

# Three Heavens in Scriptures

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We will examine the fact that in Scriptures, there are three regions of רַקִּיעַ (*raqiya*; open expanse),<sup>1</sup> i.e., different realms, each called “heavens.”

Father Yahweh dwells in what is defined as the “third heavens,” the sun, moon, and stars occupy the “second heavens,” and flying birds and clouds are contained in the “first heavens” (i.e., in the atmosphere surrounding the earth).

The evidence will prove that no man—with only the exception of Yahushua the messiah, and then only in those periods before and after his fleshly, earthly existence as a human—has ever dwelt in the third heavens with father Yahweh.

The fundamental error made by those who would have mortal humans go off to heaven to be with father Yahweh before death, resurrection, and quickening is their confounding of the three different realms called “heavens.”

## Elijah and Enoch

For example, in 2 Kings, we read:

And it happened, as they (Elijah and Elisha) were going on and speaking, that, behold, a chariot and horses of fire; and they separated between the both of them (i.e., between Elijah and Elisha), and Elijah went up in a whirlwind into the *shamayim* (heavens). (2 Kings 2:11)

Afterward, men were sent to look for Elijah but were unable to find him,<sup>2</sup> reminiscent of Enoch’s earlier disappearance after his transla-

tion or transportation.<sup>3</sup> The stories of Enoch and Elijah are then understood by many Jews, neo-Christians, and Muslims to mean that Enoch and Elijah did not die but, while in their mortal flesh, ascended up into heaven to dwell with the deity. In these two items of scriptural history, those believing in a trip to heaven feel they have found their primary articles of proof.

It is certainly true, for example, that Elijah “went up in a whirlwind into the heavens.” Yet this leaves us with an apparent contradiction in Scriptures, for Yahushua, long after Elijah’s experience, just as strongly asserted that

“no one has gone up into the heavens except he (the messiah) who came down out of the heavens.”<sup>4</sup>

The reality is that there is no contradiction: each scriptural passage was speaking of a different realm called “*shamayim* (heavens).” In Scriptures, as we have stated above, there are three “heavens.” The first is our atmosphere, which surrounds the earth; the second is the place where the moon, sun, and stars are located; and the third is where father Yahweh lives.

As we shall see, Elijah and Enoch went only into the first of these three heavens. The heavens spoken of by Yahushua as the place where no man has gone is the third heavens, where father Yahweh presently dwells.

## Shamayim (Heavens)

The Hebrew term שָׁמַיִם (*shamayim*) is a collective noun, שָׁמַי (*shamay*) being the simple plural form. These terms are translated either as “heavens” or “heaven.” It is understood that

Yahushua, long after Elijah’s experience, just as strongly asserted that “no one has gone up into the heavens except he (the messiah) who came down out of the heavens.”

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew term רַקִּיעַ (*raqiya*) means, “an expanse, i.e. the firmament” (SEC: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Heb. #7549); “the expanse of heaven, atmosphere, sky” (HEL: Hebrew-English Lexicon. Zondervan Edition, 1970, p. 251). For the first heavens as a *raqiya* (open expanse), see Gen. 1:6-8, 20; for the symbolism of the third heavens as a *raqiya* (open expanse), see Ezek. 1:22.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 2:12-17.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 5:22-25.

<sup>4</sup> John 3:13.

*shamayim* is a group of שָׁמַיִם (*shamah*), the singular, meaning, “to be lofty; the sky (as aloft),” “heaven, the sky.”<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, the term שָׁמַיִם (*shamayim*) is often and more correctly translated as the “heavens.” The Septuagint (LXX) and the New Testament translate the Hebrew terms *shamayim* and *shamay* with the Greek words οὐράνος (*ouranos*), and the plural οὐράνοιοι (*ouranoi*), from ὄρος (*oros*), “to rise or ‘rear’,”<sup>6</sup> meaning, “the sky; by extens. heaven,” i.e., “the vault or firmament of heaven, the sky.”<sup>7</sup>

Importantly, the singular Greek term “*ouranos*,” also “*ouranou*,” and so forth, is often used as a translation for the collective Hebrew noun “*shamayim*.”<sup>8</sup> This Greek translation merely reflects the collective noun nature of the term *shamayim*.

