

According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament the definition of *paradise* is a "grand enclosure or preserve, park, shady and well watered, garden, grove"

In many Bible versions the verse in [Luke 23:43](#) is mispunctuated. At the time the New Testament was written, there was no punctuation in the original Greek manuscripts. Only a continuous string of letters, with no spaces between words or paragraphs. Therefore, when the translators supplied the commas in the English, they were placed where the translators thought they should be. (Note that in most instances the punctuation mark is placed correctly. In this particular instance it is not). Therefore, the appropriate position for the comma is after the word 'today,' and the verse should correctly read: "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise." The word 'today' emphasizes the 'time' of Jesus promise, not the time when there will be paradise. Jesus perceived the man's repentant attitude and told him that he would ultimately live again in a future paradise on Earth. The thief is still dead in his grave, and the perfect utopian paradise is yet to come!

Why does the Book of Matthew frequently use the phrase 'Kingdom of heaven?'

Some Biblical scholars speculate that the Matthean text adopted the Greek word for "heaven" instead of the Greek word for "God." Matthew was a Jew who was writing for a Jewish audience and it was a Jewish custom to avoid using God's name as an act of piety. In the Book of Matthew, "heaven" stands for "God."

We eagerly and joyfully await the glorious return of Jesus Christ, and establishment of a one supreme world-ruling government and Kingdom of God! After the Millennial reign of Christ, when God's plan for man is complete, and the saints will have been given glorious spirit bodies, and incorrigible wicked have ceased to exist, there will be a new heavens and new earth, completely renewed and refurbished (after the present earth's surface is purified by fire), where the sparkling, glorious Holy City, new Jerusalem, with streets of pure gold will be world capital. The new Jerusalem will be the location of the very throne of God the Father, the very headquarters from which God will rule all His creation and He will dwell on the earth! (Read tract: 'Hell & Unquenchable Fire!').

Scriptural References:

Malachi 4:1-3
Matthew 3:2
Matthew 4:17
Matthew 5:1-12
Matthew 5:17-20
Matthew 6:10
Matthew 7:21
Matthew 10:7
Matthew 11:12
Matthew 13:1-52
Matthew 18:1-9
Matthew 19:10-12, 13-15, 16-30
Matthew 20:1-16
Matthew 22:1-14
Matthew 23:13
Matthew 25:1-13
John 3:1-8, 13
1 Corinthians 6:9-10
Galatians 3:26-29
Galatians 5:19-21
Philippians 2:9-11
1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, 13-18
2 Timothy 4:18
Hebrews 6:12
James 2:5
2 Peter 3:1-18
Revelation 5:10
Revelation 20:5-6

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Is Heaven Your Reward?

Many professing Christians believe that they will instantly ascend to heaven upon death, where they will be welcomed by angels who will surround them in a place of peace and tranquility, with golden harps sounding, bells of heaven ringing and angel voices singing. What does the Bible teach about heaven? Will you go to heaven and meet all your friends and relatives there, and be greeted by all the angels with rejoicing and singing?

Will you go to heaven? The Bible clearly teaches that only Jesus who came down from heaven is ascended to heaven: John 3:13 - *No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.*

There is no scripture in the Bible that mentions Christians ascending directly to heaven upon death. The Book of Daniel mentions that multitudes are still in their graves and death is compared to sleep. Daniel 12:2 states: *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (Also Jn 11:11-14).* There is no consciousness in death (Ecc 9:5). You, your friends and relatives will not immediately ascend to heaven upon death. Everyone who has died since the beginning of time is still in the grave awaiting resurrection (1 Th 4:13-18; Rev 20:5). This means, that only Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven (Heb 8:1).

Where did this theory come from? The theory of 'ascending to heaven upon death' and that 'heaven is the reward of the saved' was neither taught by Jesus nor His apostles, nor the early Church. This false teaching became popular long after the death of the apostles and came directly out of ancient pagan mythology, along with other false theories such as the immortality of the soul and an ever-burning hell. Many of the beliefs of professing Christians concerning "ascending to heaven" come from the ancient Egyptians. The later allegedly Christian belief in an 'afterlife in heaven' supplanted the true teaching of the Bible (Read tract: 'Hell And Unquenchable Fire').

