

# The Three Heavens

Assembled by C M White

Version 2.1

**Key:** 1<sup>st</sup> heaven = atmosphere; 2<sup>nd</sup> heaven = physical universe; 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven = place of God's throne and dwelling

## Chart comparing the three heavens

Scripture	First, Second or Third Heaven	Comment
"The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven" (Psalm 11:4)	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Cp Is 66:1; Acts 7:49
"I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left" (II Chronicles 18:18)	3 <sup>rd</sup>	
"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10)	3 <sup>rd</sup>	
"Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air [NASB translates is <i>heavens</i> ] eat: for the LORD hath spoken <i>it</i> ." (I Kings 14:11)	1 <sup>st</sup>	Cp Gen 1:20
"And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven" (Deuteronomy 4:19)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Cp Gen 1:14-16; Ezek 32:8
"Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God" (Deuteronomy 10:14)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Note: there is more than one heaven

<p>"But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (II Chronicles 6:18)</p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup></p>	<p>Note: there is more than one heaven</p>
<p>"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10)</p>	<p>3<sup>rd</sup></p>	<p>Note: there is more than one heaven</p>
<p>"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven...How that he was caught up into paradise*, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12:2-4)</p>	<p>3<sup>rd</sup></p>	<p>The third heaven is where God's throne is</p>
<p>"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil 3:20-21)</p>	<p>3<sup>rd</sup></p>	
<p>"And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day." (Gen 1:8)</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup></p>	
<p>"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, <i>It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.</i>" (Matt 16:1-2)</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup></p>	
<p>"And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven." (Deut 4:19)</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup></p>	
<p>"By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent." (Job 26:13)</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup></p>	

"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." (Is 14:13)	3 <sup>rd</sup>	
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## Old Testament Scriptures:

### II Ki 2:11

11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

### Job 3:17

17 There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.

### Ps 16:11

11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

### Ps 17:15

15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

### Ps 23:6

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

### Ps 24:3

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?

### Ps 24:7

7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

### Ps 73:24

24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

### Isa 33:17

17 Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.

**Isa 49:9-10**

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

**Dan 12:3**

3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

**Mal 3:17**

17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

## **New Testament Scriptures:**

**Matt 3:12**

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

**Matt 5:3**

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Matt 5:8**

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

**Matt 5:12**

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

**Matt 5:20**

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

**Matt 6:20**

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

**Matt 8:11**

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

**Matt 13:30**

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

**Matt 13:43**

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

**Matt 13:49**

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

**Matt 18:10**

10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

**Matt 19:21**

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

**Matt 22:30**

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

**Matt 25:34**

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

**Matt 25:46**

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

**Luke 10:20**

20 Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

**Luke 12:8**

8 Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God:

**Luke 12:32-33**

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

**Luke 15:6-7**

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

**Luke 15:10**

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

**Luke 15:32**

32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

**Luke 16:22**

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

**Luke 20:34-36**

34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage:

35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage:

36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

**Luke 22:29-30**

29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Luke 23:43**

43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise\*.

**John 5:28-29**

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

**John 10:28**

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

**John 12:26**

26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

**John 13:36**

36 Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

**John 14:2-3**

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

**John 17:22**

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

**John 17:24**

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

**Acts 7:55-56**

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

**Rom 5:17**

17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

**2 Cor 5:1**

1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

**2 Cor 12:2-4**

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

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise\*, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

**Eph 1:18**

18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

**Col 1:5-6**

5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

**Col 1:12**

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

**Col 3:4**

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

**1Thes 2:12**

12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

**1Thes 4:17**

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

**II Th 1:7**

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

**II Th 2:14**

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Heb 10:34**

34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

**Heb 11:10**

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

**Heb 11:16**

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

**Heb 12:22-24**

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

**Heb 12:28**

28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

**Heb 13:14**

14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

**1 Pet 1:4**

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

**2 Pet 1:11**

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

**2 Pet 3:13**

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

**Rev 2:7**

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise\* of God.

