

# Heaven

Written by Eric Shuster

Founder and Executive Director of the Foundation for Christian Studies



Man's final stop in the eternities is heaven. While hell is depicted as a place of fire and torment, heaven is depicted as calm, peaceful, often buzzing softly with floating harp playing angels passing slowly by.

Christian doctrine of heaven is established through key scriptures from the Bible, with additional detail found in modern day scriptures. The Biblical scriptures introduce and outline the existence of three levels of heaven, while the revelations given in the Doctrine and Covenants describe in detail the various glories in heaven that can be expected by those who will enter after the Final Judgment.

## Heavenly Father's House has Many Mansions

The savior told 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" (John 14:2). This scripture is joined by two letters written by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. Paul wrote about a man who had been "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2), while mentioning and briefly describing two states in the resurrection—the celestial and the terrestrial—and alluding to a third (1 Cor. 15:40-42).

Doctrine and Covenants 76 and 131 complete the missing parts of the scriptural puzzle by clearly describing *three kingdoms* of heaven following the Final Judgment, with the highest kingdom (Celestial) having three degrees of glory. There is also a fourth place called outer darkness, which is the eternal hell spoken of in another essay from the Foundation.

Jesus spoke of "preparing" a place in the house of his father. This same type of preparation takes place for each of us on earth as we prepare ourselves for the kingdom into which we choose to enter. Our works and faith in Jesus Christ, exercised in the choices we have made on earth, will decide which kingdom (place or state) we are prepared to live in following the Final Judgment.

## The Celestial Kingdom—the Sun

The celestial kingdom is considered the highest of all of the levels of heaven (the third heaven that Paul spoke of). This is the kingdom Paul described as being the "glory of the sun" (1 Cor. 15:41), in which Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father will dwell. The happiness of those who will enter the celestial kingdom, and the beauty of the physical surroundings, will be far beyond our current ability to imagine.

Those who will enter the celestial kingdom are those who love and have chosen (and will continue to choose) to obey Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. These individuals have repented of their sins, committed their lives to Jesus Christ as their savior, have entered the waters of baptism through the proper authority, have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and have exercised faith sufficient to triumph over the world through the perfection of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Lord has made a provision for other individuals to enter into the celestial kingdom as well. Those who die in mortality lacking a knowledge of the gospel but "would have received it with all their hearts" (D&C 137:7-9) are allowed entrance into the celestial kingdom, as are those children who "Die before they arrive at the years of accountability [age of eight]" (D&C 137:10)—including those who will have been aborted.

Within the celestial kingdom is a place set aside for those who will be exalted— enabled to continue to grow their eternal families. To achieve this magnificent blessing an individual must be married in the temple for time and all eternity and have made and kept sacred temple covenants. These individuals will become like Heavenly Father and receive all that he has including the ability to have spirit children and to make new worlds, that is, they will inherit from Heavenly Father his creative ability.

Jesus alluded to this great blessing in the parable of the talents when he said, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:23).

Doctrine and Covenants 76:50-70 gives a detailed scriptural account of the celestial kingdom.

### **The Terrestrial Kingdom—the Moon**

The terrestrial kingdom is considered the second highest of the levels of heaven. This is the kingdom Paul described as being the “glory of the moon” (1 Cor. 15:41), in which Jesus Christ will dwell on a frequent basis.

Those who will enter into the terrestrial kingdom are those who rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ on earth but received it in the spirit world. These are individuals who are honorable, but were blinded by the craftiness of men and thus not valiant in their testimony of Jesus.

Those who dwell in the terrestrial kingdom will not have claim to their family in the eternities. Although not close to the happiness of those who will dwell in the celestial kingdom, our Father in Heaven will grant to these terrestrial bodies the happiness they will be ready and are prepared to receive.

Doctrine and Covenants 76: 71-80 gives a detailed scriptural account of the terrestrial kingdom.

### **The Telesial Kingdom—the Stars**

The terrestrial kingdom is the lowest level of heaven. This is the kingdom Paul described as being the “glory of the stars” (1 Cor. 15:41), in which the influence of the Holy Ghost will reside and angels will minister.

Those who will enter into the telesial kingdom are those who rejected the gospel and testimony of Jesus Christ on earth and in the spirit world. These individuals are described in the scriptures as liars, sorcerers, adulterers, whoremongers, and those who make and love lies. These individuals will be the last to be resurrected after suffering for their earthly sins in the spirit world until the end of the millennium.