What is the true teaching of the Bible? The early true Christians believed in the establishment of the Kingdom of God and millennial reign of Christ on the earth after their resurrection. The Kingdom of God will be located here on the earth (not up in heaven). (Rev 5:10).

Scriptures reveal that at the return of Jesus Christ, true Christians will inherit the promises of God which include: **1) Eternal Life. 2) Kingdom of God. 3) Entire Earth.** What an amazing future and destiny! Children of God will receive their **eternal inheritance** once they receive **eternal life** at the resurrection, when Jesus Christ returns to resurrect the righteous dead and establish God's Kingdom and supreme world government.

Those who belong to Christ (Spirit-begotten Christians) and whom God has called, regardless of color, race or nationality are qualified to become heirs to the promises God made to Abraham. An individual must become an obedient Christian - a co-heir with Christ to qualify to receive eternal inheritance. Thus far, only Christ has inherited the promises and He came to "confirm" them in His ministry. Abraham is important to Christians because God made him a promise to which Christians are heirs. God's promise made to Abraham was conditioned only on obedience (Gen 22:15-18). It includes inheritance of the entire earth, but does not include heaven.

The Apostle Paul addressed Gentile-born converts in Galatia and wrote in Galatians 3:16,29 that Christians are now only heirs to the promises. Not yet inheritors.

In Matthew 5:1-12, known as the beatitudes, Jesus described who will inherit God's promises. Among those, He mentioned the poor in spirit, meek and persecuted. In other words, those who are humble, truly repentant, obedient and submissive to God.

Scripture also reveals who will not inherit God's promises, which include the Kingdom of God in: Revelation 21:8 - *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*

Why did Christ ascend to heaven? To prepare positions of rulership for Christians and to return with those rewards. Christ said that He is preparing "mansions." (Jn 14:2). More correctly translated "abodes" or "dwelling places." These abodes refer to rooms in the "Father's house," or God's temple occupied by God's priests, representing positions of authority and responsibility. God's saints will be rewarded with these positions in God's Kingdom at Christ's return!

Will Christians go up to heaven for 1,000 years? Some Christians believe that John 14:2-3 means that we will be up in heaven for 1,000 years, since God has prepared mansions there for us. If we closely examine the scriptures, both John 2:16 & John 14:2 mention '**my Father's house**.' But nowhere does Jesus refer to heaven as the 'Father's house.'

John 2:16 states - *'And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.'* Jesus drove out all the money changers from the temple. He was referring to '**my Father's house**' as the '**temple**.' Both verses in John 2:14 & 15 mention '**temple**.'

Therefore, Jesus could not be referring to both the 'temple' and 'heaven' as being the 'Father's house.' The word "mansions" in John 14:2 is translated from a word meaning 'dwelling places.' Built around the exterior wall of the temple were numerous chambers for priests to counsel worshippers privately. People hearing Christ were familiar with the temple and therefore would instantly have understood His words to refer to these chambers in the abovementioned verses. Jesus reassured His disciples that He was going to prepare a "place" or position of service for them. Jesus made a promise in John 14 to His disciples that they would have a place with Him and not be forsaken.

Acts 1:11 mentions *'Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'* This prophecy refers to Christ being on earth.

Rev 5:10 & 20:6 also mention the important positions of authority in the Kingdom of God that Jesus will give to His disciples upon His return. To serve God as Kings (rulers) and priests (teachers) for 1,000 years.

Rev 5:10 - *'And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth'* & Rev 20:6 - *'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.'*

Saints of God will begin ruling over the remainder of the earth's population at Christ's return (Isaiah 24:1-6,13). Verse 6 states that few men will be left after the Lord's devastation of the earth. (Also Isaiah 17:4-6) (Read tract: 'Signs of the End Of The Age').

Will there be a resurrection of the dead? When the seventh and last trumpet sounds, Christ will return to resurrect the saints and establish the supreme world-ruling Kingdom of God on the earth. His saints will assist Him in ruling over the nations (Rev 11:15).