**Rev 3:21**

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

**Rev 4:4**

4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

**Rev 5:9**

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

**Rev 7:9**

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

**Rev 7:13-17**

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

**Rev 14:1-3**

1 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

3 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

**Rev 15:2**

2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

**Rev 21:1-5**

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

**Rev 21:9-11**

9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

**Rev 21:18-19**

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

**Rev 21:21-25**

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

**Rev 21:27**

27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

**Rev 22:1-5**

1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

## **\*The Word *Paradise***

Dependant upon context, this word may refer to the Millennium, the period thereafter, the New Earth or heaven itself. The following two articles provide proof for this:

### **The Meaning of “Paradise” in the Bible**

**MARCH 30, 2015** *posted by Mason Slater*

Today we are pleased to share the latest post in our new weekly series, **Beyond the Book**. This month J. Richard Middleton will be discussing interesting things he learned about eschatology while working on *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.

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*Paradise is not a reference to ‘heaven,’ but to the earthly flourishing offered to humanity in the beginning and reserved for the righteous in the eschaton.— J. Richard Middleton*

*“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).*

These famous words of Jesus to the thief on the cross are often understood as a promise that he would join Jesus in heaven immediately after death.

The first problem with this interpretation is that Jesus did not rise from the dead for three days, and only ascended to heaven some time after that (which makes the promise of “today” problematic).

#### **Paradise as the Garden of Eden**

Beyond the temporal problem, the term “paradise” (*paradeisos*) is simply not equivalent to “heaven” in the Bible.

The Greek word *paradeisos* is how the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word for “garden” (*gan*) in the garden of Eden account in Genesis 2-3. According to the end of Genesis 3 humanity was expelled from the garden and denied access to the tree of life, with the way guarded by cherubim with flaming sword (Genesis 3:23-24).

#### **The Present Inaccessibility of Paradise**

Various Second Temple Jewish traditions thus developed about the inaccessibility of paradise and the tree of life (some of these texts are cotemporaneous with the New Testament, some earlier, some later). These traditions centered around the idea that God took the garden/ paradise up into heaven or

removed it to the top of a high mountain (in the sky/ heaven) at the ends of the earth, in order to guarantee its continued inaccessibility—until the last day, when it would be revealed upon the earth.

The idea of paradise presently inaccessible in “heaven” assumes the ancient Jewish picture of the earth as a flat disk, with mountains at the extremities of the earth that function as pillars holding up the sky/ heaven, which is conceived as a solid ceiling or roof over the earth (for more on the nature of “heaven” in the Bible, see [my previous blog post on the subject](#)).

The association of garden and mountain is found in Ezekiel 28:1-19, in an oracle of judgment against the king of Tyre, who is described as having been “in Eden, the garden of God” (Ezekiel 28:13), which is then identified as “the mountain of God” (Ezekiel 28:14).

### **Paradise in the Eschaton**

It thus makes sense that John is taken to “a great, high mountain” to see the holy city descending out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:10).

Earlier in Revelation, Jesus promises the church at Ephesus: “To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7); and then in chapters 21-22 we have a vision of the New Jerusalem, intertwined with elements of paradise/ the garden, coming down out of heaven from God.

Just as there was a tree of life in the garden (Genesis 2:9), so there is one in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2). But whereas in Genesis 3:23-24 humanity is exiled from the garden, in Revelation 22:14 those who are cleansed from sin “will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates,” which are always open (Revelation 21:25).

### **Paradise is Not Heaven**

This means that we should not identify “paradise” in the New Testament with “heaven”; rather “paradise” more correctly refers to God’s original intent for human earthly flourishing (the garden of Genesis 2), which now comes to fruition in a garden *city* (a new Jerusalem), on a renewed (even grander) Mt. Zion, as the focused center of God’s presence in the new heaven and new earth.

Although there might be an argument for understanding the temporary location of paradise in heaven, as part of what God is preparing for the saints, this is clearly symbolic language meant to say that eternal life is currently inaccessible to human beings.

More importantly, paradise is not simply equivalent to “heaven.” Indeed, paradise is not (in either Jewish literature or the New Testament) an immaterial realm or place, which is the way that “heaven” is typically conceived in contemporary Christian theology.