Although not close to the happiness of those who will dwell in the celestial or terrestrial kingdom, our Father in Heaven will grant to these telesial bodies the happiness they will be ready and are prepared to receive. There will be many who will dwell in the telesial kingdom following the Final Judgment.

Doctrine and Covenants 76: 81-89 gives a detailed scriptural account of the telesial kingdom.

### **Common Concerns with the Doctrine of Heaven**

While all Christians are familiar with the concept of heaven, many are not familiar with the details of the doctrine. To fully comprehend the doctrine one must engage in earnest scriptural study with inspiration through the Holy Ghost. Assuming most Christians are more familiar with the Bible than with modern day scriptures, the Foundation is providing insights on a few of the common concerns, providing a head start on how one might begin to study the doctrine using the Bible and our own spiritual common sense through the Light of Christ:

#### ***Varying degrees of reward for varying degrees of righteousness***

People live their lives on earth in varying degrees of righteousness. Some want to be close to God and his son Jesus Christ and work hard to achieve that. Others are lukewarm and do the minimum amount necessary to stay in touch with God. Others make terrible choices on earth (for various reasons) and live far away from God. With varying degrees of righteousness on earth, why would there not be varying degrees of glory and reward in the eternities?

#### ***Three degrees of glory***

We reviewed the scriptures from John 14:2 (many mansions), 2 Corinthians 12:29 (a third heaven), and 1 Corinthians 15:40-42 (sun, moon, and stars, with the celestial and terrestrial being mentioned by name). There is a solid Biblical foundation for their being three levels of heaven, or three degrees of glory in the eternities. This is further substantiated in modern day scriptures in vivid and spectacular detail.

***Becoming gods***

The concept of becoming gods may be shocking to some, but the concept of becoming “like Christ” in an exalted state should not. There are numerous scriptures from the Bible that substantiate exaltation (Luke 13:11, Gal 4:7, Col. 3, 2 Tim 2, 3, and 4, 2 Thes 2:14, Hebrews 6:1, James 1:4,12, 1 Peter 5:4,6; 2 Peter 2: 6,9, 1 John 3:2, Romans 8:16-18, and Matt 25). Although one may not consider their reward in heaven as becoming a god, it is clear that exaltation—becoming a perfected resurrected being like God (or a god)—is part of God’s plan and something well documented in the Bible.

***Marriage as a requirement***

The doctrine of requiring the everlasting covenant of marriage to gain entrance into the highest level of the celestial kingdom is truly an advanced doctrine and one that is very difficult for those who have not had a happy marriage to comprehend. For those who have enjoyed many years of happy and fulfilling marriage with children, it is much easier to come to a deep realization of the value of the experiences of marriage and parenthood in the eternities. Given the nature of living in the highest level of the celestial kingdom, the experiences of marriage and parenthood are an absolute necessity.

***We choose the heaven we deserve (even desire)***

At first glance one might conclude that there are a few winners (celestial kingdom dwellers) and a lot of losers (terrestrial and telestial kingdom dwellers). A natural thought is that many are going to be disappointed by not being in the terrestrial kingdom (if they are in the telestial kingdom) or by not being in the celestial kingdom (if they are in the terrestrial kingdom). However, at second glance this will surely not be the case. If someone didn’t feel comfortable or able to live the laws of God on earth and do what it takes to be a righteous and loving individual in a life of service and sacrifice, why would they change in the eternities? God will put us into not only the kingdom we deserve, but it will be the kingdom in which we will feel most comfortable. That doesn’t mean there won’t be disappointment in not being in the presence of our Heavenly Father—there likely will be. See the Foundation’s explanation of *damnation* for more details.

God’s plan is merciful, while satisfying the laws of justice in perfect harmony. See the Foundation essay on the Plan of Salvation for more details and a broader view on how this entire sequence of the after-life takes place.

**Conclusion**

The gospel of Jesus Christ imparts to all of God’s children everything we need to know and understand to receive the blessings of the celestial kingdom. By learning and following the principles of the gospel, we can know our Heavenly Father, develop a personal relationship with our savior Jesus Christ, and learn to live the life that God our father desires us to live, the life that will lead us back to Him. Should we not develop the desire for righteous living, nor live our lives responsibly, we will find ourselves damned from progression into one of the other two kingdoms of heaven, with few going to outer darkness.

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