### Visions and Revelations

That there are three realms called the “heavens,” the third being equated with παράδεισον (*paradeison*; paradise), is assured to us by the apostle Saul (Paul). He writes:

To boast indeed is not profitable to me; for I will come to VISIONS AND REVELATIONS of Yahweh. I know a man in the messiah fourteen years ago, whether in the body or out of the body I know not, the deity knows, such a one was caught away (in a vision and revelation) to the THIRD HEAVENS. And I know such a man, whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, the deity knows, that he was caught away into paradise,

and heard unutterable sayings, which it is not permitted to man to speak. Concerning such a one I will boast, but concerning myself I will not boast, unless in my weakness.<sup>9</sup> (2 Cor. 12:1-5)

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In this comment from 2 Corinthians, Saul is speaking of visions and revelations and of knowing a man of the Assembly who was taken to the “third heavens” in a vision. Saul openly admits that he did not know how such visions were accomplished. The expression “whether in the body or out of the body” does not mean that the man went up bodily into the third heavens or had left his body.

Instead, it refers to whether the man saw the vision only in his mind, i.e., “in the body” (as some visions in the Old Testament were in dream form),<sup>10</sup> or whether the man, while awake, saw the vision around him, i.e., “out of the body” (as in the case of the visions spoken of in Ezekiel and John).<sup>11</sup>

### Book of Revelation

In the book of Revelation, John the Divine, for example, was on the Island of Patmos and, while awake, he saw a vision in which he “became in the *ruach* in the day of Yahweh” and saw Yahweh’s throne and the heavenly angels.<sup>12</sup> In this realm, he saw the “paradise of the deity,” where sets the Tree of Life and the throne of father Yahweh.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, John could not actually be in the future, but he saw the future in the vision while awake and moving about. The key point we wish to glean from 2 Corinthians and

<sup>5</sup> SEC, Heb. #8064; HEL, p. 270.

<sup>6</sup> SEC, Gk. #3735.

<sup>7</sup> SEC, Gk. #3772; GEL: A Greek-English Lexicon. Compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, p. 578.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., LXX (Greek Septuagint) Gen. 1:1, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Saul was making reference to the early Christian prophet named Agabus (Acts 11:27-28, 21:10-11).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Dan. 7:1-2, 7, 13, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Ezek. 1:1-2:10.

<sup>12</sup> Rev. 1:9-11, 4:1-11.

<sup>13</sup> Cf., Rev. 21:1-22:5, esp. v. 22:2.

Revelation is the fact that Paradise,<sup>14</sup> which is presently located in the heavens where father Yahweh resides, is in the third heaven (heavens). Yet as we will later see, this Paradise is coming to the earth with father Yahweh.

The three broader levels of heavens used by Scriptures are clearly marked out in the Scriptures:

- Deuteronomy 10:14, "Behold, to Yahweh your *eloahim* (belongs) the *shamayim* (heavens) and the *shamay* (heavens) of the *shamayim* (heavens), the land with all that is on it." Notice that the "the *shamay*," or two of the heavens, are above the *shamayim* and the land (earth).

- 1 Kings 8:27, "Behold, the *shamayim* and the *shamay* of the *shamayim* cannot contain you (Yahweh)."

- Psalm 68:34, speaks of the "*shamay* of the ancient *shamay*."

- Psalm 115:15-16, states that Yahweh made "the *shamayim* and the land." As we shall shortly see, the expression "*shamayim* and land" stand for the first heavens or atmosphere that encircles the earth. This passage goes on to say, "The *shamayim* of *shamayim* is to Yahweh, but the land he has given to the sons of Adam."

