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(Area #1) - There is the first heaven, which is the atmospheric heaven, where the birds fly and clouds form (Ps. 104:12; Hos. 2:18; Dan. 7:13; Acts 14:17).

A real, visible, tangible place.

(Area #2) - There is the second heaven, the stellar heaven, where the stars and planets are located, including the sun and moon (Gen. 1:14-18). A real, visible, tangible place.

(Area #3) - There is the third heaven, the throne of God heaven, which is the place of God's residency and presence, where God the Son and Father now are (Acts 1:9-11). There is solid evidence that heaven is a very real material place. Stephen certainly indicated he saw some very real place when he was being executed. In fact, he said he saw heaven, the glory of God and Jesus Christ standing at His right hand (Acts 7:55-56). Also the writer of Hebrews said that Jesus finished the work and went back into heaven and "sat down" (Heb. 10:12). You don't sit down unless you are in a real place to sit down.

We must logically assume this third heaven is as real as the first two.

Reality #2 - Jesus Christ, who was a real Person in history, actually said He came from heaven, which He identified as His father's house. John 6:28, 42; 14:2

Now those who deny heaven is a real place say that Jesus was just using anthropomorphic language—which is just using language and terms that humans can understand. But when we track things Jesus said, we must conclude that Jesus treated heaven as being a very real place. As we said, 1) He taught He came from heaven; 2) He taught it was His Father's house; 3) He taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," which churches still pray today. Now why would Jesus say these things about some place that does not really materially exist? Jesus obviously knew of this place, heaven, as a very real place.

Since Jesus Christ said He would prove He was telling the truth about Himself by His resurrection, which He literally did, we logically conclude He is telling the factual truth about heaven. Based on what Jesus said, it is better to view heaven as a real, tangible place.

Reality #3 - The Apostle Paul said he actually was caught up to the third heaven. **II Cor.12:2-4**

Paul was one of the most logical thinkers in history, which his letters and epistles prove. He is still celebrated in Turkey for some of the places he visited, such as Ephesus. When he says he actually saw heaven, he is not the kind of man to make up some delusional story. Since he specifies it is the third heaven, we conclude it is as real as the first two which we can actually see now.

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Reality #4 - The Apostle John said he actually was transported to heaven (Rev. 4:1-2).

Now since we can actually see two of the three heavens right now, I assume the third heaven is just as real. Now when one visits the island of Patmos, they will tell you the Apostle John received his vision from Jesus Christ and wrote the book of Revelation from that very island, which Revelation reveals (Rev.1:9). So when John says he saw a throne standing in heaven and One sitting on the throne (Rev. 4:2), we will assume John is telling the truth about that place just as real as Patmos.

There is no doubt that the apostles clearly believed and taught about a real place known as heaven. There is an historical writing known as the Didache, which supposedly gave a synopsis of the teaching of the twelve apostles to the Gentiles. In their discussion of end times, they said that one of the first signs of the coming of Christ will be “an opening in heaven.” It is obvious from this that the early church clearly believed in a literal heaven (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 158).

Reality #5 - The Bible, as we previously mentioned, refers to heaven as being a real place in hundreds of passages and the Bible has always proved to be telling the truth on any other subject it discusses.

Three scientific proofs of this are: 1) Archaeology; 2) Fulfilled prophecy; 3) Scientific Discovery. Archeological discoveries have proved the Bible is accurate in discussing the various places where events happened. The prophecies that are made in the Bible, which we are able to track, have a literal and truthful fulfillment. Science has actually determined that the Bible is very truthful on many subjects. For example, there were various theories that existed about the earth. The Egyptians believed that the earth was held on five great pillars. The Greeks believed the earth was supported by the shoulder of Atlas. The Hindus believe the earth was held up by an elephant. Even when Christopher Columbus set sail in the 1400's, the scientists thought the world was flat.

Now Isaiah 40:22 says that there is sphericity to the earth. The word “vault” (NASV), “circle” (NIV & KJV) is a word that refers to a sphere or circle. Job 26:7 says the earth “hangs on nothing.” Eventually with the development of space technology, science was able to prove the truth of the Bible. So since the Bible has proved to always be true on any subject it addresses, we conclude it is true when it speaks of heaven.

Reality #6 - The history of the church starting with the early church fathers until this very day substantiates the existence of Heaven.

- 1) Ignatius (A.D. 110) said that Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins that he might “preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom.”
- 2) Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) said that Jesus Christ saves us “and has undertaken to provide an eternal kingdom.”

