

There Are Three Heavens

If it were not for Paul the apostle, we probably wouldn't be aware there are three heavens:

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.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

From reading this, we see this "third heaven" is where "paradise" is and things are spoken there which men are not allowed to utter on earth.

Reading this, I felt Paul must be saying something he expected his readers to be familiar with. Not all, but enough of his audience must have been familiar with the concept of multiple heavens. I would likewise have to conclude there was enough information in the Old Testament to instruct readers so they would have this knowledge. From Scripture, I see three, and only three heavens alluded to.

In Descending Order:

Third Heaven:

Called "third heaven" by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 – Paradise is here and important affairs of God are conducted that are not to be revealed in the ears of men.

Another reference is seen here:

3 Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

Psalms 104:3

A more literal translation goes: "Who builds with beams in waters his roof-chambers. . ." This is a poetic expression referring to the location of the third heaven. To understand this, we must consider the creation in Genesis where the waters were separated from the waters with the "firmament". From an overview position: we are on the dry land surrounded by waters (seas) with the air pocket of the first heaven (to be covered in more depth shortly). That air pocket reaches to the "firmament". That "firmament" was to separate the waters from the waters. Above that "firmament" are the waters it is separating. Above that is the third heaven

where the throne of God is found. Therefore we can see the foundation of His heavenly abode founded in the waters expressed in Psalm 104:3.

Psalm 148 references all three heavens. In the first section of this Psalm we see “upper” things grouped together. The “lower” are in the second half of this Psalm.

1 Praise ye the LORD (*Halleluia*). Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Psalm 148:1

The “heavens” is a plural form. It is used in that form referring to a single item or plural. You can see that by looking at the first verse in the Bible: Genesis 1:1 where it is translated in the singular. Verse 1 starts from the highest place, the third heaven where His praise is “from” there.

In verse 4 we see the “heaven of heavens”, which is a further reference to the third heaven at the end of this “upper” section. In this verse we see they themselves give glory to God, not a give glory from that location, like verse 1:

4 Praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that *be* above the heavens.

Psalm 148:4

Second Heaven:

Psalm 148:4 slips in the second heaven, almost as a side, where we see the waters that are “above the heavens” (i.e. the firmament but could also include the first heaven). This is referring to an ocean of water that is resting upon this firmament.

We find a unique term “firmament” in reference to the second heaven. I suspect it leaves most people baffled as to what it is? For an answer to that, we need to look at the Hebrew term “raqia” (Strong’s 7549) and its root “rqa” which means to beat, strike; spread out by beating, as a thin plate; to spread out (with the hammer). Consider this with Job 37:18:

18 Hast thou with him spread out the sky, *which is strong, and* as a molten looking glass? Job 37:18

A literal expanded translation of this being: “To spread out by beating with Him (God) to the sky (*sh’chaqim**) strong like a molten looking glass (thing that is looked at being poured, cast, a cast metal.”

The “*to spread out*” is based on that word for the firmament.

*“*sky*” – *shachaq* – to rub, beat in pieces, rub or wear away”.

Putting it simply, this firmament is something hard that God worked like a metal worker does a metal bowl with a hammering and beating of the metal into the bowl, possibly like a stamp press does in forming helmets from a single piece of metal.

We see the Second Heaven in Psalm 104:2 where He stretches out the heavens as a curtain:

2 Who coverest *thyself* with light as *with* a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Psalm 104:2

We are told in the beginning about the creation of the “firmament”. We are told God called it Heaven – “Shamayim”:

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. 7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. Genesis 1:6-8

This “firmament” has been described like a giant glass-like (in transparency) upside-down bowl creating an air pocket between the sea/land world we know and the waters that are above and outside of it. The firmament is necessarily “firm”. It’s not gaseous, as the English term “firmament” indicates.

During the fourth day of Creation we find the following:

14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: 15 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. 16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also. 17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, 18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was* good. 19 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. Genesis 1:14-19

Thru this portion, wherever we see “in the firmament of the heaven” we need to be aware the literal reading is “*in the firmament the heaven*”. The sun, moon and stars are literally “in” the second heaven and that second heaven is “the firmament”.

How can such things be “in” a solid creation? Consider how glass is solid yet we can see a holographic projection of someone doing something in the glass. Apparent motion in a solid object.

We should note these celestial features are not said to be found, or placed “upon the face of the firmament the heaven” like we find of the birds in Genesis 1:20 (to be examined in the “First Heaven” section).

