

*Investigative
Series*

**Are There
Three
Heavens?**



Are There Three Heavens?

What Are The Three Degrees of Glory?

LDS claim the Bible teaches three heavens in I Cor. 15:41 when it 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." In LDS scripture, the sun, moon and stars are symbolic of the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial heavens (kingdoms or glories) where resurrected people spend eternity (*Doctrine & Covenants* 76:70-71, 81, 96-98). LDS believe only devout Mormons go to the celestial kingdom (*Gospel Through The Ages*, p.166). Non-valiant Mormons and honorable non-Mormons will go to the terrestrial kingdom. But most people, including all the wicked except the sons of perdition, will go to the telestial kingdom (*Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 134, 778, 784). LDS not only believe in those three heavens, but they also believe: "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees" (D. & C. 131:1). And they believe, while "baptism is the gate to the celestial kingdom, celestial (eternal or temple) marriage is the gate to an exaltation in the highest heaven within the celestial world" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 118). But is this LDS doctrine in the Bible?

Mormons often point to the witnesses of the *Book of Mormon* as proof that it is true. To show that is a valid argument they quote II Cor. 13:1: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." Using that same argument, can three heavenly kingdoms be established by witnesses in the Bible?

What Does The Bible Teach About Three Degrees of Glory?

1. OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS mentioned only two ways to

spend eternity: the dead will awake to everlasting life or to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2); heaven or hell are the alternatives in Psalm 139:8, Isa. 14:12-15. No other options are found in the Old Testament.

2. JESUS CHRIST mentioned only two ways to spend eternity: in the kingdom of heaven or in outer darkness (Matt. 8:11-12); in life eternal or in everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46); in the kingdom of God or in hell fire (Mark 9:47); being saved or lost (Lk. 19:10); having everlasting life or perishing (Jn. 3:16); condemned or not condemned (Jn. 3:18); having life or death (Jn. 5:24); having the resurrection of the just or of the unjust (Jn.5:29).

3. THE APOSTLE JOHN mentioned only two ways to spend eternity: having life everlasting or having the wrath of God (Jn. 3:36); having eternal life or not having eternal life (I Jn. 5:11-12); those whose names *are not* in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15) and those whose names *are* in the book of life enter into God's presence in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-3 & 27). Notice, a name is either *in* or *not in* the book of life. No other alternative exists!

4. THE APOSTLE PETER mentioned only two ways to spend eternity: the saved have an incorruptible inheritance in heaven while the unsaved do not (I Pet. 1:3-5); the godly are delivered to a new heaven and earth while the ungodly perish in perdition and judgment (II Pet. 2:9; 3:7-9 & 13).

5. THE APOSTLE PAUL mentioned only two ways to spend eternity: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23); believers are saved while unbelievers perish (I Cor. 1:18); the justified inherit God's kingdom but the unrighteous do not (I Cor. 6:9-11); followers of God inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God, but the wrath of God comes on the disobedient (Eph. 5:1-6); believers inherit the kingdom of God, but those who don't know or obey God are

punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (II Thess. 1:5-9).

What Bible Texts Do LDS Use To Teach Three Heavens?

Mormons use II Cor 12:2 to teach three heavenly kingdoms because Paul spoke of "one caught up to the third heaven." But, the Bible does not say anyone will spend eternity in the first or second heaven. Why not? Because the first heaven is the atmosphere with birds and clouds (Gen. 1:20; Ps. 147:8). The second heaven (sidereal) refers to the stars and outer space (Gen. 1:14-19). The third heaven is God's "dwelling place" (I Kings 8:30). Mormons also use the word heaven in the same three ways (*Mormon Doctrine*, p.347). In II Cor. 12:2 & 4 the third heaven is equated with paradise, so it cannot be the LDS celestial kingdom which requires Mormon baptism for entrance because the unbaptized thief on the cross went to paradise when he died (Lk. 23:43).

Mormons claim Paul referred to three heavens in I Cor. 15:41 when he wrote of the difference in the glories of the sun, moon, and stars. But, that verse is part of his answer to the two questions in verse 35: "How are the dead raised up? And with what *body* do they come?" Verses 36 to 57 have his complete answer. Verse 41 refers to the *difference* between the sun, moon and stars and verse 42 continues: "So *also* is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." In other words, there is a *difference* between mortal bodies and immortal, resurrected bodies. LDS also claim verse 40 teaches two heavens when it says, "There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial." But, verse 40 is also part of the answer to the questions in verse 35 about resurrected bodies, so it cannot refer to heavens. In the King James Bible the Greek word *epigeios* is translated as "terrestrial" in verse 40, but as "earth" in verse 47 (and in Phil. 2:10 & 3:19). Also,

the Greek word *epouranios* is translated as "celestial" in verse 40 but as "heaven" or "heavenly" four times in verses 47-49. Dictionaries also define "terrestrial" as "earthly" and "celestial" as "heavenly." Translations other than the King James use "earthly" and "heavenly" instead of "terrestrial" and "celestial" in I Cor. 15:40. According to II Cor. 5:1-4, we *now* have an earthly or *terrestrial* (*epigeios*) body which will be exchanged for a heavenly (celestial) body when we are resurrected. No one in the Bible is ever promised another terrestrial body! Joseph Smith coined the word "telestial" in verse 40 of his *Inspired Version* of the Bible, but that word does not even exist in the original Greek language and it conflicts with all Bible manuscript evidence. The only place that word can be found is in Mormon writings!

