



Beyond the Veil: Life in the Eternities

“[The righteous who have died] shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die any more, but they shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith’s work on the translation of the Bible led to a most remarkable vision of life in the eternities. On February 16, 1832, the Prophet was at work in the home of John Johnson in Hiram, Ohio, with Sidney Rigdon serving as his scribe. He was translating the Gospel of John. “From sundry revelations which had been received,” the Prophet later said, “it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of man had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled. It appeared self-evident from what truths were left, that if God rewarded every one according to the deeds done in the body, the term ‘Heaven,’ as intended for the Saints’ eternal home, must include more kingdoms than one.”¹

The Prophet translated John 5:29, which describes how all “shall come forth” in the resurrection—“they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” As he and Sidney pondered this scripture, a marvelous vision was opened to them. As the Prophet recorded: “By the power of the Spirit our eyes were opened and our understandings enlightened, so as to see and understand the things of God—even those things which were from the beginning before the world was, which were ordained of the Father, through his Only Begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, even from the beginning” (D&C 76:12–13).



*The restored John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio.
In the Johnson home in February 1832, the Propbet Joseph Smith saw a vision of
the three degrees of glory that God has prepared for His children.*

In this glorious vision, the Prophet and Sidney Rigdon saw the Son of God at the right hand of the Father and “received of his fulness” (D&C 76:20). They saw the three kingdoms of glory that God has prepared for His children and learned who will inherit these kingdoms. They also saw Satan thrust out of the presence of God and the sufferings of those who allow themselves to be overcome by Satan.

This vision later became section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Prophet explained: “Nothing could be more pleasing to the Saints upon the order of the kingdom of the Lord, than the light which burst upon the world through the foregoing vision. Every law, every commandment, every promise, every truth, and every point touching the destiny of man, from Genesis to Revelation, where the purity of the scriptures remains unsullied by the folly of men, . . . witnesses the fact that that document is a transcript from the records of the eternal world. The sublimity of the ideas; the purity of the language; the scope for action; the continued duration for completion, in order that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee; the rewards for faithfulness, and the punishments for sins, are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men, that every honest man is constrained to exclaim: *‘It came from God.’*”²

Teachings of Joseph Smith

God has prepared three degrees of glory for His children.

“My text is on the resurrection of the dead, which you will find in the 14th chapter of John—‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’ [John 14:2.] It should be—‘In my Father’s kingdom are many kingdoms,’ in order that ye may be heirs of God and joint-heirs with me. . . . There are mansions for those who obey a celestial law, and there are other mansions for those who come short of the law, every man in his own order.”³

“‘But,’ says one, ‘I believe in one universal heaven and hell, where all go, and are all alike, and equally miserable or equally happy.’

“What! where all are huddled together—the honorable, virtuous, and murderers, and whoremongers, when it is written that they shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body? But St. Paul informs us of three glories and three heavens. He knew a man that was caught up to the third heaven [see 1 Corinthians 15:40–41; 2 Corinthians 12:2–4]. . . . Jesus said unto His disciples, ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come and receive you to myself, that where I am ye may be also.’ [See John 14:2–3.]”⁴

“Go and read the vision in [Doctrine and Covenants 76]. There is clearly illustrated glory upon glory—one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and a glory of the stars; and as one star differeth from another star in glory, even so do they of the celestial world differ in glory, and every man who reigns in celestial glory is a God to his dominions. . . .

“Paul says, ‘There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So is also the resurrection of the dead.’ [1 Corinthians 15:41–42.]”⁵

Those who receive the testimony of Jesus, receive the ordinances of the gospel, and overcome by faith will inherit the celestial kingdom.

The Prophet Joseph Smith saw the following in vision, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–59, 62, 68–70: “And again we bear record—for we saw and heard, and this is the testimony of the gospel of Christ concerning them who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just—they are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; and who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true.

“They are they who are the church of the Firstborn. They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—they are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; and are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son.

“Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. . . .

“These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever. . . . These are they whose names are written in heaven, where God and Christ are the judge of all. These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood. These are they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all, whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical.”⁶

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught the following in May 1843, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4: “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.”⁷

“Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, . . . by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power. . . .

“. . . [The righteous who have died] shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or



Those who inherit the celestial kingdom are “they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the biggest of all.”

die any more, but they shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What is it? To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a god, and ascend the throne of eternal power, the same as those who have gone before.”⁸

“They who obtain a glorious resurrection from the dead, are exalted far above principalities, powers, thrones, dominions and angels, and are expressly declared to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, all having eternal power [see Romans 8:17].”⁹

The “honorable men of the earth,” those who are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus, will inherit the terrestrial kingdom.

The Prophet Joseph Smith saw the following in vision, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76:71–79: “And again, we saw the terrestrial world, and behold and lo, these are they who are of the terrestrial, whose glory differs from that of the church of the Firstborn who have received the fulness of the Father, even as that of the moon differs from the sun in the firmament.