Other examples of scriptural passages showing that there are several heavens are found in such passages as Psalm 148:1-4; 2 Chronicles 2:6, 6:18; and Nehemiah 9:6.

Early Christian writers also believed in the existence of only three realms of heavens. Pseudo-Clement, for example, reports that Keph's (Peter's) view was that "there are only two heavens and these created, and that the higher (the third) is the abode of that

light, in which the ineffable father dwells alone eternally."<sup>15</sup>

This evidence reveals that there are three general divisions of the heavens. These three divisions are defined as follows:

### The First Heavens

The definition for the first "heavens" or "heaven" is found in Genesis.

And *eloahim* said, "Let a *רַקִּיעַ* (*raqiya*; open expanse)<sup>16</sup> exist in the midst of the waters, and let it divide between the waters and waters." And *eloahim* made the *רַקִּיעַ* (*raqiya*), and he separated between the waters which were under the *רַקִּיעַ* (*raqiya*) and the waters which were above the *רַקִּיעַ* (*raqiya*), and it was so. And *eloahim* CALLED THE *רַקִּיעַ* (*RAQIYA*) "*SHAMAY-IM* (HEAVENS)." (Genesis 1:6-8)

This statement from Genesis clearly defines the *raqiya* as the open expanse (atmosphere, sky) between the waters above (i.e., the water in the clouds above the earth) and the waters below (i.e., the seas, oceans, and rivers) as a "*shamayim*." In this realm, going high above us, there is *שַׁחַקִּים* (*shakhaqim*; dust and vapors),<sup>17</sup> i.e., dust clouds and vapor clouds of the sky.<sup>18</sup> The creation story in Genesis further defines this open expanse as the place where the birds fly.<sup>19</sup> The following items further identify this first *shamayim*.

- This *shamayim* has clouds.<sup>20</sup>
- Rain comes from this *shamayim*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Paradise" is also used in the Greek of the LXX for the "garden" of Eden which held the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-10, 15-16, 3:1-10, 24), i.e., Renewed Jerusalem (Rev. 2:7).

<sup>15</sup> Ps.-Clement, Recog. 3:14.

<sup>16</sup> See above n. 1.

<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew term *שַׁחַקִּים* (*shakhaqim*), the collective noun form of *שַׁחַק* (*shakhaq*), means, "a powder (as beaten small); by anal. a thin vapor; by extens. the firmament:—cloud, small dust, heaven, sky" (SEC, Heb. #7834); "a cloud . . . the sky" (HEL, p. 264). "sg. coll. (layer of) dust . . . sg. coll. trad. clouds" CHAL: A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. William L. Holladay, p. 366).

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Deut. 33:26; Job 35:5.

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 1:20.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Dan. 7:13; 1 Kings 18:45; Ps. 147:8; Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Gen. 7:11, 8:2; Deut. 28:12; Acts 14:17; James 5:18.

- Dew comes from this *shamayim*.<sup>22</sup>
- The four winds exist in it.<sup>23</sup>
- Frost is of this *shamayim*.<sup>24</sup>
- Snow comes from this *shamayim*.<sup>25</sup>
- Birds fly in this *shamayim*.<sup>26</sup>
- While Yahweh was on top of Mount Sinai, he spoke with the Israelites, “from the *shamayim* (heavens).”<sup>27</sup>

- The walls of fortress cities can reach into this *shamayim*.<sup>28</sup>

It was to this first *shamayim* that Genesis makes reference when discussing the creation of “the *shamayim* and the *eretz* (land, earth).”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, whenever the two terms, *eretz* and *shamayim*, are used in conjunction with one another, it is a reference to the earth and the first heavens.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, when Yahweh creates a “renewed land and renewed heavens,”<sup>31</sup> it is a reference to renewed things on the planet earth and not to a renewed universe.

