

# Section 76

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Various people love Joseph Smith or object to him for the same reason: he revealed “realms of doctrine unimagined in traditional Christian theology.”<sup>1</sup>

On February 16, 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon read John 5:29, where Jesus testified to some Jews that he would raise the dead who “shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of the just; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Joseph and Sidney “meditated upon these things” and the Lord touched, perhaps literally, their eyes, and they understood. They testified together of Jesus Christ. They saw and understood God’s plans for salvation and the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whom they saw and with whom they spoke, at his Father’s right. After all the testimonies given of Christ, they give the ultimate testimony: “He lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—that by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:22–24).

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<sup>1</sup> E. Brooks Hollifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 335. Richard Bushman calls such texts “exaltation revelations.” *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 195.

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The Vision

A vision of Joseph & Sidney February 16th 1832  
 given in Cortez County New Mexico township 24 of New  
 in North America which they saw concerning the  
 church of the first born and concerning the economy  
 of God and his vast creation throughout all eternity  
 Hee ope heavens & give ee O earth and yee  
 ye inhabitants thereof for the Lord he is God  
 and beside him there is, no ~~other~~ <sup>partner</sup> for great is  
 his wisdom, marvillon are his ways and the  
 extent of his doings none can find out his  
 purposes feel not neither are there any who can  
 stay his hands from eternity to eternity, he is  
 the same and his years never fail <sup>Longing just the same</sup> the Lord  
 ever merciful and generous unto ~~them~~ <sup>those</sup> who fear  
 me and delight to honor ~~them~~ <sup>those</sup> who serve me  
 in righteousness and in truth <sup>unto the end</sup> great shall be  
 their reward and eternal shall be their glory and unto  
 them will I reveal all mysteries yea all the hidden  
 mysteries of my Kingdom from days of old and for  
 ever to come will I make known <sup>unto them</sup> the good  
 pleasure of my will concerning all things <sup>pertaining to my Kingdom</sup> to come yea  
 even the wonders of eternity shall they know and things  
 to come will I show them even the things of many  
 generation their wisdom shall be great and their  
 understanding reach to heaven and before them  
 the wisdom of the wise shall perish and the  
 understanding of the prudent shall come to naught  
 for by my spirit will I enlighten them and by  
 my power will I make known unto them the  
 secrets of my will yea even those things which  
 eye has not seen nor ear heard nor yet  
 entered into the heart of man  
 We Joseph <sup>Smith</sup> & Sidney <sup>Higdon</sup> being in the spirit on the

Original manuscript of "The Vision," now known as Doctrine and Covenants 76.  
 Image via [Joseph Smith Papers](#).

In a major reversal, another vision opened to Joseph and Sidney. They saw an angel, Lucifer, revolt against God to steal the kingdom from its rightful heir—Jesus Christ. Weeping, Heavenly Father banished Lucifer permanently from his presence.

Having been punished for his rebellion, Satan chooses to attack the Saints by surrounding them with evil. Joseph and Sidney envisioned the suffering of those who fell under Satan’s onslaught. The Lord told them that all who knew his gospel and then chose to follow the devil and become subject to his power, denying the truth and defying Christ’s power, become Satan’s children rather than Christ’s. They are sons of the utterly lost. It had been better for them not to have been born. They suffer God’s justified anger with the devil and the spirits who rebelled with him. The Lord has said they are not and will not be forgiven. They don’t want to be. They denied the Holy Spirit after they received it. They denied Christ. It was as if, knowing the power of his gospel, they openly crucified him themselves. They are sent to hell with the devil and the spirits who rebelled with him. Though resurrected, they remain spiritually dead forever, cut off from the Godhead, the only ones unredeemed by Christ, who saves everyone else and would have saved them if they wanted that.

