

## Paragraph 21

[Footnote]

\*\*\* w18 December p. 8 Questions From Readers  
\*\*\*

### Questions From Readers

In what sense was the apostle Paul “caught away to the third heaven” and “into paradise”?—2 Cor. 12:2-4.

▪ At 2 Corinthians 12:2, 3, Paul refers to a certain man who was “caught away to the third heaven.” Who was that? Writing to the Corinthian congregation, Paul stressed that God was using him as an apostle. (2 Cor. 11:5, 23) He then mentioned “visions and revelations of the Lord.” Paul did not in that context mention other brothers. Thus, he was logically referring to himself as being the man who had received visions and revelations.—2 Cor. 12:1, 5.

So Paul was the one who was “caught away to the third heaven” and “caught away into paradise.” (2 Cor. 12:2-4) He used the term “revelations,” which suggests a revealing of what will exist in the future.

What did Paul see as “the third heaven”?

In the Bible, “heaven” can refer to the physical heavens. (Gen. 11:4; 27:28; Matt. 6:26) But “heaven” is also used in other senses. Sometimes it refers to human rulership. (Dan. 4:20-22) Or it can refer to divine rulership, such as through the Kingdom of God.—Rev. 21:1.

Paul saw “the third heaven.” What was the point? The Bible occasionally repeats something three times for emphasis, to show intensity, or to imply added strength. (Isa. 6:3; Ezek. 21:27; Rev. 4:8) It seems that in speaking of “the third heaven,” Paul was stressing a superlative, an exalted, form of rulership—the Messianic Kingdom by Jesus Christ and his 144,000 corulers. (See *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, pp. 1059, 1062.) As the apostle Peter wrote, we are awaiting the “new heavens” according to God’s promise.—2 Pet. 3:13.

What about Paul’s mention of “paradise”?

The word “paradise” likewise can mean various things: (1) In view of man’s original home, “paradise” can logically refer to the literal earthly Paradise that is ahead. (2) It can refer to the spiritual condition that God’s people will enjoy in the new world. (3) Additionally, it can refer to the blessed conditions in heaven, “the paradise of God” mentioned at Revelation 2:7.—See *The Watchtower*, July 15, 2015, p. 8. par. 8.

It is possible that Paul was alluding to all three of those aspects at 2 Corinthians 12:4 when describing his experience.

To summarize:

“The third heaven” mentioned at 2 Corinthians 12:2 is likely the Messianic Kingdom in the hands of Jesus Christ and the 144,000, the “new heavens.”—2 Pet. 3:13.

It is “the third heaven” because the Kingdom is a superlative, an elevated, form of rulership.

The “paradise” into which Paul was “caught away” in vision likely refers to (1) the physical Paradise to come on earth, (2) the spiritual paradise that will exist then, which will be more extensive than the spiritual paradise that exists now, and (3) “the paradise of God” in heaven that will coexist in the new world.

Accordingly, the new world will be a combination of the new heavens and the new earth. It will be a new arrangement, including both the heavenly Kingdom government and mankind serving Jehovah on a paradise earth.