If the sun, moon and stars in I Cor. 15:40 refer to three heavenly kingdoms as LDS claim, do the four kinds of flesh in I Cor. 15:39 refer to four heavenly kingdoms? Forcing doctrines into Bible texts when they are not really there opens the door to all kinds of heresy.

What Does Mormon Scripture Teach About Three Degrees of Glory?

1. *The Book of Mormon* mentions only two ways to spend eternity: in the kingdom of God or in an awful, filthy hell (I Ne. 15:34-35); in liberty and eternal life or in captivity and eternal death (II Ne. 2:27); in never ending happiness or in never ending torment (Mos. 2:39-41); in heaven with everlasting life and salvation or under the wrath of God in eternal torment (Mos. 5:5 & 15); redeemed and dwelling with God or perishing in their sins (Mos. 15:21-27); in happiness or in punishment as eternal as the life of the soul (Alma 42:16); in everlasting life or in everlasting damnation (Hela. 12:26). LDS claim that the *Book of Mormon* is "the fulness of the gospel" (D. & C. 20:9; 27:5)

and Joseph Smith said, "I told the brethern that the *Book of Mormon* was the keystone of our religion and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book" (*History of the Church* Vol. 4, p. 461). How can that be true when the *Book of Mormon* never even mentions three heavens?

2. *The Doctrine & Covenants* is the only book of LDS scripture which mentions three degrees of glory (D. & C. 76, 88, & 131). But the D. & C. often mentions only two ways to spend eternity: eternal life or eternal damnation (D. & C. 29:27-28, 43-44); eternal life or unquenchable fire (D. & C. 43:25,33; 63:49 & 54); eternal life in celestial glory or burned with unquenchable fire (D. & C. 101:66-67). This revelation in D. & C. 101 is dated almost two years after Smith's vision of the three degrees of glory in D. & C. 78. Did God change his mind? The D. & C. is not consistent in teaching three heavenly kingdoms! The D. & C. has also undergone many changes: The 75 pages of the *Lectures on Faith* were deleted in 1921; The meaning of D. & C. 5 was reversed from the way it read in chap. 4 of the original *Book of Commandments*. 13 1/2 verses were added to D. & C. 28 after it was first printed in chap. 27 of the *Book of Commandments*. Since many other "revelations" have been changed in the D. & C., could the revelations which teach "three heavens" also be changed in the future? If the D. & C. came from God, why was it changed? Isaiah 40:8 says, "The word of our God shall stand forever."

3. *The Pearl of Great Price* mentions only two ways to spend eternity: in the kingdom of heaven or in death and hell (Moses 6:29 & 59); in fulness of joy or in chains of darkness (Moses 7:57-67). There is no mention of three heavens anywhere in the P. of G. P.

4. *The Inspired Version* of the Bible by Joseph Smith is printed in the appendix of the official LDS edition of the King James

version where it is called the *Joseph Smith Translation*. While Smith altered the meanings and verse numbers in many texts, no meanings of Bible verses used in this pamphlet are altered except for the addition of "testial" in 1 Cor. 15:40. So, if LDS claim any of these verses are mistranslated they imply that the *Inspired Version* was not inspired! But if it is inspired, why doesn't it clearly teach three heavens? The only thing Smith added in his Inspired Version about three heavens is the word "testial," which is not enough to understand that LDS doctrine. Many Mormons think Smith did not complete his translation of the Bible, but in LDS scripture the Lord told him to finish it (D. & C. 73:4) and publish it (D. & C. 124:89; 42:56-58). Was he disobedient? LDS records show he completed the New Testament on Feb. 2, 1833 and the Old Testament on July 2, 1833 (*History of the Church* Vol. 1, pp. 324 & 368). Although the King James Version is the official LDS Bible, they claim it is mistranslated. If it is mistranslated, why haven't LDS prophets corrected it since one of their official titles is "translator"? In 1981, as well as in previous printings, numerous changes were made in *all* LDS books of scripture *except* the King James Bible! Yet, *before* 1981 Apostle McConkie declared that all LDS scripture *except* the Bible "are accepted without qualification" because they were revealed "in modern times in English" (*Mormon Doctrine* p.764). Since those books were revealed in English, the changes made in them were not made to correct translation problems. So, why were they changed?

What Is The Biblical Alternative?

In contrast to the changing and self-contradictory LDS scriptures, the Bible declares, "Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). God's eternal and unchangeable word declares there are only two ways to spend eternity; with or without God. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 Jn. 5:12). Eternal life with God is a gift to

believers and therefore cannot be earned by works (Jn. 3:16; Eph.2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6). Yet, believers can gain or lose rewards in heaven by the way they live on earth (Matt. 10:42; Lk 19:17; I Cor. 3:11-15). Unbelievers will also be judged "according to their works" and punished (Rev. 20:13; 21:8). Some will be beaten with few stripes and some with many stripes (Lk. 12:47-48), and it will be "more tolerable" for some than for others (Matt. 11:22). Thus, the LDS idea of three heavens does not make God more just in the way He rewards or punishes. But, one must *become* "a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus" before he can earn a reward in heaven (Gal. 3:26; Jn. 1:12-13). Since we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23) and "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6), we must receive "the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9) in order to enter a perfect heaven without polluting it. Rom. 4:6 declares, "God imputeth (puts to our account) righteousness without works" (Rom. 3:21-22; 9:30; 10:3-4, 10; II Cor. 5:21). But many, like those in Rom. 10:3, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Are you trusting in your own righteousness or in God's righteousness to enter His one, true heavenly kingdom?

-M. W. Cowan & S. R. Doty

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