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## The Final Judgment

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# The Final Judgment

# 1

Terry B. Ball

*The last judgment is one of many doctrines taught in the Gospels but clarified by the second witness of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon elucidates, for example, that Christ will be our primary judge. From it we also learn that the final judgment will occur after the resurrection, and we learn the criteria upon which we will be judged. Modern revelation teaches that we will be judged by our words, thoughts, feelings, and desires, and that we will be judged out of books – records kept both on earth and in heaven. We are judged because God requires that his kingdom be pure; and this life, the Book of Mormon teaches, is a probationary state, the time to prepare to meet God.*

**P**aul identified two inevitable experiences through which each of us must pass when he wrote to the Corinthians: “For as in Adam *all die*, even so in Christ shall *all be made alive*” (1 Cor. 15:22; emphasis added). The newly converted Alma the Younger taught that each of us can also anticipate appearing before God’s judgment bar “even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged” (Mosiah 27:31).

Of these three inevitable events – death, resurrection, and the final judgment – the last is perhaps that which causes us the most concern. We wonder, “Who will judge us? When will we be judged? What are the criteria upon which we will be judged?” and “What are the rewards and punishments given at the judgment?” During his mortal ministry, as recorded in the four Gospels, Jesus gave answers to these important questions. The Savior answered these questions through the writings of the Book of Mormon prophets as well, frequently adding important insights and clari-

fications to the doctrines taught in the Gospels. Moreover, the Book of Mormon addresses some questions about the judgment which are not considered in the Gospels, such as “Why should we be judged?” and “When should we prepare for the judgment?” A careful study of the teachings concerning the judgment in these two canons can do much to help us prepare for this important event.

### Christ’s Role as Judge

While explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son, Jesus identified himself as our judge: “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). Later, he assured that all the judgments he makes are according to the will of the Father (John 8:15–16, 26, 50). Christ taught the Twelve that they will assist him by serving as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

The Book of Mormon offers a second witness that Christ will judge us at the last day: “And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (3 Ne. 27:14).<sup>1</sup>

Alma’s companion Amulek explained to the conspiring lawyer Zeezrom that the judgment bar would be composed not only of Christ but of “God the Father” and “the Holy Spirit” as well (Alma 11:44). Moreover, Mormon verified that the twelve whom Jesus called as apostles in the land of Jerusalem would also serve as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel. He then added that they will judge the twelve whom Jesus chose out of the Nephites. He further taught that the Nephite twelve would in turn help judge those who were a remnant of the Nephites and Lamanites (see Morm. 3:18–19).<sup>2</sup> Bruce R. McConkie summarized and clarified the roles of the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, and the apostles in the judgment: “The scriptural assertion that all men ‘shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil’ (Alma 11:44) means simply that Christ’s

judicial decisions are those of the other two members of the Godhead because all three are perfectly united as one. The ancient Twelve and the Nephite Twelve, and no doubt others similarly empowered, will sit in judgment, under Christ, on selected portions of the house of Israel; but their decrees will be limited to those who love the Lord and have kept his commandments, 'and none else'" (D&C 29:12; 3 Ne. 27:27; Matt. 19:28).<sup>3</sup>

Jacob taught that in a sense we will also judge ourselves, for at the judgment, "we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness" (2 Ne. 9:14). He further explained that because we will have such knowledge at the judgment bar, we will know what our reward or punishment should be, and accept it as just: "Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty – but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery" (2 Ne. 9:46).<sup>4</sup>

Apparently none of us will be taken away from the judgment bar protesting, "It's unfair! I demand a retrial! I want to appeal!" There will be no such nonsense. Rather, "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just" (Mosiah 16:1).

Although others may help with the judgment, Jacob testified that the final judgment which will allow us entrance into the kingdom ultimately belongs to the Savior (see 2 Ne. 9:41). Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained why this is important: "Jacob, in 2 Nephi 9:41, in speaking of the straight and narrow, reminds us that 'the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel' and that Jesus 'employeth no servant there.' The emphasis rightly is on the fact that Jesus 'cannot be deceived.' There is another dimension of reassurance, too: not only will the ultimate judgment not be delegated in order to serve the purposes of divine justice, but also divine mercy can best be applied by him who knows these things what only he can know."<sup>5</sup> How appropriate it is that he who

atoned for our sins should have the privilege of determining whether we are worthy to enter the kingdom.

