

Where Are Heaven and Hell?

Well, believe it or not, this is a common question. Most people don't dwell on it much, but they sure wish they knew the answer. Does the Bible give us more than a clue? We think so. Frankly, it tells us a lot if we are willing to look at a number of things very carefully. Let's start with the Book of Genesis and see what it tells us. Note: The heaven we speak of here is what we distinguish as a "spiritual" heaven where God resides and the righteous go when they die.

What God Started With

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

What can we glean from this first verse of Genesis? In Genesis 1:1, we learn that God created the heavens and the earth. This tells us four important things:

1. The Triune God¹ obviously had to exist before creation because He could not create something if He did not first exist.
2. We can conclude that if God existed before anything was created, He must, by definition, be eternal, i.e., He has always been in existence.
3. Creation of the heavens and the earth is referenced in the first verse. We believe the verses that follow simply give us more detail about the heavens and earth that God created.
4. God created more than one heaven. This is interesting, and we should keep this little tidbit in mind as we proceed with examining what else God created. Hint: the heavens in Genesis 1:1 may be physical in nature and not the "spiritual" heaven we are discussing in this document.

"The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." Genesis 1:2

Genesis 1:2 tells us what the heavens and earth were like as God began "fine-tuning" His creation.

1. The earth was "formless and void" – it had no form or content. The New English Translation (NET) Bible phrases it this way: *"Now the earth was without shape and empty"*. Different words, same meaning. Note: Here we are assuming God is referencing our planet earth as opposed to earth, as in dirt.
2. The heavens and the earth were dark, as light had not yet been created, and they were also deep, implying the heavens and the earth had some sense of volume, albeit without shape or content. But remember, this is only an assumption using what man knows today; neither man's knowledge, nor his rationale, nor his reasoning apply to God. This fact is pointed out to us by the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 55:8-9: *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."*
3. There was the Spirit of God. We believe this is a reference to either the Triune God or the third "person" of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit.
4. The term "surface of the waters" is a bit puzzling but is given further clarification later in Genesis 1:6-19.

God's Additional Creations

Light

On day one, God creates light and separates it from the darkness:

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day." Genesis 1:3 – 1:5

Heaven

"Then God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day."* Genesis 1:6-8

¹ The Triune God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (which together form the Holy Trinity) – is one deity and one God. Think of God as one "What" (Essence or Being) consisting of three "Whos" – all of whom individually have the power of our one God.

**The Interlinear Bible translates the original Hebrew word into English as the plural “heavens”, while the NASB version translates it as the singular “heaven”. Given the verses below, we believe the plural “heavens” is the more accurate of the two.*

God creates an expanse in the midst of the waters which He calls “heavens”. He then separates “the waters” into waters above the heavens and waters below the heavens. If our idea of the “spiritual” heaven is among the heavens referenced here, this would be our first introduction to where the “spiritual” heaven is – it is in the midst of “the waters”. It is also entirely possible that the heavens referenced here are only physical in nature and have no spiritual relevance. Genesis 1:14-19 (see below) implies the latter might be the case.

This would be a good time to remind the reader that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant and occasionally metaphorical Word of God. The Bible is not meant to be either a science book or a geography book, and when it speaks to us in metaphors, we need to trust that God is only telling us what we need to know at the time.

Earth

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:9-10

On day three, God takes the waters below the expanse of the heavens and gathers them into one place which He calls seas, and where there is no water, He causes the dry land to appear which He calls earth. It seems apparent that from the waters below the expanse of the heavens, God creates the earth with its land and seas.

The Sun, Moon and the Stars

“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.” Genesis 1:14-19

On day four, God gives form to light. He creates the earth’s sun and moon, and also creates the stars. He places them all “in the expanse of the heavens”.

So far, all we know from Genesis on the possible location of our sought-after “spiritual” heaven is that (a) God created an “expanse” in the midst of the waters, (b) He called the “expanse” heavens, (c) there are waters above the “expanse of the heavens” and there are waters below the “expanse of the heavens”, (d) God used the waters below the “expanse of the heavens” to create earth – dry land and seas, (e) God created the sun, moon and stars and placed them in the “expanse of the heavens”, and (f) God did not disclose anything about His plans for the “waters” above the “expanse of the heavens”.

The truth is, we do not know where our concept of a “spiritual” heaven is and whether it is part of the physical heavens (the expanse), or part of the waters above the expanse of the heavens, or for that matter, part of the waters below the expanse of the heavens that God used to create the earth and its seas. Remember, anything is possible with God. As Mark 10:27 tells us:

“Looking at them, Jesus said, ‘With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.’”