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Psalm 19:1

Psalm 19:1 must never be overlooked in a study like this. I have seen a modern translation pervert this glory to God by changing the “firmament” to something that dodged the truth of the passage. It is that “firmament” which brings glory to God. When we know we are not part of a “big bang” and see God’s creation for what it is; we KNOW we are specially created for His good pleasure and we KNOW He is near, WATCHING His special creation. God looks down from the third heaven upon us and we are told in Scripture we are like grasshoppers as He is looking out over us:

22 *It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:* Isaiah 40:22

[It should be noted the Hebrew does say “circle”, like an architect’s compass would draw, not a “sphere”. The Hebrew does have a word for something like a sphere – ball, and it doesn’t use that here.]

Only as we understand the firmament will we grasp our special place in creation. This firmament has been written away with the Copernican, Kepler and Newton theories. I have seen some who erase the “Third Heaven’s” foundations by saying those waters above the firmament (where these heavens are founded – Psalm 104:3) were drained in Noah’s flood. They say they aren’t there anymore but Psalm 148:4 showed this to be a false theory. These waters are still found in a Psalm written after the flood *calling them* to give glory to God.

First Heaven:

In Psalm 148, as the call to praise Yahweh has worked downward to earth, we see a reference to the First Heaven:

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD; for his name alone is excellent; his glory *is* above the earth and heaven. Psalm 148:13

That “heaven”, I believe to be the First Heaven which is bound by the land and the firmament. God’s glory rests in the highest position above this heaven in the heaven of heavens (third heaven).

The air-pocket “First Heaven” is seen in Genesis 1:9-13:

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so. 10 And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that *it was* good. 11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *was* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good. 13 And the evening and the morning were the third day. Genesis 1:9-13

The “First Heaven” is where the birds fly:

10 And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. 2 Samuel 21:10

In this passage both “heaven” and “air” are “shamayim”, translated “heaven” elsewhere. We can see this is where the clouds that rain are found.

Another passage showing the “First Heaven” is where the birds are found is:

25 I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. Jeremiah 4:25

The following is a special passage casting further light on this subject:

20 And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. Genesis 1:20

A literal reading of Genesis 1:20b helps see the boundaries of this first heaven – “And fowls to fly upon the land upon the face of the firmament the heaven.” The Hebrew for “upon” is “al” which is upon or over, and can be understood in the consideration of silver-plating something. If that silver-plating is upon a tube, it is upon that tube. It doesn’t matter if it is the bottom or top of that tube, it is upon that tube. With the First Heaven, its boundaries are “bound” by the land (earth) on the one side and extends upwards until it reaches the “firmament”. Within this area are the clouds. The clouds are not the “waters above the firmament”, as seen in 2 Samuel 21:10.

Final Considerations:

Reflecting back to the opening passage of Paul’s, we know there are three heavens with the third being “Paradise”. His words bring us, as Christians, to a face off in realizing there are multiple “heavens” and we need to know the truth about our present world. Whatever we may conclude, we know heaven number three is where Paradise is. That leaves at least two other heavens we need to learn about. Scripture discusses these and gives substantial detail as to what number one and two are. We know the birds and clouds are in number one. We know the second is something solid that holds back a flood of waters. Three is Paradise. Whatever we would like to imagine, there is no place for some great expanse of air with countless worlds flying thru it. If that did exist, it would have to be at position four or beyond and we would have to get past both the firmament, with its stars, moon and sun and the water barrier beyond and finally Paradise before it could be found.

I want to look at a quote from *Gesenius’ Hebrew Lexicon* on the biblical cosmology. In my edition, publishers place frequent notes pointing that *Gesenius* presented views true Bible-believers can’t accept, such as when he indicates “copyist

errors must have messed up the text”. For that reason the following quote is very enlightening:

7549 – raqia - ... the firmament of the heaven, spread out like a hemisphere above the earth ..., like a splendid and pellucid sapphire (Ex. 24:10, compare Dan. 12:3), to which the stars were supposed to be fixed, and over which the Hebrews believed there was a heavenly ocean...

We see there are scholars who bare witness that the Bible teaches an unpopular cosmology, they discard it as an ignorant view of earth in which they didn't know “the modern enlightened truth”. For those who hold the Bible as an inspired book, which presents to us God's revelations, we know they were not “uninformed” men speaking of their own ignorance. With such accusations condemning sacred text, we must decide where we stand. Do we stand with God or men? Who is the liar?

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The English version used is either King James Version or my literal translation

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