### When Will We Be Judged?

Jesus taught his disciples that “the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).<sup>6</sup> Thus, we understand that a judgment will follow the glorious return of the Savior. However, it is not clear in this passage from Matthew whether this judgment accompanying his Second Coming is the final judgment, or the destruction of the wicked and the rewarding of the righteous with millennial peace that will precede the final judgment (see D&C 43:29–31).

The Book of Mormon offers much more detail about the timing of the final judgment. Jacob taught that there was an early judgment passed upon man at the Fall of Adam, and that it would have been the final judgment were it not for the Atonement of Christ: “Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement – save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Ne. 9:7).

Alma taught that there will be another early judgment immediately after death to determine our place in the spirit world (see Alma 40:11–14). Abinadi suggested there must also be a type of judgment at the resurrection, for the wicked are to be resurrected after the righteous (Mosiah 15:21–26). Furthermore, throughout the Book of Mormon we are taught that certain judgments are poured out upon men during mortality (e.g., 1 Ne. 18:15),<sup>7</sup> but none of these early judgments should be confused with the final judgment. The Book of Mormon teaches that the final judgment will occur only after we have conquered the first or physical death through the resurrection: “And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God” (2 Ne. 9:15).<sup>8</sup>

## The Criteria of Judgment

Jesus taught his followers that, at the judgment, those granted entrance into his kingdom will have done more than simply confess faith with their lips. Rather, they will also have performed good works that are in harmony with the will of the Father: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21–23; see also 3 Ne. 14:21–23).

In the Book of Mormon, the teaching that all men shall “be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (Alma 11:44) is ubiquitous.<sup>9</sup> The Gospels and the Book of Mormon specifically mention several works which must be done in faith and according to the will of the Father. These include accepting the gospel, receiving saving ordinances, forgiving others, judging others righteously, serving God and others, and teaching others. In addition to works, both canons also teach that we will be judged by our words, thoughts, feelings, and desires. Moreover, both texts teach that we will be held accountable for teachings and records contained in certain books, such as the scriptures and the Book of Life. While both canons mention these criteria, the Book of Mormon consistently adds insight and clarification to the doctrines as taught in the Gospels.

### *Accepting the Gospel*

In the parable of the great supper, the Savior taught that we will be judged by how well we have taken advantage of opportunities to accept the gospel. He used the parable to chastise the lawyers and Pharisees who had professed righteousness but had not accepted the gospel or “come to the great supper.” Rather, they refused the opportunity by offering poor and worldly excuses. In contrast, those whom the lawyers and Pharisees despised as unworthy—the poor, halt, and maimed in the parable—accepted the invitation and were allowed to enjoy the blessings of the gospel (Luke 14:16–23).

Jesus clearly taught the Pharisees that having the opportunity to understand the gospel and then refusing to live it constitutes a sin for which they would be held accountable: "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:39-41).

In addition to the Pharisees, others had the opportunity to witness Jesus' mortal ministry yet failed to respond and fully accept him as the Christ. Consequently, Jesus warned that at the final judgment, those people who did not have the opportunity to see and hear him would be judged less harshly than those who had the privilege of knowing him: "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:20-24).<sup>10</sup>

The Savior used the parable of the faithful and wise steward to teach Peter why those who have the opportunity to accept Christ and his gospel are judged by a different standard than those who have not had a similar opportunity: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48).

Book of Mormon prophets likewise warned that those who had the opportunity to accept and live the gospel would be more accountable at the judgment. For example, Nephi, the son of Helaman, warned the apostate Nephites of his generation: "Ye

have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God; and even at this time, instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean, ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment" (Hel. 8:25).<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Alma vindicated those who had not had an opportunity to accept the gospel: "Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless" (Alma 29:5). Alma therefore suggested that at the judgment bar, ignorance of the law would be an acceptable excuse. The prophet Jacob explained why this is so: "Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel" (2 Ne. 9:25-26).<sup>12</sup>

### *Receiving Saving Ordinances*

In his nighttime interview with Nicodemus, Jesus taught, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5; see also Mark 16:16). Latter-day Saints understand this admonition to include receiving the saving ordinances of baptism by water and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

The prophet Moroni made it clear that receiving these two ordinances in faith is an important part of preparing for the judgment: "If it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment" (Morm. 7:10).

The resurrected Savior taught the Nephites of another work that must follow baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost. "And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my



name shall be filled; and *if he endureth to the end*, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world" (3 Ne. 27:16; emphasis added). Thus, the Book of Mormon testifies that saving ordinances only save us if we continue in righteousness until the judgment.