We know from Genesis that “God created the heavens and the earth”. The “spiritual” heaven we are seeking to find may be a part of this creation, or it may not. And if we believe there is a “spiritual heaven”, is knowing its location right now all that relevant? 1 Peter 1:3-5 appears to address this question:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (emphasis added)

Whether our “spiritual” heaven is part of God’s original creation of “the heavens”, Hebrews 9:11-12 tells us:

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this (man’s) creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Simply put, yes, there exists what we deem to be a “spiritual” heaven (“the holy place”), and we will know of its location when the time comes for us to know.

Does the Bible Hint at Any Other Heavens We Should Know About?

Well, in fact, yes, it does. We suspect most people who think they are going to “heaven” simply believe that when they die “they immediately go to heaven”. While this is accurate for those destined for heaven, the place they immediately go to after death may not be their “final” resting place. We believe there is a sequence of places one could go to before they land in their final, eternal, resting place.

Note: As we have previously stated, the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and occasionally metaphorical Word of God. As such, because God cannot lie, heaven must conform “truthfully” to the time between Creation and the End of Times. That is a long time, involving a plethora of activity, including the Giving of the Law (God’s original covenant with the Jewish people), Christ’s crucifixion and His new covenant with all nations (peoples), the Rapture of the Church, Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the creation of a new earth and a new heaven as the old earth and heaven “pass away”. You will witness firsthand the exacting nature of God’s Word as we explore why there is a potential sequence of destinations before we reach our final, eternal home of heaven or hell.

Many may argue that the following discussion is not appropriate or too complex for someone who is just evaluating whether they want to become a believer in Jesus Christ. We understand this but have included this discussion anyway because we believe one needs to fully understand how God distinguishes between those who will inherit the kingdom of God and those who won’t. We also believe people should know exactly how He will deal with both groups. The Bible is quite clear on how both groups are treated, and we believe letting people know how harshly the end of times will play out for those who don’t believe, may motivate those considering a relationship with Christ to go to the next step and accept Him as their Lord and Savior so they won’t experience the utter hell that awaits them if they don’t.

Why Are “Heaven” and “Hell” So Complicated?

The subject of heaven and hell is complex because it all depends on when people die and what rules of salvation apply to them at the time of their physical death. Here is our understanding of the timeline:

God’s Rules for Salvation for Those Who Believe in Him						
	The Old Covenant	The New Covenant				Eternity
Time Frames	From Creation to Christ’s Crucifixion, Resurrection, and His Ascension Into Heaven	From Christ’s Ascension into Heaven to the Day of Pentecost (the Beginning of Christ’s Church) and From the Day of Pentecost Through the Church Age	The Rapture of the Church	7 Years of Tribulation	Christ’s 1,000 Year Millennial Kingdom	Eternal Heaven
Where Is Heaven?	Abraham’s Bosom / Paradise →	The Heaven Above (where God and Christ are now manifestly present)	(Believers in Christ - Dead or Alive - Under the New Covenant) In the Clouds (Saints Dying Under the Old Covenant) →		Heaven On Earth	The New Heaven
Heaven’s Physical Location	Under the Earth (See Exodus 20:4)	The Heaven Above	(New Covenant) In the Clouds (Old Covenant) The Heaven Above		Heaven On Earth	Possibly the New Earth
Where Is Hell?	Sheol / Hades (place of the dead) →					Lake of Fire
	Sheol/Hades and Abraham’s Bosom/Paradise were in the same location, but an uncrossable schism separated the wicked from the righteous. After Christ’s ascension, only the wicked remained. <i>Note: In Exodus 20:4, God makes a reference in the second of His Ten Commandments to “water under the earth”. This is pure speculation, but this may be a reference to where Sheol/Hades and Abraham’s Bosom/Paradise might be located; however, the Bible does not state this connection.</i>					

Here is a brief explanation of the time frames, what rules for salvation apply to each time frame, and where the Bible tells us their heaven and hell will be – as we understand and interpret Scripture.

From Creation to Christ's Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven

Prior to the crucifixion of Christ, one's salvation was by faith and belief in, and prayer to, a gracious and forgiving God, which was manifested in one's obedience to God's law (see Genesis 15:6, Psalm 32, Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 4:3, and Romans 9:30-33). We will not describe the details applicable to this period before Christ as they ceased to apply once Christ gave us His New Covenant. If you are reading this, you fall under Christ's New Covenant.