“Behold, these are they who died without law; and also they who are the spirits of men kept in prison, whom the Son visited, and preached the gospel unto them, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh; who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it.

“These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness. These are they who receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father.

“Wherefore, they are bodies terrestrial, and not bodies celestial, and differ in glory as the moon differs from the sun. These are they who are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus; wherefore, they obtain not the crown over the kingdom of our God.”¹⁰

Those who are wicked and do not receive the gospel or the testimony of Jesus will inherit the telestial kingdom.

The Prophet Joseph Smith saw the following in vision, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76:81–85, 100–106, 110–12: “And again, we saw the glory of the telestial, which glory is that of the lesser, even as the glory of the stars differs from that of the glory of the moon in the firmament.

“These are they who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus. These are they who deny not the Holy Spirit. These are they who are thrust down to hell. These are they who shall not be redeemed from the devil until the last resurrection, until the Lord, even Christ the Lamb, shall have finished his work. . . .

“These are they who say they are some of one and some of another—some of Christ and some of John, and some of Moses, and some of Elias, and some of Esaias, and some of Isaiah, and some of Enoch; but received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus, neither the prophets, neither the everlasting covenant.

“Last of all, these all are they who will not be gathered with the saints, to be caught up unto the church of the Firstborn, and received into the cloud.

“These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie. These

are they who suffer the wrath of God on earth. These are they who suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. These are they who are cast down to hell and suffer the wrath of Almighty God, until the fulness of times, when Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet, and shall have perfected his work. . . .

“And [we] heard the voice of the Lord saying: These all shall bow the knee, and every tongue shall confess to him who sits upon the throne forever and ever; for they shall be judged according to their works, and every man shall receive according to his own works, his own dominion, in the mansions which are prepared; and they shall be servants of the Most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, worlds without end.”¹¹

The torment of the wicked is to know they have come short of the glory they might have enjoyed.

“God has decreed that all who will not obey His voice shall not escape the damnation of hell. What is the damnation of hell? To go with that society who have not obeyed His commands. . . . I know that all men will be damned if they do not come in the way which He hath opened, and this is the way marked out by the word of the Lord.”¹²

“The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits, where they go after death, is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers.”¹³

“There is no pain so awful as that of suspense. This is the punishment of the wicked; their doubt, anxiety and suspense cause weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth.”¹⁴

“A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. Hence the saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone [see Revelation 21:8]. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man. . . .

“. . . Some shall rise to the everlasting burnings of God, for God dwells in everlasting burnings, and some shall rise to the damnation of their own filthiness, which is as exquisite a torment as the lake of fire and brimstone.”¹⁵

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were meditating about a verse of scripture when they received the revelation that is recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76 (pages 217–19; see also D&C 76:15–19). What personal experiences have helped you understand that meditating can lead to increased understanding? As you study or discuss this chapter, as well as other chapters, take time to meditate about the truths you read.
- Read John 14:2–3 and 1 Corinthians 15:40–41. How do the teachings in this chapter help you understand these verses?
- In the description of those who will inherit celestial, terrestrial, and telestial glory, the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” is used five times (pages 220–24). What are the characteristics of a person who is “valiant in the testimony of Jesus”? What promises are given to those who are valiant in the testimony of Jesus?
- Read the last paragraph on page 220, giving special attention to the phrase “overcome by faith.” What are some things we might need to overcome? How does faith in Jesus Christ help us overcome our problems in this life?
- Read the last full paragraph on page 221. In our eternal progression, why do you think we need to improve “from one small degree to another”? What experiences have you had that illustrate our need to learn and grow in this way?
- Review the second paragraph on page 223, which describes some of the people who will inherit the terrestrial kingdom. How can we avoid being “blinded by the craftiness of men”? What can we do to help others avoid being blinded?
- On page 224, look for words and phrases Joseph Smith used to describe the state of the wicked in the next life. What do these words and phrases communicate to you? How can a man be “his own tormentor and his own condemner”?

Related Scriptures: Alma 41:2–8; D&C 14:7; 76:20–49; 88:15–39

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 1:245; punctuation modernized; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 183, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *History of the Church*, 1:252–53; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 192, Church Archives.
3. *History of the Church*, 6:365; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
4. *History of the Church*, 5:425–26; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
5. *History of the Church*, 6:477–78; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 16, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–59, 62, 68–70; vision given to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on Feb. 16, 1832, in Hiram, Ohio.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4; bracketed words in original; instructions given by Joseph Smith on May 16 and 17, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois.
8. *History of the Church*, 6:306; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
9. *History of the Church*, 6:478; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 16, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 76:71–79; vision given to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on Feb. 16, 1832, in Hiram, Ohio.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 76:81–85, 100–106, 110–12; vision given to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on Feb. 16, 1832, in Hiram, Ohio.
12. *History of the Church*, 4:554–55; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
13. *History of the Church*, 5:425; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:340; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 8, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.
15. *History of the Church*, 6:314, 317; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.