

## **Question #3: Are You Going to End Up In the Right Destination?**

**Both Mormons and Christians alike agree that the goal is to go to heaven when this life ends.**

Here is where we must explore whether the Mormon churches belief about heaven and hell are consistent with what the biblical prophets, apostles, and Jesus taught.

### **Explore...**

#### **“Is Mormon Theology Regarding Death and Eternity Consistent with Scripture?”**

##### **Mormonism and Death**

Mormonism teaches that at the moment of death, the spirit immediately enters into the spirit world. Mormons go to a place called “paradise”, where they continue in their efforts to work toward godhood. Non-Mormons go to a spirit prison, where Mormon spirits “evangelize” them through missionary activities. If that spirit in prison accepts Mormonism they can enter into paradise as long as a living relative has undergone “baptism for the dead” on their behalf. After entering into paradise, the spirit is then free to work toward his or her own progression.

(Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 601)

##### **The Gospel Preached to the Dead?**

Mormons tell us that it is plain that “the Gospel must be proclaimed to the spirit world; and, that such work is provided for the Scriptures abundantly prove.” (*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p. 147)

##### **Did Jesus Preach to the Dead?**

###### **1 Peter 3:18-19**

##### **The Mormon Teaching:**

James E. Talmage tells us in *The Articles of Faith* that “the inauguration of this work among the dead was effected by Christ in the interval between His death and resurrection. While His body lay in the tomb, His spirit ministered to the spirits of the departed.”

Scholars Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine show us that the Mormon Church's teaching of this passage is flawed and be shown to be so by simply studying the passage in context as well as consulting other portions of Scripture.

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Scripture teaches that immediately following the moment of death comes judgment (**Hebrews 9:27**). There is no possibility of redemption beyond death's door (**Luke 16:19-31**). Now is the day of salvation (**2 Corinthians 6:2**). We can say with certainty, then that **1 Peter 3:18-19** doesn't suggest that people can respond to the gospel after they die.

Most biblical scholars agree that the "spirits in prison" mentioned in **1 Peter 3:19** are fallen angels who grievously sinned against God. The idea is that these spirits are the fallen angels of **Genesis 6:1-6** who were disobedient in the days of Noah. This same group of evil angels is mentioned in **2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6**. According to this interpretation, these evil angels disobeyed God, left their first estate, and entered into sexual relations with human women.

The Greek word for "preach" (*kerusso*) is not the word used for preaching the gospel, but rather, refers to a proclamation of victory. This being the case, it is clear that the verse has nothing to do whatsoever with human spirits hearing and responding to the gospel in the afterlife.

### **1 Peter 4:6**

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

The Mormon Church teaches that this verse proves that we should preach the gospel to the dead in the spirit world. (*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p. 147)

#### **The Biblical Teaching:**

The best view of this verse in its context refers to those who are now dead but who heard the Gospel while they were yet alive. This especially makes sense in view of the tenses used: the Gospel was preached (in the past) to those who are dead (presently).

Again, we must look at the words of Jesus in **Luke 16:19-31**: Once the rich man had died and gone to a place of great suffering, he had no further opportunity for redemption. This clearly illustrates the urgency in Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 6:2**: "Now is the day of salvation."

### **Are There Three Kingdoms of Heaven?**

Mormon apostle LeGrand Richards tells us that "one of the greatest errors in the teachings of the Christian religions is the doctrine of one heaven and one hell, so that all who go to heaven share and share alike, and all who fail to go to heaven are sent to hell where they share and share alike."

At the end of the world, Mormons tell us, people will end up in one of four places: the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, the telestial kingdom, or "outer darkness." A person's level of worthiness determines which of these four realms he or she ends up in. (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 369)

### **There Are Only Two Possible Destinies**

Scripture consistently teaches that there are only two classes of people (saved/unsaved or believers/unbelievers) and that the final destiny of every person will be in one of two places (heaven or hell).

### **Ask...**

- Would you please read **Matthew 13:30; Matthew 13:49; Matthew 25:32; Luke 16:26**?
- Don't all these verses point to two classes of people and two possible destinies?

### **God's Justice Demands Degrees of Punishment in Hell**

LeGrand Richards criticizes the view that "all who fail to go to heaven are sent to hell where they share and share alike." Scripture teaches that all who reject the free gift of salvation found in Christ alone will be sent to hell, but there are degrees of punishment in hell for every unbeliever.

### Ask...

- Would you please read **Matt. 10:15; Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 12:35-48; Hebrews 10:29**?
- Don't these verses tell us that God will judge the wicked according to what they have done and that some will face a greater degree of punishment?