From Christ's Crucifixion Through His Resurrection and to His Ascension into Heaven

We created a separate category for this time frame to account for the following:

1. In Luke 23:43, Jesus tells the thief on the cross who came to believe in Him, ***"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*** This tells us that at Christ's death and prior to His resurrection and ascension into heaven, both He and the thief entered the heaven known then as Paradise.
2. Following Christ's resurrection and His appearance to the many and to His disciples on at least three separate occasions (see John 20:19-29, John 21:1-14), we know that Jesus ascended into heaven:

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." Luke 21:50-51

3. Ephesians 4:7-10 tells us that when Christ ascended, He may also have led the righteous out of Paradise and into heaven with Him:

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.' (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)"

Note: The use of the term "ascended far above all the heavens" could imply that the waters above the heavens (see Genesis 1:6-8) may be where the spiritual heaven we are seeking is located. This, of course, is pure speculation as the Bible does not state this.

We can see from the above three Scripture verses that upon His death, Christ initially went to Paradise, which we believe to have been under the earth. After His resurrection and visits to His disciples, Christ ascended "up into heaven" – which presumably is not the same place as Paradise – and He appears to have taken the Old Covenant righteous with Him into this Heaven.

From Christ's Ascension into Heaven to the Day of Pentecost and Then On Through the Church Age

Christ's crucifixion sourced a new blood Covenant with the Jews and the Gentiles, and this New Covenant was that His death, and the shedding of His sinless blood, would be sufficient to pay the price for the sins of humanity once and forever for those who believe in Him (Jesus Christ). Unlike the Old Covenant where annual blood sacrifices were necessary, and which only covered sins in God's eyes as opposed to removing them, Christ's New Covenant made future sacrifices, and similar rituals, completely unnecessary. The New Covenant is still applicable to this day.

"While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.'" Matthew 26:26-28

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, 'Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers On the day when I took them by the hand To lead them out of the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care for them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, And I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, And they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, And everyone his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," For all will know Me, From the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more.' When He said, 'A new covenant', He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." Hebrews 8:7-13

"For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Hebrews 10:1-4

“After saying above, ‘Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:8-10

We call the period from the Day of Pentecost to the present the “Church Age”, as it defines the foundation and continuation of Christ’s Church. Believers in Christ receive salvation and eternal life as gifts through God’s grace, demonstrated by Christ’s death on the cross paying the penalty for our sins and His subsequent resurrection. The Day of Pentecost also marks the start of when the Holy Spirit is given to indwell those who come to believe in Christ.

At death, believers in Christ immediately experience the presence of Christ in heaven (II Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-23). Those who don’t believe in Christ will die in their sins and pass immediately into Hades.

Note: In the Old Testament, “Sheol” was where the dead went – both the righteous and the unrighteous. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the term “Hades” (the place of the dead) was substituted for Sheol, but Hades still referred to where the dead – both the righteous and the unrighteous – went. It wasn’t until Christ’s resurrection that the righteous dead joined Him in heaven, while the unrighteous remained in Sheol/Hades. We often refer to Hades as “hell” but this is not entirely accurate, as the true “hell” is the lake of fire and the final resting place for the unrighteous, where unbelievers are cast following Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. It will also become the permanent place for Satan.

Christ’s New Covenant complicates defining heaven and hell because those who died hundreds or thousands of years before Christ’s crucifixion had no Christ to believe in (except through prophecy), so the New Covenant could not have applied to them. Remember, God’s Word is perfect. This, of course, begs the question, why did God need to establish a New Covenant? Simple. God wants His children with Him. But given the sin nature of humanity, faith in God - which under the Old Covenant was demonstrated by one’s faith in a loving God and strict obedience to the Law as established by God through Moses - was proving impossible to sustain. Hence, a New Covenant – one easier to keep – was needed. Under the New Covenant, access to heaven depends solely on the sincerity and endurance of our belief and faith in God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as demonstrated by our good works. Note: Our repentant, abiding, and enduring faith in Christ will source our good works, so a faith without good works is no faith at all. Thus, although good works won’t earn salvation under the New Covenant (for salvation is by grace and a gift from God), they do demonstrate whether we have the kind of faith that saves. Ephesians 2:8-10 and James 2:26 confirm this:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8-10

“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” James 2:26

The Rapture of the Church (Our Temporary Heaven Is in the Clouds)

The Bible describes a time in the future, called the Rapture of the Church, when Jesus comes back to us *in the clouds* (He does not set foot on earth) and brings up to Him, into the clouds, those to whom salvation has been granted through their faith and belief in Christ. This will include both the living and the deceased who died *in Christ* (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 below). Those who have been granted salvation will be given bodies that shall not perish (see 1 Corinthians 15:50-53 below). While it is up for debate, we believe the Rapture of the Church (Christ’s body of believers) takes place just prior to the Seven Years of Tribulation.

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep [deceased], so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 (emphasis added)

“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.” 1 Corinthians 15:50-53

Seven Years of Tribulation

The Seven Years of Tribulation will be the most horrible of times earth has ever experienced. As Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:21-22:

“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Following the Seven Years of Tribulation, Christ sets foot on the earth (the “Second Coming”) and destroys all the enemies of God and Israel in what has become known as the Battle of Armageddon.

