

Questions About the Three Heavens

By Pastor Ed Anderson

What are the three heavens mentioned in Scripture?

Answer:

Great question! Let's walk through what the Bible says about the **three heavens**, then explore the **ancient concept of "seven heavens"**, and finally examine whether science offers any parallels or insights into these ideas.

The Three Heavens in Scripture

The Bible clearly speaks of **three "heavens,"** each referring to a different realm:

The First Heaven – The Atmospheric Heaven

This is the sky, the **realm of clouds, birds, and weather.**

- **Genesis 1:20** – "Let birds fly above the earth across the **face of the firmament of the heavens.**"
- **Deuteronomy 11:11** – Refers to "*the rain from heaven*" — meaning the sky.
- **Jeremiah 4:25** – "I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the **heavens** were fled."

This is the **airspace** where birds fly and weather systems exist — **our atmosphere.**

The Second Heaven – The Celestial or Cosmic Heaven

This refers to **outer space**, where the **sun, moon, stars, and planets** exist.

- **Genesis 1:14–17** – "Let there be lights in the **firmament of the heaven** to divide the day from the night..."
- **Psalms 19:1** – "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the **firmament shows His handiwork.**"
- **Isaiah 13:10** – "The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light..."

This is the realm of **astronomical bodies** — beyond our atmosphere.

The Third Heaven – The Dwelling Place of God

This is the **spiritual heaven**, the dwelling place of God, angels, and the heavenly sanctuary.

- **2 Corinthians 12:2–4** – Paul writes: *“I know a man in Christ... caught up to the **third heaven**... caught up into **Paradise**, and heard inexpressible words...”*
- **1 Kings 8:30, 39, 43, 49** – Solomon prays toward **heaven**, calling it *“Your dwelling place”*.
- **Revelation 4:1–2** – John sees a door open in heaven and is shown the throne room of God.

This is the **highest heaven**, beyond the visible cosmos — **where God rules from His throne**.

What About the “Seven Heavens”?

The “seven heavens” is **not a biblical doctrine**, but a concept found in:

- Jewish mysticism (e.g., the Talmud and apocryphal books)
- Islamic tradition (Qur’an references 7 heavens in Surah 71:15)
- Some ancient Mesopotamian and Babylonian cosmologies

In Jewish apocryphal writings, the seven heavens are named:

1. **Vilon** – where the day and night cycle is managed.
2. **Raqia** – the realm of the sun and moon.
3. **Shehaqim** – where manna and millstones for righteous souls are.
4. **Zebul** – where Jerusalem and the temple are.
5. **Maon** – home of ministering angels.
6. **Machon** – storehouse for winds and weather.
7. **Aravoth** – the highest heaven, where God’s throne and justice dwell.

These names do **not appear in the Bible**, and are part of **extra-biblical Jewish thought**—not canon.

So what does the Bible say?

- The Bible **only explicitly confirms three heavens**.
- The **number seven** often symbolizes **completeness** in Scripture (e.g., seven churches, seven spirits, seven seals), so some early writers may have symbolically structured the heavens into seven **to represent divine perfection**, not literal cosmology.

Is There Any Scientific Parallel?

While science doesn't confirm "three" or "seven" heavens, we can find **conceptual parallels**:

1. The Earth's Atmosphere (1st Heaven)

Science defines **layers of the atmosphere**:

- Troposphere (weather)
- Stratosphere
- Mesosphere
- Thermosphere
- Exosphere

Birds and weather dwell in the **lower layers** — what the Bible calls the "**first heaven**."

2. Outer Space (2nd Heaven)

The vast expanse of **cosmos** aligns with the Bible's second heaven:

- Stars, planets, galaxies
- Cosmic radiation, black holes, etc.

3. Beyond the Observable Universe (3rd Heaven?)

Science suggests there may be **dimensions beyond time and space**:

- **String theory** posits up to 11 dimensions.
- **Quantum physics** suggests non-locality and higher realities.
- Some physicists believe there could be **other realms** beyond the observable universe — something **outside space-time**.

While science does not affirm the third heaven as a place where God lives, it does acknowledge that realities may exist beyond our current dimension — which aligns with the biblical idea of a supernatural throne room (Revelation 4).

Summary

Heaven Type	Description	Bible References
First Heaven	Earth's atmosphere (sky)	Genesis 1:20, Jeremiah 4:25
Second Heaven	Outer space (cosmos)	Genesis 1:14–17, Psalm 19:1
Third Heaven	God's dwelling place	2 Corinthians 12:2–4, Revelation 4
Seven Heavens	Extra-biblical Jewish tradition	Talmudic, apocryphal (not canonical)

Final Thought

God's word teaches that **He is enthroned above all the heavens**, and while He transcends all space and time, He's still close enough to hear your whisper. The "third heaven" isn't just a cosmic location—it's the **center of divine presence, justice, mercy, and love**.

"For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.'"

— *Isaiah 57:15*