### The Second Heavens

The second open expanse, defined as a *shamayim*, is above the upper atmospheric waters mentioned in Genesis 1:6-8. Within its bounds are contained the moon, planets, sun, and stars. The following are some examples:

- Deuteronomy 4:19, which speaks of “the sun and the moon, and the stars, all the hosts of the *shamayim*.”
- Psalm 8:3, “When I contemplate your *shamayim*, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have fixed, what is man that you (Yahweh) remember him.”

- Jeremiah 8:2, “the sun, and the moon, and all the host of the *shamayim*.”

Within this realm are the constellations of Orion, Arcturus, and others (e.g., Job 9:9; Amos 5:8).

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### The Third Heavens

Presently, father Yahweh makes his home in the third realm called *shamayim*. The following are examples:

- In the New Testament, father Yahweh is directly said to be dwelling in the heavens, more specifically the third heavens.<sup>32</sup>
- Psalm 103:19, “Yahweh has established his throne in the *shamayim*; and his government rules over all of us.”

- Deuteronomy 26:15, Yahweh’s “sacred habitation” is in the *shamayim*.
- 1 Kings 8:39, Yahweh’s “dwelling place” is in the “*shamayim*.”
- Job 22:12 “Is not *eloah* in the height of *shamayim*? And look at the leading stars, for they are high.”
- Psalm 8:2, which notes that Yahweh’s “glory” is “above the *shamayim*” (i.e., above the second heavens).
- Psalm 11:4, “Yahweh is in his sacred temple; Yahweh, on the *shamayim*, his throne.” Therefore, Yahweh is located in a realm identified with the sacred temple (= the third heavens) and sits upon his throne (= the second heavens).

The above parable of Psalm 11:4 is further explained in Isaiah.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Gen. 27:39; Dan. 5:21; Zec. 8:12.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Dan. 7:2, 8:8, 11:4; Zec. 2:6.

<sup>24</sup> Job 38:29.

<sup>25</sup> Isa. 55:10.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Gen. 1:20, 7:23; Job 35:11; Ps. 104:12; Jer. 15:3; Hos. 7:12.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Exod. 20:22; Deut. 4:36.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Deut. 1:28, 9:1.

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 1:1-2, cf., 1:6-8; also see Exod. 20:11, 31:17; 2 Chron. 2:12; Ps. 146:6; Jer. 32:17, 51:48; Matt. 5:18, 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; Acts 14:15; and so forth.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Gen. 1:1; Exod. 31:17; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 146:6; and so forth.

<sup>31</sup> Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1. This phrase is commonly translated to read, “new earth and new heavens,” but “renewed” gives a better understanding of the meaning of the phrase.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Matt. 5:16, 45, 6:9, 8:21, 12:50, 16:17, 18:14; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 11:2; etc. This particular “heaven(s)” is specified as the “third heavens” in 2 Cor. 12:1-5.

Thus says Yahweh, the *shamayim* is my throne, and the *eretz* the stool of my feet. (Isaiah 66:1)<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, parabolically speaking, the earth (which contains the first heavens) is the footstool beneath the throne (being the second heavens). Accordingly, Yahweh's head is in the third, his body sets upon the second, and his feet rest within the first heavens, which is located just above the land.

### Yahushua Ascended to the Third Heavens

It was to the highest of heavens that Yahushua went after his resurrection and quickening. Using a different parable regarding the throne than that which is found in Psalm, 11:4 and Isaiah, 66:1 we have the following evidence:

- 1 Peter 3:21-22, mentions the resurrection of Yahushua the messiah, "who is at the right hand of Yahweh, gone into οὐρανόν (*ouranon*; heaven = *shamayim* = the third heavens), angels and authorities and powers having been subjected to him."

- Ephesians 1:20-21, notes that father Yahweh has "raised him (the messiah) from out of the dead, and he set him at his (the father's) right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality and authority and power and lordship, and every name named," etc.