### **Paradise as Earthly Flourishing**

Even Origen, the church father with the clearest commitment to Platonism, understands the “paradise” promised to the saints as “some place situated on the earth.” This is why he is constrained to portray the afterlife in terms of a journey *from* paradise *to* heaven; being a Platonist, it is unthinkable for him that earth could be the final destiny for those who are truly spiritual (see Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.11.6-7).

Therefore, what Jesus promises the thief on the cross is not “heaven” but access to the tree of life in the garden/ city of God, which is essentially equivalent to resurrection in the new creation.

As to what Jesus means by being in paradise “today,” that’s another story.

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## The Meaning of "Paradise"

What did Jesus promise the thief on the cross in response to his dying request, "**Remember me when you come in your kingdom.**"?

What did Jesus promise the thief on the cross in response to his dying request,

**"Remember me when you come in your kingdom."**?

Jesus assured the man,

**"You shall be with me in Paradise."**

Many use this passage to document their belief that heaven is the reward of the righteous. *But is this what Jesus meant? Just what is "Paradise?"* Let's take a closer look at this classic section of Scripture to find out what it really means.

We should note that Jesus did not answer him directly. Contrast this with his detailed reply to Peter regarding the disciples' status in the kingdom (Matthew 19:27ff). Although Peter's question was similar in nature to the request of the thief on the cross, the circumstances were obviously quite different. In the former case, Jesus was teaching men who were given the opportunity to understand and participate in the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:10-11). In the latter case he was confronted with the dying request of a convicted criminal. It is certainly not uncommon for a dying person (especially criminals) to express concern about the hereafter, even if they had not been religiously inclined in their lifetime. Many of us in the ministry have doubtless encountered examples of this. Clearly, the right response on such occasions is encouragement, not judgment. Likewise, despite his own suffering, Jesus lovingly

perceived that this was a time for reassurance not a theological lecture. So he used a term that was very familiar in the religious culture of the day without attempting to correct or clarify the meaning. The following quotes trace the development of the traditional meaning of "paradise."

Used in later Jewish and Christian thought, it appears in religious language as God's garden, where man was placed at first by his Creator. Lost or hidden since the Fall, it will be regained at the end, whilst it may already mean, in the intermediate era, the abode of the blessed dead (*Dictionary of the Bible, Revised Edition*, by Hastings, article "paradise").

The actual word . . . is nowhere used in the Old Testament in an eschatological sense, which meaning developed in the later Jewish world (*The New Bible Dictionary* by J. D. Douglas, article "paradise").

The shift from the secular to the religious sense appears more largely in the Greek Bible (LXX). "*Paradeisos*" is used there more than thirty times, especially in Genesis, where it means God's garden or Eden. The tendency to idealize grows in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings (*Dictionary of the Bible, Revised Edition*, by Hastings, article "paradise").

While speculation flourished, there was a growing consensus that the abode of the righteous after their resurrection would be the Garden of Eden, or, as some called it, "Paradise" (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, article "paradise").

"*Paradeisos*" developed into a specific eschatological concept in the apocalyptic literature. The starting point for all Jewish thinking about paradise, under the influence of the LXX, was the garden of Eden (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, article "paradise").

"*Paradeisos*" shortly became a technical term. This idea that the future paradise is identical with the original paradise led to the further notion that paradise must exist now. Thus paradise was seen not only as a future home for the righteous, but as existing in the present, between creation and the final age, although now in hidden form . . . There are three stages of the one paradise: the ancient garden, the present paradise which is hidden, and the future paradise (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, article "paradise").

*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* makes a most interesting point which can shed light on the passage in question. There was a notable lack of agreement as to the geographical location of Paradise during the second and third stages. For some it was on earth, for others in heaven (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, article "paradise").

Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states that in later Judaism of the New Testament Period, "The site of reopened Paradise is almost without exception the earth" (vol. 5, page 767). Under the heading "The Return of Paradise in the Last Age," It continues, "The belief in resurrection gave assurance that all the righteous, even those who are dead, would have a share in the reopened paradise" (vol. 5, page 767).