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- 3) Irenaeus (A.D. 125-202) said all who believe in Christ have a hope in “the commencement of the Eternal Kingdom.”
- 4) Cyprian (A.D. 200-258) said, “think of the future only, with contempt for the present, that you may be able to come to the fruit of the eternal kingdom.”
- 5) Augustine (A.D. 354-430) said, “Christ is the head of the Church, which is His body, destined to be with Him in His eternal kingdom and glory.”

Ultimately, what one believes comes down to faith, but faith in heaven is the most logical and rational thing to believe.

QUESTION #4 – What does the Biblical word “heaven” actually mean?

The doctrine of our future destiny depends completely on what is revealed in the inspired Scriptures and God uses various inspired words to describe it. One word that is used is the noun “Heaven.” We may analyze the actual word by breaking it down into two categories:

Category #1 - The word “heaven” in the Old Testament.

The O.T. Hebrew word for “heaven” is “shamayim” (shah-mah-yim). **This particular word was used to refer to several things and the context will determine the meaning.** For example, in the O.T. law (Exodus 20:4), Moses divided up the cosmos into three parts—1) Heaven above; 2) Earth below heaven; 3) Water from under the earth. **Heaven in that context refers to all that is above the earth.**

William Gesenius said this Hebrew word is used to describe the place above the earth that is the “abode of God” (*Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 834). The particular interest of this doctrinal study is the use of the noun heaven to describe the upper region dwelling place and presence of the Jehovah/God (YHWH, Elohim).

Gerhard Kittel observed, “Most of the references to heaven which are important for Israel’s faith speak of Yahweh’s dwelling in heaven” (*Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. 5, p. 504). The idea that Jehovah was the God who lived up in heaven and had a throne in heaven is seen starting in Genesis (Gen. 11:4-5, 7; 19:24; 24:3, 7). Also see Job 1:6-12; Psalm 103:19; 104:2-3.

In O.T. times, heaven was not generally considered to be the place where O.T. believers went who died. Heaven was God’s dwelling place, but not the dwelling place of humans who died. Heaven was the place from which God gave His blessings (Gen. 49:25; Deut. 33:13; I Kings 8:35), but not where He took people to live with Him. Although in Elijah’s case it certainly would be in the mind that one could be taken to heaven (II Kings 2:11). Furthermore, at the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, both Moses and Elijah appeared from heaven (Matt. 17:3-4).

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Many theologians teach that Old Testament believers went to a place of comfort, Abraham's bosom, until their sins were paid for by Jesus Christ, thus opening up the possibility of actual entrance into the heaven which is the residency of God.

Category #2 - The word "heaven" in the New Testament.

It is the New Testament and, specifically Jesus Christ, who takes us to a new dimension of understanding about heaven.

The most often used word for "heaven" is the N.T. Greek word "ouranos" (οὐρανός). Gerhard Kittel says that the Septuagint (Greek Translation of the O.T. Hebrew) uses this word 667 times and the New Testament uses this word 284 times (Vol. 5, p. 509, 513). **This word also refers to the upper region dwelling place and the presence and home of God.**

QUESTION #5 – What are some other Biblical words connected with the idea of heaven?

Other than the word "heaven," there are nine more words that are used in connection to a place where one goes when one leaves this world.

(Word #2) - There is the noun Paradise.

The actual Greek word "paradise" (παράδεισος) is one that refers to a garden-type park that is very pleasurable. In the N.T. this word is found three times—Luke 23:43; II Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7. Jewish teaching placed paradise as a part of Hades, which was a place of comfort for the believer who died. G. Abbott-Smith said that this was the "abode of the blessed dead" (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 339).

(Word #3) - There is the noun Sheol.

The first thing to know is that Sheol is not always an equivalent of hell. Hell refers to a place of future punishment. Sheol is an O.T. word that refers to a specific place where people go when they die. The KJV translates this word "hell" 31 times; "grave" 31 times; "pit" 3 times.

The actual Hebrew word "sheol" means a hollow, subterranean place (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 798). **Sheol is a name of a subterranean O.T. place of post mortem existence for all people who died; both believer and unbeliever. It is a subterranean place apparently comprised of two chambers, upper and lower. The upper is a place of comfort and the lower is a place of torment.**

Genesis 37:35- Sheol was the place where Jacob anticipated he would go when he died. This is the first reference to Sheol in the Bible (42:38).

Numbers 16:30 - Sheol is a place to which one descends, not ascends when one dies (v. 29).

Numbers 16:33 - Sheol is a place in which people may be sent while alive—it is a living place.

I Samuel 2:6 - God is the one who determines when a person dies and goes down into Sheol.