### *Forgiving and Judging*

After demonstrating how to pray while teaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave further detail about what he meant when he prayed, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). He explained, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).<sup>13</sup>

In the Book of Mormon, the Lord taught Alma that a refusal to forgive others constitutes a sin itself. "And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation" (Mosiah 26:31). In discussing the seriousness of such condemnation, President Spencer W. Kimball explained, "Condemnation, then, comes to you who will not forgive, probably even greater than to him who gave the offense."<sup>14</sup>

These teachings suggest that forgiving others is a part of the repentance process, and those who come to the judgment harboring grudges or malice against their fellow beings will not only find it difficult to obtain forgiveness for their own shortcomings but will also find that their refusal to forgive is an additional sin for which they are accountable.

Jesus taught that how we judge others will influence how we are judged. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2). The Joseph Smith Translation makes an important alteration to the above passage, helping us to understand this is not a prohibition against any judgment we might make. "Judge not *unrighteously*, that ye be not judged: *but judge righteous judgment* (JST Matt. 7:1-2; emphasis added). The principle that righteous judgment is allowed without condemnation is in harmony with John's recording of the

Savior's teachings: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Moroni also taught that unrighteous judgments made in mortality will be held against us at the judgment: "For behold, the same that judgeth rashly shall be judged rashly again" (Morm. 8:19). Later, as he closed his record, Moroni explained what constitutes "righteous judgment":

For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged (Moro. 7:15-18).

Thus, righteous judgments are made according to the light of Christ, which inspires us to do good and to help God bring to pass his work and glory. In contrast, unrighteous judgments are motivated by evil feelings such as hatred, jealousy, greed, and lust. Moroni invites each of us to evaluate why we judge, and to be certain to judge in such a way that we invite "to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ" (Moro. 7:16).

### *Serving and Teaching*

Through many of his parables, Jesus taught that we will be judged by how we have responded to opportunities to serve God and others. For example, in the parable of the talents, the good and faithful servants who increased the talents with which they were entrusted, and thereby took advantage of the opportunity to serve their lord, were each judged worthy of reward. "His lord

said unto him, Well done, 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" (Matt. 25:23). In contrast, the slothful servant who failed to use the opportunity to increase the talent for which he was given stewardship was punished at his day of judgment: "His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:26-30).

One of the most poignant parables recorded in the Gospels, the parable of the sheep and the goats, also teaches the importance of service. This parable has a judgment-day context, with Jesus sitting as king. The nations are gathered before him to be judged. Like a shepherd dividing his flocks, he places the "sheep," the righteous, on his right side, and the rest, the "goats," on his left. He then rewards the righteous on his right side for the service they rendered to their king and others:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:34-40).

Turning to those on his left, he uses similar words to condemn them for failing to render the same service (see Matt. 25:41-46).

The principle that as we serve others we also serve God was taught by King Benjamin as well: "And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). King Benjamin further explained that in spite of all the service we might render God, we will ever be indebted to him for all that he has given us and will yet give us upon conditions of continued service and obedience.

The Savior instructed Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Speaking of this commandment, President Gordon B. Hinckley explained, "I believe, my brethren, that that great admonition applies to the men of the priesthood of the Church of Christ: ' . . . when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.' When thou art converted, go thou and convert thy brethren. This is our responsibility."<sup>15</sup> The doctrine that those who have received the gospel should teach it to others is found throughout the Gospels.<sup>16</sup> While the Gospels teach us that we should share Christ's teachings with others, the Book of Mormon explains that how well we do so may be considered at the judgment. The prophet Jacob's testimony illustrates the point well. Because he had been consecrated to be a teacher, Jacob was especially anxious to adequately warn his brothers and sisters, thereby exonerating himself from accountability for their sins: "And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day" (Jacob 1:19). Again, those who were taught the gospel will be judged by how well they accepted or rejected the message.