Philo of Alexandria was the first to allegorize the Genesis account of Eden. Many "church fathers" followed his allegorical method on this and other subjects. McClintock & Strong's *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* has a long article which traces the development of many mystical interpretations that grew out of this allegorization method, identifying "paradise" with heaven. Thus, "*paradeisos*" is used in two New Testament passages to refer to "**the third heaven**" (II Corinthians 12:4) and "**the Paradise of God**" (Revelation 2:7), which Revelation 21-22 identifies as "**a new heaven and a new earth.**" Many therefore assume that heaven is the meaning of "paradise" in Luke 23:43. However, Jesus' usage of the term obviously preceded

the later writings of Paul and John, so these two passages should not be used to interpret the meaning of paradise in Luke 23:43. Jesus' usage related rather to the Jewish concept, which was rooted in the Old Testament and corrupted over time by allegorization by the time the term found its way into the apocalyptic literature of the apocrypha. It is therefore instructive to examine the Old Testament references which the later Jewish and patristic concepts grew out of.

As we have seen, the Septuagint rendering of "garden" as "*paradeisos*" in Genesis 2 and 3 established the precedent for later meanings of the term. Similarly, in Ezekiel 28:13, Eden is referred to as "the paradise of God." An earthly paradise is clearly indicated, as is the case in other occurrences of the term. Two other passages are especially instructive. Isaiah 51:3 poetically describes the endtime restoration of the land:

**"For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden (LXX, "*paradeisos*") of the LORD."**

Again in Ezekiel 36:35,

**"So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden (LXX, "*paradeisos*") of Eden . . . ."**

Ezekiel 37 continues the story of the ultimate restoration of all Israel via the post-millennial general resurrection. Obviously, the earthly paradise that began during the millennium will be "in full bloom" during this time when the bulk of mankind will be raised to physical life. Could Jesus have had this in mind when he promised the thief on the cross that he would be with him in "paradise?" Although the term later came to be used to refer to "the third heaven," the original Old Testament scriptures from which the later meaning evolved obviously refer to the Edenic beauty of the earth under the righteous rulership of Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God. Even though the thief undoubtedly understood "paradise" in terms of the mystical meaning of the apocryphal writings, did Jesus' promise actually promise the man that he would be with him in a beautifully restored earth at the time of the second resurrection, when he would have an opportunity to learn and live the way of God for a lifetime in the presence of Jesus Christ? This would have given a truthful yet reassuring answer without introducing theological issues that would have been neither productive nor appropriate during the final hours of the man's life. It is simply a case of "*What he didn't know didn't hurt him.*" It would seem that Jesus' brief, diplomatic answer might suggest this conclusion. If this is the correct meaning, the man will learn soon after he comes back to life the precious truth that we are now privileged to understand.

In the movie *Field of Dreams*, one of the baseball players who comes back to life to play on the field asked, "Is this heaven?" The lead character responds, "No, it's Iowa." When the man describes heaven, the lead character says, "Then maybe this is heaven." Likewise, "heaven on earth" would certainly be an apt description of the beauty of the earth in the millennium and beyond--the New Heavens and New Earth, which will literally be "heaven on earth."

Of course it is not for us to determine whether or not the thief on the cross (or anyone else, for that matter) will be in the first resurrection. Only God knows.

**Written by:** Larry J. Walker

## A Note on Ephesians 6:12

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.” (ESV)

“Nor do believers need to be on their guard only against the wiles of the devil ... “The god of this age” ... (2 Cor 4:4), has a host of allies, principalities and powers, here described as “the world-rulers of this dark domain” (lit., “this darkness”) and “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm” ...

“The heavenly realm may be envisaged as comprising a succession of levels, with the throne of God on the highest of these and the hostile forces occupying the lowest. The level which they occupy is probably identical with “the domain of the air,” ruled (according to Eph 2:2) by “the spirit which now operates in the disobedient” ...” (F.F. Bruce, “The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,” *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, pp.404, 406).