- Hebrews 8:1, states, "we have a high priest (Yahushua), who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens."

- Hebrews 4:14, notes that after his resurrection, having become our new high priest, Yahushua "passed through the ouranos (heavens)" to reach his present post. This statement indicates that Yahushua passed through the lower heavens to reach Yahweh's throne in the highest or third level of the heavens.

- Ephesians 4:10, states that the messiah is said to have "ascended above (beyond) all the heavens" when he returned to father Yahweh.

Many other scriptural verses likewise show that the messiah ascended into the highest of the heavens to sit at the right hand of father Yahweh and his throne, which in this parable is located in the third (highest) heavens.<sup>34</sup>

The present inaccessibility of father Yahweh by mortal humans is demonstrated in 1 Timothy 6:16, which states that it is the father "who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, who no one of mankind has seen nor is able to see; to whom is honor and eternal might."

Therefore, mankind in its present mortal condition, except in visions,<sup>35</sup> is unable to approach or even see father Yahweh. This fact also explains the following comments from Yahushua the messiah:

No one has seen the deity at any time; the only begotten son, who is in the bosom of the father, he has declared him. (John 1:18)

And the father who sent me, himself has borne witness concerning me. Neither his voice have you heard at any time, nor his form have you seen. (John 5:37)

It is written in the prophets, "And they will all be taught of Yahweh." Therefore, everyone that has heard (the message) from the father and has learned from it, comes to me: not that anyone has seen the father, except he (preexistent Yahushua) who is from the deity, he has seen the father. (John 6:45-46, quoting Isa. 54:13)

Therefore, mankind in its present mortal condition, except in visions, is unable to approach or even see father Yahweh.

<sup>33</sup> Also see Acts 7:49.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., Matt. 22:44; Heb. 1:3; Ps. 110:1; etc.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Dan. 7:9-13; Rev. 4:1-5:14; 2 Cor. 12:1-5.

On the other hand, angels are *ruach* beings capable of seeing father Yahweh. As Yahushua reminds us, there are angels in the heavens who “continually behold the face of my father who is in the heavens.”<sup>36</sup>

This evidence proves that the “*shamayim*” to which Yahushua ascended was the third realm, a place beyond the farthest stars, a realm or dimension of unapproachable light. Accordingly, it clarifies Yahushua’s statement, quoted in John 3:13, that no mortal human being “has gone up into the (third) heavens, except he who came down out of the (third) heavens, the son of man (the messiah), who was in the heavens.”

### Conclusion

All of these above scriptural facts and points of logic deny any suggestion that before death, the mortal, fleshly bodies of the pious go off to the third heavens. Neither is there any evidence of the concept of an immortal soul of any righteous person ascending to the third heavens upon death.

Both the pious and the wicked go to *sheol* upon death to sleep and await their resurrection at the beginning of the Millennial Judgment Day. Neither does the dead *nephesh* (person) have any conscious state of existence while in *sheol*. The human *nephesh* is mortal, not immortal. As we demonstrate in our Article titled “The Human *Nephesh* (Soul)

Mortal or Immortal?,” one must be quickened into immortality after their resurrection into a mortal incorruptible body.

No human—except for the messiah, and then only during his previous life as a deity and then later, after his resurrection and quickening—has ever been in the third heavens where father Yahweh dwells. Mortal flesh-and-blood humans are incapable of even being near or seeing the face of father Yahweh.

Neither can a dead *nephesh* (person) in the state of *sheol* praise or thank Yahweh.

Therefore, all humans must await their resurrection and, if they later qualify, their quickening into immortal *ruach*-type beings. Then after being perfected, they can actually behold father Yahweh and live as he arrives on the earth.

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from the deity (Yahweh) out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of the deity (Yahweh) is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and the deity (Yahweh) himself shall be with them, and be their deity (*eloahim*). (Rev. 21:2-3)

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<sup>36</sup> Matt. 18:10.