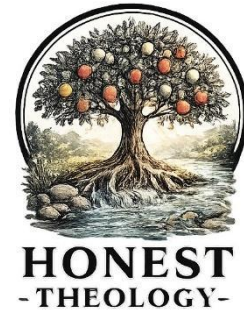


How Many Heavens Are In Scripture?



Words are important whether you are studying something intensely or even in a casual setting. I can tell someone earnestly that I “love” them and begin the start of a lifelong commitment of fierce emotions that are held together with trust and unity. I can also say I “love” mushroom pizza but it doesn’t mean that I want to eat it every single day for the rest of my life.

In spiritual discussions, words and their meanings get even more complicated. Discussions begun without thoughtful clarity on basic word understanding may begin to “shake a tree” that has been growing and thriving for years. *Don’t mess with my tree!*

Let’s take the word, “Heaven.” Do you know that there is probably *no one else on the planet* (past, present, or even future) who understands heaven the same way as you do? This actually makes perfect sense because there is no divine thing that a human can understand completely (that’s because our God is so ... incomprehensible). It *also* makes perfect sense because each of us brings our own individual selves into any discussion or experience and we’re uniquely one-of-a-kind. Put those two realities together and well, there are many directions a discussion can go.

But we’re going to be brave and start this process with the word “heaven.” We’re going to start with a reliable source: Holy Scripture. And, since there are no perfect Bible translations that everyone can agree on, we’re going to go directly to the earliest foundational source – the original Greek and Hebrew languages. (Don’t worry, I don’t speak ancient Greek or Hebrew either.) Thankfully, there are many sources we can depend on. I’m going to work with the online website [BibleHub](https://www.biblehub.com). (It’s free and easy to use.)

I have discovered through some online research that there are only **four** terms (two in Hebrew, two in Greek) in the Scriptures that English translators translate into “heaven.”

- One is Hebrew: **šāmayim** (Like in Genesis 1:1)
- One is Aramaic: **š’mayin** (See Daniel 4:26)
- Two are Greek: **ouranos** (Luke 4:25) and **mesouranēma** (Revelation 8:13)

These terms can refer to the sky above us, the celestial heavens, the dwelling place of divine beings, or God’s own realm. Actually, these terms, throughout Scripture, are translated into a *variety* of English words: “heaven,” “air,” “sky,” “heavenly,” and “mid-heaven.”

Here’s what (probably) is going to shake your tree:

None of them mean automatically “the place people go when they die.” even though Scripture does discuss life beyond death in other passages.

There is an analogy I like to use when discussing deep, theological stuff (and this is that). How do you eat an elephant? Answer: one bite at a time. And – cliff-hanger warning – here is our very first taste of the ‘heaven elephant.’ I’m going to stop here. (I hope you’re disappointed.)

You should now have lots of questions swirling around in your head. I sure did/do. *This is a good thing.*

- How do we even *know* about where we are supposed to go when we die?
- How did *I* come up with *my* concept of what ‘heaven’ is?
- Is there anywhere in Scripture that actually *does* tell us where we go when we die?!

You probably have many more.

Now don’t abandon this journey! We’ve barely begun. [Remember Jesus’ promise](#) to his followers: “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?*”

God doesn’t ever break God’s promises to God’s people.

Nerd Stuff:

Heaven #1: Genesis 1:1 “And God began to create the **heavens** and the earth...”

HEBREW: šāmāyīm שָׁמַיִם H8064 – meaning:

- ✓ visible heaven, “highest heavens” (Deut. 10:14, I Kgs. 8:27),
- ✓ sky (Gen. 1:20, Deut. 4:17),
- ✓ abode of the stars (Gen. 1:14-17, Ps. 8:3)
- ✓ atmosphere, as the abode of God (Ps. 115:3, Is. 66:1).

It is translated into English as:

- “heaven” (398x)
- “air” (21x)
- “astrologers” (with H1895) 1x

Interesting fact: This Hebrew word is plural!

Heaven #2: Daniel 2:18 “¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of **heaven** concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

ARAMAIC: šamayin ܫܡܝܝܢ H8065 – meaning heaven, heavens, sky (Dan. 4:26, Ezra 5:11)

It is translated into English as:

- “heaven” (38x)

Interesting fact: This is essentially the Aramaic equivalent of šāmāyīm.

Heaven #3: Luke 4:25 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the **heaven** was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land,”

GREEK: ouranos οὐρανός G3772 – meaning:

- ✓ the vaulted expanse of the sky with all things visible in it; the universe, the world, the aerial heavens or sky, the region where the clouds and the tempests gather, and where thunder and lightning are produced (Matt. 16:2-3, Luke 4:25),
- ✓ the sidereal or starry heavens (Matt. 24:29, Heb. 11:12),
- ✓ the region above the sidereal heavens (Matt. 5:16, Matt. 6:9, Jn. 14:2),
- ✓ the seat of order of things eternal and consummately perfect where God dwells and other heavenly beings (Rev. 21:1, Acts 7:55).

It is translated into English as:

- “heaven” (268x),
- “air” (10x),
- “sky” (5x) (Matthew 24:29)
- “heavenly” (with G1537) 1x

Interesting fact: It is this Greek term that Matthew uses when describing the “kingdom of the heavens” yet it is always coupled with the Greek term Basileia βασιλεία G932. It is done 32x, and is unique to Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew 3:2 “²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Heaven #4: Revelation 8:13 “13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in **midheaven**, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

GREEK: mesouranēma μεσουράνημα G3321 – meaning:

- ✓ The highest point in the heavens, which the sun occupies at noon, where what is done can be seen and heard by all (Rev. 8:13, Rev. 14:6, Rev. 19:17).

It is translated into English as:

- “mid-heaven” 3x

Interesting fact: This term is found only in the book of Revelation.

Bibliography notes:

1. For this post I used New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Feel free to research your own translation or look up the many translations that are available on [Bible Gateway](#).
2. I do not speak Biblical Hebrew or Greek. All translations of both are thanks to the excellent (FREE!) website [Blue Letter Bible](#).
3. Please note the number of times a word has been translated into English denotes the *King James Version* of Scripture (which is public domain) specifically so it does not match “perfectly” with other translations. I provided that number just so you would have a concept of its frequency.

4. Another excellent source is *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* by James Strong, L.L.D., S.T.D. which is published by Thomas Nelson publishers in Nashville, TN.

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