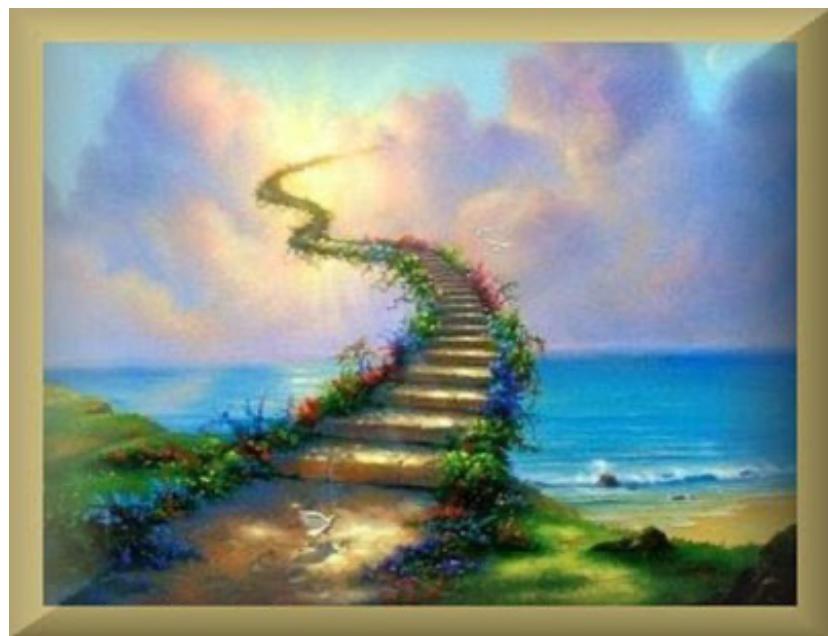


THE THIRD HEAVEN OF WHICH PAUL SPEAKS IN SECOND CORINTHIANS

Remember: Scripture first... Experience, feelings, and speculation a distant 2nd.



2 Corinthians 12:1-10, "I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-God knows.** ³ And I know that this man-whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows - ⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. ⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, ⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My

grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

I think the man that Paul speaks about who was caught up to the 3rd heaven was Paul himself (remember that he is trying to show the Corinthians his credentials as a servant of the most High God... a follower, yet an authorized speaker for Jesus Christ in his time).

For the person that tries to understand beyond what man can comprehend, it is more than one can imagine. For a person like this, the great aim of all religious experience is the vision of God and union with him.

For this type of person he/she always aims at that moment of wonder when "the seer and the Seen are one."

Traditionally, the Jews stated in historical documents that there were four (4) rabbis that had this vision of God:

1. **Ben Azai... had seen the glory and died**
2. **Ben Soma... beheld it and went mad**
3. **Acher... saw it and went on a rampage to tear up the Garden of God... Paradise. He became a heretic.**
4. **Akiba... alone ascended in peace and in peace came back.**

Note: Understand, the above documents are not mentioned in the Word of God. It is just found in the historical documents of the Jews.

We can't even guess what happened to Paul... We can only speculate: How many heavens... Paul mentions the 3rd heaven...

He simply means that his spirit rose to an unsurpassable ecstasy in being near the Most High God.

However, it's important to make a distinction between the eternal state and the current heaven. When a believer dies, he or she goes to heaven (spirit and soul), but that is not our final destination. The Bible speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21) as

our eternal, permanent home (each of us with a new immortal body).

My interpretation: Paul speaks of the 3rd heaven.

1st heaven = The heaven created by God called "heaven" (Genesis 1, KJV)... "firmament called heaven."

2nd heaven = where we will go until the end of the 7 year tribulation

3rd heaven = the new heaven and new earth spoken of in Revelation 21

Note: In the Scripture, Paul speaks about Paradise.

Paradise comes from a Persian word meaning "walled-garden." When a Persian King wished to confer a very special honor on someone, he made him a companion of the garden... and gave him a right to walk in the royal gardens with him in conversation and companionship as a friend.

I speculate that in this experience, as never before, Paul had been the companion of God.

There is another verse of which Paul speaks of "heavens" (plural).

Ephesians 4:10, *"He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe."*

So... again, we can speculate... but, we must stay within the inside borders of Scripture. All other documents and man's guesses have, in many cases, shown a lack of authenticity.

I have on many occasions had to say to myself, "Gerald, does Scripture go along with what you believe?"

Remember: Scripture first... Experience, feelings, and speculation a distant 2nd.