they all part of the same place, or are they different places? One thing is sure - the results will be spectacular. God will live with his people from now on – just like in the Garden of Eden before the fall of man. And the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem is for believers only – Satan's followers will be confined in the lake of fire.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away...”



...But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

...And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb... [compare with Dead Sea Scrolls *The New Jerusalem*.]

...I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (From Revelation 21)

Heaven in the Christian Apocrypha

Apocryphal Christian documents written in the 2nd and 3rd centuries enlarge upon many of the themes regarding heaven in the New Testament. Some people refer to these documents as the *Christian Apocrypha* – non-Gnostic works that didn’t make the New Testament canon. And while we shouldn’t view them as divinely inspired or authoritative, they do help us trace the development of Christian thought on the subject of heaven.

The first work we’ll examine is the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which purportedly describes Paul’s adventures in the “third heaven” (see discussion in the “Heaven in the New Testament” section):

“REVELATION of the holy Apostle Paul: the things which were revealed to him when he went up even to the third heaven, and was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words.”

With its emphasis on a well-defined church leadership hierarchy (deacons, bishops, presbyters), we can guess a no-earlier than 2nd or 3rd century date for authorship. St. Augustine thought dimly of this work.

In the course of the vision, Paul receives a tour of heaven, and meets many famous Old Testament characters, including Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Manasseh, Joseph, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Noah and Elias. Paul also meets Mary, mother of Jesus, and the infants slain by King Herod.

In the course of his tour, Paul describes heaven, the heavenly Jerusalem (compare with Revelation 21) and Paradise – the place from which Adam and Eve were ejected.

"Follow me, that I may bring thee into **the city of God**, and into its light. And its light was greater than the light of the world, and greater than gold, and walls encircled it. And the length and the breadth of it were a hundred stadia. And I saw twelve gates, exceedingly ornamented, leading into the city; and four rivers encircled it, flowing with milk, and honey, and oil, and wine...

And I looked, and saw in the midst of the city an altar, great and very lofty; and there was one standing near the altar, whose face shone like the sun, and he had in his hands a psaltery and a harp, and he sung the Alleluia delightfully, and his voice filled all the city. And all with one consent accompanied him, so that the city was shaken by their shouting. And I asked the angel: Who is this that singeth delightfully, whom all accompany? And he said to me: This is the prophet David; **this is the heavenly Jerusalem**. When, therefore, Christ shall come in His second appearing, David himself goes forth with all the saints. For as it is in the heavens, so also upon earth...



...And he took me by an impulse of the Spirit, and brought me into paradise. And he says to me: **This is paradise, where Adam and Eve transgressed**. And I saw there a beautiful tree of great size, on which the Holy Spirit, rested; and from the root of it there came forth all manner of most sweet-smelling water, parting into four channels...And having again taken hold of me by the hand, he led me near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And he says to me: This is the tree by means of which death came into the world, and Adam took of the fruit of it from his wife, and ate; and thereafter they were cast out hence. And he showed me another, the tree of life, and said to me: This the cherubim and the flaming sword guard. And when I was closely observing the tree, and wondering, I saw a woman coming from afar off, and a multitude of angels singing praises to her. And I asked the angel: Who is this, my Lord, who is in so great honor and beauty? And the angel says to me: This is the holy Mary, the mother of the Lord." (*Revelation of Paul*, "Apocrypha Of The New Testament", Translated By Alexander Walker, Esq., One Of Her Majesty's Inspectors Of Schools For Scotland)



The second work we'll examine is the *Revelation of Peter* which was lost until 1886 when a French archaeological mission found fragments of it in Egypt. Most scholars view that the *Revelation of Peter* was written in the second century, thus, it could not have been written by Peter. However, it does seem to have some stylistic similarities with II Peter. The *Revelation of Peter* appeared on an early list of proposed canonical New Testament works - the Muratori Canon, a fragmentary list (85 lines) dated to c. 200 A.D., named after its 18th century discoverer, Lodovico Muratori. It was quoted from by several of the Early Church Fathers, including Clement of Alexandria.



The first part of the *Revelation of Peter* describes a tour of heaven given to the apostles by two angels.