Matthew 25:34 - *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*

Revelation 20:5-6 - *(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

The righteous saints who are alive at the time, including the righteous dead (who will be resurrected) will be changed from mortal, flesh and blood human beings to glorious immortal spirit beings, and share in the divine eternal nature of God. The corruptible flesh, that is subject to death and decay will be completely transformed to an immortal, incorruptible spirit body. The resurrection from mortal flesh and blood bodies to glorious spirit bodies is vitally important because flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. We must be born again - born of God and born of the Spirit! (Read tract: 'Are you born again?').

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 states: *'I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.'*

Christ will come down from heaven, at His return, accompanied by a loud command, the voice of an archangel and trumpet call of God. The (righteous) dead in Christ will rise first, and we (righteous) who are alive at the time, will be gathered up together with them in the clouds to **meet** the Lord in the air, and we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Are Moses and Elijah in heaven? No. The transfiguration is recorded in Mt 17:1-13. In Matthew 17:9 Jesus clearly said it was a vision. He told Peter, James and John to 'tell the **vision** to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.' It was a vision of the future resurrection where our bodies will be raised as glorious bodies (1 Co 15:43). It was also a partial vision of the Kingdom of God as though it were actually there (Lk 9:27). Furthermore, since Christ is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:17-18; Rev 1:5), Moses and Elijah could not be resurrected before Christ.

In the OT, did Elijah go to heaven? In 2 Kings 2:11, it states "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Which heaven? Scriptures reveal there are three heavens. Third heaven is the highest heavens or God's dwelling place—God's throne and the heavens where Jesus is at the "right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb 8:1). Heaven is specifically named God's "holy dwelling place" (Dt 26:15). Also called "third heaven" (2 Cor 12:2). Christ "ascended up far above all heavens" (Eph 4:10). Third heaven is described as such because it is far above the other two which are in the natural or physical realm.

Second heaven referred to in the scriptures as outer space is where the sun, moon, stars, planets, asteroids and comets which God has ordained are located (Ps 8:3). Numerous verses refer to the "stars of heaven" (Gen 26:4; Dt 1:10; Is 13:10).

First heaven closest to us is the envelope of air encircling our planet, consisting of oxygen and other gases. Earth's atmosphere stated in Gen 7:11-12, describes the great flood of Noah's day. Scriptures also mention the birds of heaven in Jer 16:4; Rev 19:17. It was to this location that Elijah was taken.

We must look at the context of passages. In 1 Kings 19:16, God told Elijah he was to anoint Elisha as a prophet to succeed him. Later, as the two men walked together, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" (2 Ki 2:9). This led to a conversation about God's gift to Elisha that would permit him to fill Elijah's role. In 2 Ki 2:11, "Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind." Elisha was the new leader of Elijah's former followers (2 Ki 2:15). Sons of the prophets knew the whirlwind had simply removed Elijah to another location on the earth (2 Ki 2:16).

In the next Book of the Bible, after the Book of "Kings" is the Book of "Chronicles," where Jehoram King of Judah receives a letter from Elijah the prophet a few years after he was removed by the whirlwind (2 Chron 21:12). This letter is conclusive evidence that the prophet Elijah was still alive on earth a few years after he was removed by the whirlwind and replaced by Elisha. God had chosen Elisha to succeed Elijah as His prophet, so He boldly removed Elijah to another location, where he continued to live for a further few more years, as the letter clearly reveals.

After this letter, nothing else is known about Elijah's life. But eventually he died just like the other prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament. Heb 11:39 states that these all died in faith, not yet receiving God's promise—the resurrection to eternal life in the Kingdom. Therefore, Elijah was transported to another location here on earth, not to eternal life in the heavens. John 3:13 clearly states that no one is ascended to heaven. Only He who came down from heaven - Jesus Christ! Scripture never contradicts itself!

Didn't the thief on the cross go to heaven with Jesus that very day?

No. Christ Himself had not yet ascended to heaven that day. Instead, He was placed in a tomb, where He was in the heart of the earth, three days and three nights as He Himself stated in Matthew 12:40.

Also, observe the context of the following verse where the thief asked Jesus a question in Luke 23:42 - *Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* But Jesus has not yet come into His Kingdom. He will establish His Kingdom at His awesome return! Luke 23:43 - *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* The word *paradise* describes the earth when God's Kingdom will be established. It does not mean heaven at all, since God's Word clearly mentions that God's saints will reign on the Earth in: Revelation 5:10 - *You have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."*