

The Bible opens with the sentence:

- *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)*

How creation came into being is not stated, but the Bible uses the word 'heaven' in three different contexts:

- The first heaven, the heaven we see when we look at the sky.
- The second heaven, also called the heavenly realms.
- The third heaven, God's dwelling place.

Heaven as God's dwelling place – also called the third heaven.

In the Psalms it is stated that heaven is the place where God dwells:

- *From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth. (Psalm 33:13-14)*

The apostle Paul calls God's dwelling place the third heaven, when he writes:

- *I know a man in Christ who ... was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this man - whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows - was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)*

When Jesus was nailed to a cross at the end of His life, two murderers were also crucified with Him, one at each side.

One of them recognised who Jesus was and asked Him:

- *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. (Luke 23:42)*

Jesus answered him:

- *Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:43)*

Here heaven is called the Kingdom of Jesus.

Jesus often talked about 'the Kingdom of heaven' in His teaching.

And on the cross He Himself calls it: 'paradise'.

It is God's desire that **all** men should receive the citizens' rights of the Kingdom of heaven and that they should live forever in the heavenly paradise, in God's presence, after their death in this world.

The third heaven is also the dwelling place of the angels.

Jesus said:

- *See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)*

And when Jesus was taken prisoner, and did not want His disciples to fight for Him, He said:

- *Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53 - a legion consisted of 5,000 to 8,000 soldiers.)*

The angels are sent to help people.

- *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)*

The third heaven is situated in the spiritual, unseen world.

There is more to be found about angels here.¹

The heaven we see – the first heaven.

When earth was created, when God formed the firmament, it is said:

- *God called the vault “sky”. (Genesis 1:8)*

When we look up, outside, we see the first heaven, the sky, the clouds, the firmament.

The first heaven is situated round about the earth, in the visible world.

The heavenly realms – the second heaven.

Between heaven, God’s dwelling place, and earth, man’s dwelling place, there is a spiritual, invisible world, which the Bible calls ‘the heavenly realms’.

Man can exercise influence in this unseen world, in the heavenly realms, through his behaviour in this visible world.

The ‘heavenly realms’ are also the angels’ field of action.

They are also the battleground between the angels of God and the angels of His adversary, Satan.

More information about Satan can be found here.²

In the book Daniel a description is given of how he was carried off in to exile and served several kings, as a high government official, during the period from 600 to 530 years B.C..

- *At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. (Daniel 10:2-6)*

¹ Study: Angels.

² Study: Satan (see: Under the magnifying glass).

- *Then he continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. ... (Daniël 10:12-13)*

What does Daniel’s testimony suggest?

At the moment Daniel is in prayer, the angel Gabriel is sent by God, from the third heaven, to deliver a message to Daniel in this world.

Gabriel is retained in the heavenly places by ‘the prince of the Persian kingdom’, and has to fight him in order to get through to Daniel.

In the end Gabriel is assisted by a brother-in-arms, the angel Michael.

In Daniel 12:1 it is stated that Michael is an important angel, who supports the people of Israel.

Gabriel and Michael’s struggle lasts three weeks apparently, until they prevail against the prince of the Persians.

What is described here is the battle in the heavenly realms.

Daniel’s prayer influences the unseen world.

God also appears to have appointed a prince, in the person of the angel Michael, to keep watch over the people of Israel.

Satan, God’s adversary, has also appointed a prince, an angel from the realm of darkness, who keeps watch over the kingdom of the Persians. Further on in Daniel’s testimony the angel tells Gabriel that he has to fight the prince of Greece as well. (Daniel 10:20)

Conclusion:

- There is apparently a heavenly army of angels. This army has a clear structure.
On one side there are angels appointed over lands and nations.
On the other side Jesus says that the angels of children are constantly in God’s presence. (Matthew 18:10)
- Satan, a fallen angel, also has an army at his disposal and, as the great imitator of God, his army is structured along the same lines.
- What the story of Daniel clearly shows, is that **prayer exercises influence on the unseen world.**
- The battle in the heavenly realms, the unseen world, is a reality.
- Furthermore, Daniel’s prayer apparently not only brought about Gabriel’s mission, but also Michael rushing to his aid, so that they prevailed together.
- It is very certain that if Daniel had stopped praying after 10 days, because he received no reply, Gabriel would have never gained the upper hand and would therefore never have got through to him.

Persevering prayer is extremely important, therefore!

General remarks:

- How man behaves and speaks in this world exercises influence on the heavenly realms, the unseen or spiritual world.
- In turn, what happens in the heavenly realms exercises influence on the visible world.

The creation of the earth is dealt with in the following chapter.³

³ Study: God created the earth.