"And the Lord showed me a very great country outside of this world, exceeding bright with light, and the air there lighted with the rays of the sun, and the earth itself blooming with unfading flowers and full of spices and plants, fair-flowering and incorruptible and bearing blessed fruit. And so great was the perfume that it was born thence even unto us. And the dwellers in that place were clad in the raiment of shining angels and their raiment was like unto their country; and angels hovered about them there. And

the glory of the dwellers there was equal, and with one voice they sang praises alternately to the Lord God, rejoicing in that place.” (*Revelation of Peter*, “The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 10”, Edited by A. Roberts and J Donaldson)

Finally, the apocryphal *Revelation of John* gives a description of heaven not unlike the Revelations of Paul and Peter – lots of sweet smells, angelic hosts, and bright lights!

“And I spent seven days praying; and after this a cloud of light caught me up from the mountain, and set me before the face of the heaven. And I heard a voice saying to me: Look up, John, servant of God, and know. And having looked up, I saw the heaven opened, and there came forth from within the heaven a smell of perfumes of much sweet odor; and I saw an exceeding great flood of light, more resplendent than the sun.” (*Revelation of John*, “Apocrypha Of The New Testament”, Translated By Alexander Walker, Esq., One Of Her Majesty’s Inspectors Of Schools For Scotland)

Appendix: Heavenly beings

A number of seemingly different types of heavenly beings are identified in the Bible as having the role of attending to and/or worshipping God in heaven. These include "cherubim" (identified in Ezekiel as being one in the same as "four living creatures"), "seraphim" (referenced only in Isaiah), "heavenly hosts", and the "twenty-four elders".

The "cherubim" and "seraphim" ("the burning ones") are the only angels in the Bible that are depicted as having wings (except, possibly, Zec 5:9, and the locusts in Rev 9). The cherubim are also mentioned in Gen 3:24, as the guards that God places at the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve have been cast out.

The "twenty-four elders" are traditionally considered to be the twelve patriarchs, and the twelve Apostles. However, this is solely by church tradition - the canonical Bible makes no such claim.

Reference	Notes
Cherubim/Seraphim	
Genesis 3:24	"...he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword..."
Ezekiel 1:1-24	Wheel in a wheel
Ezekiel 10:1-22	Winged cherubim
Rev 4:6-8	Four living creatures
Rev 5:8-10,14, 19:4	Four living creatures
Rev 6:1	"Come!"
Rev 14:3	A new song before the throne
Isaiah 6:1-7	Seraphs in heaven
Twenty-four elders	
Rev 4:9-11, 19:4	Twenty-four elders before the throne
Rev 5:5	Elder speaks to John
Rev 5:8-10	Fall before the lamb
Rev 7:13-17	Elder interprets John's vision
Angelic hosts	
Rev 5:11-12	""Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain..."

Reference	Notes
Rev 7:10-12	Angels worshipping before the throne
Rev 19:1-8	"a great multitude in heaven..."

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Stain glass windows on pages 37 & 39 - Saint Fidelis Church in Victoria, Kansas. Photos by Robert Jones.

Notes

About the Author

Robert C. Jones grew up in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. He made his living as a hotel lounge band leader/musician from 1974-1981. In 1981, he moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area, where he received a B.S. in Computer Science at DeVry Institute of Technology. From 1984-2009, Robert worked for Hewlett-Packard as a computer consultant.



Robert is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church. He has written and taught numerous adult Sunday School courses (see front inside cover). He has also been active in choir ministries over the years, and has taught the *Disciples* Bible Study six times.

Robert is also President of the Kennesaw Historical Society, for whom he has written several books, including "The Law Heard 'Round the World - An Examination of the Kennesaw Gun Law and Its Effects on the Community", "Retracing the Route of the General - Following in the Footsteps of the Andrews Raid", and "Kennesaw (Big Shanty) in the 19th Century". A new book, "Images of America: Kennesaw", was published by Arcadia in 2006.

Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

In 2005, Robert co-authored a business-oriented book entitled "Working Virtually: The Challenges of Virtual Teams". His co-authors were Lise Pace and Rob Oyung.

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