

Degrees of Glory

Preface

On February 16, 1832, the prophet Joseph Smith and his counselor, Sidney Rigdon, were in the process of translating and correcting the New Testament. They were working in an upper room of the John Johnson home where Joseph, his wife, Emma, and their two adopted twins were staying. Joseph and Sidney were in the company of about a dozen other men and were working on the fifth chapter of John. As they pondered the 28th and 29th verses, the heavens opened, and the Prophet and Sidney received six revelations that extended for a period of an hour or more. These revelations were collectively called the vision and are now contained in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 76.

Eleven years later, in January of 1843, W.W. Phelps wrote a sixteen-line poem dealing with life after death and dedicated it to the Prophet Joseph. A month later Joseph responded with a 78 - stanza poetic rendition of the vision.

While Joseph and Sidney were receiving the vision, they were commanded to write some portions of it and, likewise, to not record other portions. Sidney, who was completely enervated by the experience, apparently stayed up much of the night completing his record of what he had witnessed. The result, Section 76, is a wonderful description of those who will reside in the various degrees of glory.

As I have read and re-read this scripture, I have often wondered what those kingdoms looked like. Section 137 of the doctrine and Covenants has a brief description of the celestial kingdom, but, for the most part, the scriptures are singularly silent, as are the words of the prophets.

What follows, then, is a fictionalized visit as seen through the eyes of the author. I claim no great gift of prophecy and this, obviously, should not be considered as doctrine or any attempt to enlarge upon scripture. The errors, and there are bound to be many, are mine. But perhaps this simple story will strike a responsive chord. They day will come for all of us, when we will have an opportunity to experience a more accurate representation.

Chapter 1

"You've been duped! Lied to!" the man said, shaking his head and smiling a wolfish grin. "He won't come back for you. The master will see to that." He looked past me at the retreating light.

"But he said he would, when he left me at the gate," I replied as a tremor ran down my spine.

"Oh, there was a time when I'd have believed that as well, but that was long ago. But now I know that no one leaves here." He turned slowly toward the impenetrable darkness behind him. "Judas, we have another one," he called out.

Another figure, dark gray, and brooding, walked out of the shadow toward me. "Welcome. You'll like it here." he inspected me from head to toe, his eyes nearly invisible under a beetled brow. "You're really new, aren't you?"

"New? I suppose. I'm not sure what you mean."

He shaded his eyes with his hand and squinted until they were nearly shut. "Yes, I can tell you're new, you're still so bright!"

"Bright!"

"You hurt my eyes. But, never mind, you'll fade soon enough, now that you're here." He turned to the figure who had greeted me. "Cain, why don't you show our latest member around, if you can stand the brightness."

The figure sneered. "Are you telling me what to do?"

"No, no merely a suggestion." Judas withdrew a step into the darkness that surrounded us. "You know it was nothing more than that." Behind him I caught a glimpse of flittering gray.

"I'm sure. You'd do well to remember your proper place." He turned to me, "Ah, you're beginning to fade already. Would you like a tour? It's a wonderful place to be."

"Is it?"

"Truly wonderful. Perfect. No one ever does anything wrong here."

"They don't?" I said incredulously.

Cain shook his head slowly. "Never. Everyone knows the master's will and follows it exactly."

"But what if they choose to do something wrong?"

"Choose?" Cain rolled the word beneath his tongue. "That's not a word I understand." He smiled thin-lipped at me. "But why would anyone want to disobey? There is order here. Complete order."

We walked slowly through the darkness, the only light being that which seemed to emanate from my body. I could see gray, indistinct shapes, mostly with my peripheral vision. When I turned my head to focus on them they seemed to melt into the darkness. Cain gestured with his hands, "They won't bother you."

"Who - what are they?"

"The wraiths, the ones who are different."