### The Justice of God: Rewards in Heaven

Not only are there degrees of punishment in hell, there are also varying degrees of reward in heaven. When the Lord returns at the Second Coming, He will judge believers in regard to their works and will reward them accordingly. (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 377)

**1 Corinthians 3:11-15** and **2 Corinthians 5:10** indicate that every believer in Christ will be judged and rewarded (or suffer the loss of a reward) according to his or her works. Christians believe that our just God will judge every believer according to his or her works and give different levels of rewards. But despite the fact that believers will have varying degrees of rewards...

### There Is Only One Place That All Believers Will Be with Christ

Jesus states clearly in **John 12:26** that there is one place where followers of Christ will be with Him and there's no mention of three kingdoms. All who follow Jesus will be with Jesus in His Kingdom. All who believe in Christ are heirs of the eternal kingdom (singular) (**Galatians 3:29; Galatians 4:28-31; Titus 3:7; James 2:5**).

In **Romans 3:22** we read that the righteousness of God that leads to life is available "unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference."

Furthermore, in **John 10:16** Jesus affirms that all who believe in Him will be in "one fold" under "one shepherd." There will not be three separate "folds" or "kingdoms." One fold, one Shepherd! One kingdom, one King! (Ibid., p. 379)

## **Are There Three Kingdoms of Glory?**

### **1 Corinthians 15:40-42**

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons say this passage is proof that there are three heavenly kingdoms of glory. Citing these verses, Bruce McConkie explains that “contrary to the views found in the uninspired teachings of modern Christendom, there are in eternity kingdoms of glory to which all resurrected persons (except the sons of perdition) will eventually go.”

#### **The Biblical Teaching:**

We should first note that **1 Corinthians 15:40-42** does not even include “telestial.” Only the words “terrestrial” and “celestial” are mentioned. This automatically disqualifies this passage as support for three kingdoms.

The context of **1 Corinthians 15:40-42** is set for us in verse 35, where two questions are asked: “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” The rest of **1 Corinthians 15** answers these questions for us, so we don’t have to make up answers or doctrines from this passage and make it say something Paul was never saying. Paul is talking about resurrection bodies, he says nothing about kingdoms.

It must be pointed out that the word “celestial” literally means “heavenly”, and the word “terrestrial” literally means “earthly.” Paul is talking about the heavenly body as opposed to the earthly body. As we read onward to verses 42-44, we see that the earthly body is temporal, imperfect, and weak. The heavenly body will be eternal, perfect, and powerful (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

Notice the series of contrasts Paul makes between the earthly body and the heavenly body in verses 40-50: perishable/imperishable, weak/powerful, natural/supernatural, and mortal/immortal. Contextually, there is no way to read a theology of three kingdoms into a passage dealing with two kinds of bodies: the earthly and the heavenly. (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 380)

**Ask...**

- If you read this passage in context isn't it clear that Paul is talking about the difference between earthly and heavenly bodies and not kingdoms?

The doctrine of the three kingdoms of glory is not even in harmony with the book of Mormon. In fact, the book of Mormon itself teaches that there is only one heaven and one hell.

**Ask...**

- Would you please read 1 Nephi 15:35; Mormon 9:23; Ether 4:18; Helaman 14:18-19; Alma 3:26; Alma 40:26; Mosiah 16:11; 2 Nephi 2:28-29; 2 Nephi 28:21-22; 3 Nephi 27:11,17.
- Don't these passages indicate that there is only one heaven and one hell?
- How do you reconcile this with the Mormon view of three kingdoms?

**Are There Three Degrees of Glory?****2 Corinthians 12:2****The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons say this verse adds support to the idea that there are three degrees of glory. LeGrand Richards says, "It is obvious there could not be a third heaven unless there is also a first and second heaven. We therefore have three heavens." (*A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, p. 253)

**The Biblical Teaching:**

We must remember to always let Scripture interpret Scripture. By comparing various Scripture passages dealing with heaven, it quickly becomes clear that Paul is talking about the atmospheric heaven, the starry heaven, and the highest heaven where God's realm is and believers go upon death.

Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine help shed light on the fact there are three different words used for "heaven" by the writers of Scripture and that they have nothing to do with three heavenly kingdoms or degrees of glory when read in context.

### Ask...

- Would you please read **Deuteronomy 11:11**? Isn't "heaven" in this verse clearly a reference to the atmospheric heaven, from which rain comes?
- Would you please read from **Genesis 1:14**? Isn't "heaven" here a clear reference to the stellar heaven, where God has placed the stars?
- Would you please read from **Isaiah 63:15**? Isn't "heaven" in this verse the place where God dwells?
- Isn't it clear from these verses that the three "heavens" are the *atmospheric* heaven, the *stellar* heaven, and the *highest* or *third* heaven where God dwells?