“And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (‘Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.’) And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.” Revelation 16:13-16

Christ’s 1,000-Year Millennial Kingdom

Shortly after the Battle of Armageddon, Christ establishes His 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom on earth. Christ brings into His Millennial Kingdom on earth:

1. Those who were previously Raptured (and in the clouds),
2. Those who were sanctified and who died under the Old Covenant (and who joined Christ at His ascension into the heaven above), and
3. Those who came to Christ during the Seven Years of Tribulation.

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection [those Raptured]; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” Revelation 20:6

Following Christ’s 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom, there will be a final reckoning which is called the Great White Throne Judgment. This is when Jesus will send those not destined to enter God’s eternal heaven due to their lack of faith into the eternal lake of fire - the permanent, eternal hell. Everyone already in Hades will also be judged by Christ and then Christ will empty Hades into the lake of fire.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And 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

Eternity – A New Heaven and Earth

When Christ’s Millennial Kingdom ends on earth, God creates a whole new earth and heaven, for the first heaven and the first earth pass away. Those who are destined to spend eternity with God will join Jesus in God’s eternal heaven, location not yet disclosed. This is summarized in Revelation 21:1-8:

“Then I [the Apostle John] saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’ Then He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.’”

Some believe the final heaven will be the unification of God's original heaven with the new heaven described above, and that the original but newly cleansed earth (a cleansing that results from the Battle of Armageddon, the Great White Throne Judgement, and Christ's 1000-year Millennial Kingdom) will be combined with the new earth also described above. They further contend these new "combinations" will be ruled over by the New Jerusalem. We do not ascribe to this point of view as we think the above portion of Revelation should be taken literally, i.e., there will be a completely brand-new heaven and earth that will be ruled over by the New Jerusalem. We believe this view is more accurate for it is Jesus Himself speaking when He says: "*Behold, I am making all things new*" and "*Write, for these words are faithful and true.*" (emphasis added), and Jesus can never lie.

We believe the new heaven spoken of in Revelation 21:1-8 could well be our final, eternal, heaven.

God, of course, knows the answer, but for us, only time will tell. But our complete knowledge about this subject is not important, for our salvation is granted by grace through faith and not by having knowledge. What is critical to know is that under the New Covenant, God gives us a choice. Follow His Son in faith and spend eternity with Him in heaven or choose *not* to follow His Son and spend eternity in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. It is up to us to decide where we want to spend eternity.²

Postscript - Paul's Rapture Into a Third Heaven

We would be remiss if we did not at least mention the "third heaven".

We know from Scripture that Saul, a Pharisee (Jewish religious leader) and major persecutor and murderer of the early Christians, was traveling to Damascus to persecute more Christians when he was met by the resurrected Jesus and converted into one of Christianity's greatest Apostles (and henceforth known as Paul). Saul's conversion occurred roughly two to five years after the Day of Pentecost. Paul went on to write many of the epistles in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 (one of Paul's epistles), we learn that Paul was temporarily raptured³ into perhaps yet another heaven – the "third heaven". Paul's rapture would probably have occurred in either late 55 AD or early 56 AD, 14 years before the writing of the 2 Corinthians epistle.

"Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ (Paul was speaking of himself) who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows--was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak."

These verses raise two major questions:

1. Are Paradise and the third heaven one and the same?
2. If there is a "third heaven", where are the other two?

We believe answers to these two questions would be pure speculation because we do not know, and Scripture does not tell us. But here is what we do know from Scripture:

- The original heaven was Abraham's Bosom, also called Paradise.
- The next heaven was the "heaven above", where Jesus ascended when He delivered the captives from Paradise (Abraham's Bosom), which was under the earth (see Ephesians 4:7-10 on page 4 of this document).
- Paul's rapture was obviously before the prophesied Rapture of the entire Church (Body of Christ), Jesus' 1000-year Millennial Kingdom, and the prophesied New Earth and New Heaven.

We also know from the above Scripture (2 Corinthians 12:1-4) that Paul was raptured (caught up) to both a "third heaven" and, perhaps separately, to "Paradise". What Paul meant by the "third heaven" and whether he was referring to Paradise as a separate location from the "third heaven" are anybody's guess.

Again, we remind the reader that the Bible is neither a science book nor a geography book, and it is faith that saves, not knowledge.

² Yes, we are well aware of the debate over pre-determination and whether one actually has a choice as to their salvation. This is a very complex subject and will be addressed in a later document not yet posted.

³ The Bible never mentions the word "Rapture" but instead uses the term "caught up".