### *Words, Thoughts, Feelings, Desires*

In response to the pharisaical accusations that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the Savior taught, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto

you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:34-36).<sup>17</sup>

Alma's teachings at Ammonihah are more inclusive in regard to the kinds of words for which we might be judged. He simply stated, "For our words will condemn us" (Alma 12:14). While discussing the importance of controlling our speech, Elder Bruce R. McConkie listed some of the kinds of words Alma may have had in mind for which one might be condemned: "The tongue is the mirror of the soul. Spoken words reveal the intents, desires, and feelings of the heart. We shall give an account before the judgment bar for every spoken word, and shall be condemned for our idle, intemperate, profane, and false words (Matt. 12:34-37; Alma 12:14). Implicit in this principle of judgment is the fact that we can control what we say. And what better test can there be of a godly self-control than the ability to tame the tongue!"<sup>18</sup>

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduced the higher principles by which those who live the gospel law should direct their lives. He taught that those who accept his gospel should govern not only their deeds but also their feelings. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). He gave a similar warning in regards to controlling our thoughts. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

As the resurrected Savior delivered these same teachings to the Book of Mormon peoples, he made a significant alteration to his teachings concerning the controlling of anger. He deleted the phrase "without a cause" (3 Ne. 12:22), thereby suggesting that at the judgment there will be no accepted justification for anger against a brother. In the same spirit, Alma taught that evil thoughts will condemn us at the judgment (see Alma 12:14). He also taught that our desires will play a significant role in our final judgment, for God will grant us that which we have desired: "I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according

to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction" (Alma 29:4). Later he taught this principle again to his son Corianton: "And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good" (Alma 41:3).

### *Out of the Books*

While teaching in the temple during the passion week, Jesus stated, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Thus, Christ's words recorded in the Gospels will be part of the standard against which we will be judged.

Mormon taught that those who have access to the Book of Mormon will also be judged out of it "at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written" (W of M 1:11).<sup>19</sup> The Savior taught the Book of Mormon peoples that there are additional books out of which we will be judged as well: "For behold, out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged, for by them shall their works be known unto men. And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged" (3 Ne. 27:25–26).<sup>20</sup> This teaching is in harmony with that of John the Revelator: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12).

The Doctrine and Covenants explains what constitutes the other books out of which we will be judged: "You will discover in this quotation that the books were opened; and another book was opened, which was the book of life; but the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works; consequently, the books spoken of must be the books which contained the record of their works, and refer to the records which are kept on the earth. And the book which was the book of life is the record which is kept in heaven" (D&C 128:7).

Orson Pratt described how these two records will be used at the judgment: "The sacred books kept in the archives of eternity are to be opened in the great judgment day, and compared with the records kept on the earth; and then, if it is found that things have been done by the authority and commandment of the Most High, in relation to the dead, and the same things are found to be recorded both on earth and in heaven, such sacred books will be opened and read before the assembled universe in the day of judgment, and will be sanctioned by Him who sits on the throne and deals out justice and mercy to all of his creation."<sup>21</sup>

### Rewards and Punishments

The Gospels tend to stress the extreme verdicts, sentences, and rewards to be given at the judgment. The wicked are damned and relegated to hell, while the righteous are saved and allowed to dwell with Christ (e.g., Matt. 25:31–46).

The Book of Mormon prophets also tend to stress the extremes. We learn that the punishments of the wicked include being cast off forever from the kingdom of God (see 1 Ne. 10:21; 15:33), remaining eternally in a filthy or unclean state (see 1 Ne. 15:33; Morm. 9:14), existing in endless misery and unhappiness (see Alma 41:4–5; Morm. 9:14), having died as to things pertaining unto righteousness (see 1 Ne. 15:33; Alma 12:16), suffering torment as a lake of fire and brimstone (see 2 Ne. 28:23; Mosiah 26:27; Alma 12:17; Moro. 8:21), and being captive to the devil (see Alma 12:17). In contrast, the righteous will receive their just rewards, including the privilege of dwelling eternally with Christ (see Mosiah 26:24; Alma 41:4; 3 Ne. 28:40; Morm. 7:7) in a state of righteousness and happiness (see Alma 41:4; Mosiah 2:41; Morm. 7:7).

Neither the Gospels nor the Book of Mormon discusses what rewards or punishments are to be given to those who are worthy of something in between the extremes of heaven and hell. It is that very question which led Joseph Smith to receive the seventy-sixth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. (The reader is encouraged to consult D&C section 76 for further study of this topic.)

The Book of Mormon addresses two questions in regard to the judgment that are not answered in the Gospels: "Why should we be judged?" and "When should we prepare for the judgment?"

## Preparing for the Judgment

The important question “Why should we be judged?” is rarely addressed in the scriptures, perhaps because the answer should be obvious to us. Yet, the Book of Mormon warns that in the last days there would be many who teach that God will not hold us accountable for our sins, or at least will not cast us off for them: “Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Ne. 28:7–8).