### Hell According to Scripture

The Bible reveals that those who go into eternity having rejected Jesus Christ will suffer forever and ever in hell. Matthew 25:46 tells us that the punishment of those that reject Christ is *eternal*. The Greek adjective *aionion* in this verse means "everlasting, without end."

### Ask...

- Did you know that the same Greek word used in **Matthew 25:46** to describe eternal punishment is also used to describe the eternity of God Himself in **1 Timothy 1:17**; **Romans 16:26**; **Hebrews 9:14**; **Hebrews 13:8**; **Revelation 4:9**?
- Doesn't this indicate that the punishment of the wicked is just as eternal as the life of the righteous?
- Would you please read **Revelation 14:9-11**?
- How long is the torment of those that chose to worship the beast?

### Where Do True Believers Go Upon Death?

The Mormon Church teaches that at the moment of death, believers enter a spirit world where they eventually continue on their progression toward exaltation and godhood. But the Bible says otherwise. At the moment of death, believers are ushered immediately into the presence of Jesus Christ Himself.

### Ask...

- Would you please read **Philippians 1:21-23**?
- Didn't Paul say he would immediately be with Jesus when He died? If so, why does the Mormon Church teach that believers that die enter into a spirit world where they must progress toward exaltation?
- What did Paul look to *gain* upon his death? Doesn't the context make clear that it is immediately being with Jesus?
- Would you please read **2 Corinthians 5:6-8**?
- Did you know that the Greek word *pros* is used for "with" in the phrase "be at home *with* the Lord" and that word is used to speak of very close fellowship and intimate relationships?

### Conclusion:

As believers, we can look forward to spending eternity with Christ in heaven. This is the destiny of the saved (see **Revelation 21:3-4**). This means that there are only two possible destinies for people – heaven or hell. It is only through trusting the true Jesus of Scripture, God in flesh, the One who died on a cross for our sins and overcame death through His resurrection that one can enjoy eternity in the true heaven of Scripture with the true God of the universe as revealed in Scripture.



# Wrapping It All Up

Now that we have walked through the answers to who God is, who Jesus is, who man is, how one gets to heaven, and whether the Mormon church, its prophets, and its holy books are from God as opposed to the Bible alone, we must cover what is of utmost importance...

THE GOSPEL!

## **The Gospel: God's Good News for Mankind**

### **God Desires a Personal Relationship with Human Beings**

God created human beings (**Genesis 1:27**) and He did not create them to exist alone apart from Him. He created us to be in fellowship with Him (**1 John 1:5-7**) just as He originally created Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3:8-19**).

The problem is...

### **We Have a Sin Problem**

When Adam and Eve chose to sin against God in the Garden of Eden, they catapulted the entire human race into sin.

The Apostle Paul affirmed that "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin" (**Romans 5:12**). Contrary to the Mormon minimalization of sin as a "mistake," Jesus often spoke of sin in metaphors that illustrate the tremendous havoc sin can reap in one's life. He described sin as blindness (**Matthew 23:16-26**), sickness (**Matthew 9:12**), being enslaved (**John 8:34**), and living in darkness (**John 8:12; 12:35-46**). Jesus also taught that this is a universal condition and that all people are guilty before God (**Luke 7:37-48**).

Of course, some people are more morally upright than others. But even if we seek to do good works every day, we all fall short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**). In a contest to throw a rock to the moon, a more muscular athlete would be able to throw the rock further, but all would fall woefully short of throwing the rock to the moon. Similarly, all of us fall short of measuring up to God's perfect standard.

The good news is that...

### **Jesus Made Salvation Possible**

God's absolute holiness demands that sin be punished. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that Jesus has taken that punishment upon Himself. That is how much God loves us!

Jesus Himself affirmed that His very purpose for coming into the world was to die for our sins (**John 12:27**). Moreover, He perceived His death as being a sacrificial offering *for the sins of all humanity* (**Matthew 26:26-28**). (This is contrary to the Mormon teaching that Jesus covered only Adam's transgression.) Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross for us, we have a complete and wonderful redemption (not just resurrection).

God requires us to...

*Believe In Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18; John 11:25)*

God then provides for us...

*Freedom From Sin and the Forgiveness of Sins (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:17; Psalm 32:1-2)*

Complete assurance of the freedom from sin, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life with God forever in heaven is provided by simply believing in Jesus' finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

While it is not a prayer that saves you, but one's faith in Christ, you can pray something like this if you have chosen to place your trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is God in flesh and the only One worthy of paying our penalty...

*Dear Jesus,*

*I want to have a relationship with you.*

*I know that I can't save myself because I am a sinner.*

*Thank you for dying on the cross on my behalf.*

*I believe you died for me. I accept your free gift of salvation.*

*Thank you, Jesus!*

*Amen!*