A heavenly voice testified to Joseph and Sidney of these glad tidings: Jesus Christ came into the world to be crucified to endure the sins of the world, to sanctify and cleanse the world for all unrighteousness for the express purpose of saving every one of Heavenly Father’s children who exercises their God-given agency to be saved, all except the few who “defect to perdition.”<sup>2</sup>

Juxtaposed against the suffering of the damned, Joseph and Sidney testified of seeing and hearing about the resurrection of the just: those who receive the testimony of Jesus Christ, believe and are baptized by immersion, signifying burial and rebirth as Christ commanded. Christ cleanses from sin all who choose to keep these commandments. They receive the Holy Spirit when an authorized priesthood holder lays on hands. The just overcome Satan by exercising faith in Christ. The Holy Ghost, in his role as the Holy Spirit of Promise, seals them by testifying that they have been faithful to their covenants. Heavenly Father sheds this Holy Spirit of Promise on all who are keeping their covenants. Covenant keepers belong to the church of the Firstborn. Heavenly Father gives them everything—including the fullness of temple

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<sup>2</sup> Elder Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign* (November 1995): 18.

blessings. They are priests and kings, priestesses and queens. They are the children of God who fully inherit his glory. They are thus gods themselves. Everything is theirs. Death cannot stop them. Their future is limitless. They belong to Christ, and he belongs to Heavenly Father. Nothing can damn them or hem them in.

The just are resurrected first and come with Christ at his second coming to reign on earth. They dwell in Zion, the New Jerusalem, the holiest place on earth. They commune with angels and the people of Enoch's Zion and the other Saints throughout time who have received the fullness of temple ordinances and been faithful to their covenants. Their names are written in heaven, where God and Christ judge everything. They have kept their covenant promises to obey the laws of God, and Christ therefore keeps his covenant promise to resurrect and perfect them by the power of his perfect Atonement in which he shed his own blood. They are resurrected with celestial bodies as glorious as the sun, which is typical of God's glory.

Joseph and Sidney then envisioned the terrestrial world, which differs from the celestial as the moon differs from the sun. The celestial church of the Firstborn receive all Heavenly Father has. Inhabitants of the terrestrial glory do not. They died without obeying the laws of God. Christ arranged for the gospel to be preached to them in the spirit world. They received the testimony of Jesus Christ there, but they would not receive it when they were alive on earth. They were honorable but deceived, blinded by crafty men. They receive God's glory, just not all of it. They receive the Savior's presence, just not all the Father has. They were promised the blessing to become kings and queens if they would obey the laws of God, but they did not, and thus they forfeit their crowns.

Joseph and Sidney then envisioned the telestial glory, which pales in comparison to the others as stars pale in comparison to the sun and moon from our perspective. Heirs of telestial glory do not deny the Holy Ghost, but they do not receive it either. They do not want the gospel of Jesus Christ. They remain in Satan's power and are not resurrected until the very end of time, after Christ has finished his work. They receive only a portion of what Christ offers them, but they are saved.

When the visions ended, the Lord commanded Joseph and Sidney to write them before the Holy Ghost left them. They marveled and acknowledged their inability to conceive of or communicate what they had seen. They saw much the Lord commanded them not to write.

Section 76 testifies. Two eyewitnesses repeatedly declare what they saw, heard, and understood. “I know God,” Sidney Rigdon testified in conference in April 1844. “I have gazed upon the glory of God, the throne, the visions, and glories of God.”<sup>3</sup> Such testimony can be rejected but not discredited. It is powerful evidence.

Wilford Woodruff read section 76 before he ever met Joseph. “It had given me more light and more knowledge with regard to the dealings of God with men than all the revelation I had ever read in the Bible or anywhere else,” he said. Wilford “had been taught that there was one heaven and one hell,” and that those who were baptized would go to heaven and those who were not would go to hell. Personal righteousness made no difference. “That was the kind of teaching I heard in my boyhood,” he noted. “I did not believe one word of it then.” He said section 76 “opened my eyes. It showed me the power of God and the righteousness of God in dealing with the human family. Before I saw Joseph I said I did not care how old he was, or how young he was; I did not care how he looked.” Wilford knew that only one thing mattered about Joseph. “The man that advanced that revelation was a prophet of God,” Wilford wrote. “I knew it for myself.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Times and Seasons*, 5:522–6. *History of the Church*, 6:290.

<sup>4</sup> *Deseret Weekly News*, (43:2), page 321.