

## **Was Paul Taken For A Ride?** *A Short Bible Study on 2 Corinthians 12:1–6*

By Jim Shaull

### **Get out your Bible and follow along with this article!**

In II Cor. 12, Paul relates to us a special event in someone's life. "I knew a man in Christ...", for not let's assume that Paul is speaking about himself in the third person "lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations", verse 7. What happened to Paul? Did he have a vision, or was he taken somewhere? Did he see heaven or paradise? What is "the third heaven"?

#### THE THIRD HEAVEN.

Peter is very helpful in determining what is "the third heaven". In II Peter, chapter three, he tells us about an old world (heavens and earth) that was destroyed by water (the flood) and he talks about "the heavens and the earth, which are now". Next, Peter talks about our hope; "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness". So, to Peter's way of thinking, the first heaven was before the flood, the second is now, and the "third heaven" shall be brought into existence after "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men".

To add strength to this idea, in II Cor. 12, Paul seems to be telling us that "the third heaven" and "paradise" are the same thing. Read verses 2–4.

#### PARADISE

Where, or what, is "paradise"? The word "paradise" is found in Scripture only 3 times (II Cor. 12:4, Luke 23:43, and Rev. 2:7). The thief on the cross asked Jesus to "remember me when you come into your kingdom". Jesus told the man that he would "be with me in paradise". Here, Jesus has made another connection. Not only is paradise and the third heaven that same thing, but also paradise and "the kingdom" are the same thing!

Since all these refer to the same thing, if we can figure where one is, or will be, we can figure the others too. In Rev. 2:7, Jesus says, "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Where, in scripture, do we find "the tree of life"? First, it was on the earth in the garden in Eden (Gen. 2:9) and next, it shall be, according to Rev. 21 & 22, after judgment day, on either side of the river "of water of life" in the Kingdom on a new earth. Daniel also tells us (7:22–27) that the "everlasting kingdom" (i.e., "the third heaven") will be after "judgment", "under the whole heaven" ("under", not "in").

"Paradise", "the third heaven", and "the kingdom" are one and the same, and this is what Paul say. What Paul actually saw was/is the future! The question now is, how did he see the future (the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness")?

#### IN AND OUT OF THE BODY

Many have used the words, "whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell" to try to prove many things. Notice first, nowhere does it say this man (whether you believe him to be Paul or someone else) died. So, these words prove nothing about dead

people! Second, this scripture cannot be used to prove that a man can live without a body! If Paul couldn't "tell" (i.e., prove it), how can we? So what did the writer mean? I believe the experience was such that Paul was not sure whether he only saw these things in his mind (i.e., a vision) or whether he actually participated. Is this "confusion" possible?

Read Acts 12:1–11. Not until Peter was outside the prison did he realize this was an "in the body" experience (it was really happening) and was not an "out of the body" experience (in his mind only and without any participation from his body.)

God at times revealed things to Bible characters in such powerful fashions that it was hard for them to tell if it was only a vision (without the body taking part) or if it was really happening. I believe this revelation was such that Paul was not sure whether he actually was "caught up" or whether he only saw these things in a vision.

### BEING CAUGHT UP

What about these words "caught up"? The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:39, where Philip and the Ethiopian are coming up out of the water after baptism and the writer says the spirit of the Lord "caught away" Philip. In the next verse, where does it say Philip was found? Up in "heaven"? No! it says "Philip was found at Azotus"! So, "caught up"/"caught away" (the Greek word "harpazo") does not indicate direction; it doesn't necessarily mean "up"!

As I said before, what Paul actually saw was the future, and he wasn't sure if he only saw it in a vision or whether he was actually taken there. You may well ask, "Is time travel possible" (a popular subject in movies)? My answer, if there is a power capable of "time travel" it is the power that "caught up" this "man in Christ"! I think it most likely that he was given a vision of the kingdom on the new earth (i.e., the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness, the third heaven. Remember, the heavens of old [the first] and the earth were overflowed with water and perished, according to Peter, and the heavens and the earth, which are now (the second), are reserved unto fire on the day of judgment).

I think it most likely that he only had a vision and was not taken there, but since Paul could not tell, neither can I! One thing I can tell, he was not taken to God's heaven! Paul himself tells us in I Timothy 6:16 that Jesus is "dwelling in the light which NO MAN can approach". "NO MAN" includes live men, dead men, and any other kind of man that you can think of! I have never said that Paul did not know whether he went to "heaven" or not. I have never said that Paul did not know whether he left his body or not. It would be strange for me to teach that a man left his body and yet was still able to see and hear without any eyes to see with or any ears to hear with! No, he was either taken to "paradise" (i.e., the eternal kingdom on a new earth), or he saw it in a vision!

\*\*\*\*\*  
Copyright, 1992, Pastor's Library Foundation. This article may be copied freely for wider distribution, providing that the source from which it is taken is suitably acknowledged. (Acknowledgment: Resurrection Magazine, Volume 95, Summer 1992; published by Pastor's Library Foundation, Sterling, VA.) This notice must remain attached to article.  
\*\*\*\*\*