Some would suggest that God loves us so much that he will save us all regardless of our sins. Nephi taught the fallacy of such logic as he explained that there must be a judgment to protect the purity and righteousness of the kingdom of God: “Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works; and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also” (1 Ne. 15:33; see also Alma 40:26; 3 Ne. 27:19). Accordingly, the judgment will assure that only the righteous gain access to God’s kingdom, thereby preserving the kingdom’s purity and fulfilling the word of God (cf. Alma 11:34–37).

Some might question why it is so important for God’s kingdom to be pure. The eighty-eighth section of the Doctrine and Covenants answers that there are certain laws associated with each kingdom, and, in regard to God’s kingdom, it is obedience to those laws that preserves, perfects, and sanctifies the kingdom and those in it (see D&C 88:34–39). Accordingly, the celestial glory can only be maintained by righteousness. Moreover, the prohibition against evil in the celestial glory assures that only the righteous will have access to the powers of God. One can imagine the disastrous consequences should an evil and selfish being gain



access to such power. The judgment gives us the confidence that “the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36).

Amulek declared, “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). Many of the Book of Mormon prophets referred to this life as a probationary state granted to us for the very purpose of preparing for the judgment. “And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God” (Alma 12:24).<sup>22</sup> However, Abinadi made it clear that those who had not had the opportunity to accept the gospel in this life would not be unjustly punished for any lack of preparation but would still be granted participation in the first resurrection (see Mosiah 15:24). We understand that any preparation we do not have the opportunity or ability to complete in this life will be accomplished through work in the spirit world and vicarious work in the temple.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

From doctrines taught in the Gospels, it is evident that our Savior wants us both to understand and to prepare for the final judgment. Such a concern on his part is a significant manifestation of his love for us. His love and concern for us is further manifested in the fact that he gave us the Book of Mormon, not only as a second witness to the doctrines he taught in the Gospels, but also to add important insights, additions, and clarifications to those doctrines. One way we can demonstrate our gratitude for the Savior’s love is to study these two witnesses of his doctrine. As we do so, we will be better prepared for the final judgment, for we will know the answers to the following questions: Who will judge us? When will we be judged? What are the criteria upon which we will be judged? What are the rewards and punishments given at the judgment? Why should we be judged? and When should we prepare for the judgment?

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## Notes

1. See also 2 Ne. 2:10; Mosiah 3:10; Alma 33:22; 3 Ne. 27:16; 28:31; Morm. 6:21; Ether 12:38.
2. See also 1 Ne. 12:9-10; 3 Ne. 27:27.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 215-16.
4. See also Mosiah 3:25; Alma 5:18; 12:15.
5. Neal A. Maxwell, *For the Power Is in Them* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 37.
6. See also Matt. 25:31-46.
7. See also 1 Ne. 13:34; Mosiah 3:4; 29:27; Alma 4:3; 58:9; Hel. 4:23; 9:5; 14:11; 3 Ne. 16:9; 24:5; Morm. 4:5; 5:2; Moro. 9:14-15.
8. See also Mosiah 16:10; Alma 5:15; 11:44; 12:12; 33:22; 40:21; 42:23; Morm. 6:21; 7:6; 9:13; Moro. 10:34.
9. See also 1 Ne. 10:21; 15:32-33; 2 Ne. 9:44; 28:23, 29:11; Mosiah 3:24; 16:10; Alma 5:10, 15; 11:41; 12:8, 12, 14; 33:22; 36:15; 37:30; 40:21; 41:3; 42:23; 3 Ne. 26:4; 27:14-15; Morm. 3:18, 20; 6:21.
10. Cf. Matt. 12:41-42; Luke 10:10-16.
11. See also 2 Ne. 1:10; Alma 9:14-15; 60:31-33.
12. Cf. Mosiah 3:11.
13. See also Mark 11:25-26; Luke 6:37; and 3 Ne. 13:14-15.
14. Spencer W. Kimball, "Except Ye Repent . . .," *Improvement Era*, November 1949, 768.
15. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Conference Report*, April 1961, 88.
16. E.g., Matt. 10:1-20, 28:19; Mark 3:14; Luke 10:1-3; John 21:17.

17. The Greek for the adjective translated here as “idle” is *argos*. It connotes laziness or shunning labor.

18. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol. 3: Colossians–Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 262.

19. See also 2 Ne. 25:18; 33:14–15.

20. See also 2 Ne. 29:11.

21. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 7:84.

22. See also 1 Ne. 10:21; 15:32; 2 Ne. 2:21; 9:27; Mosiah 15:26; Alma 42:4,10, 13; Hel. 13:38; Morm. 9:28.

23. For a scriptural discussion of this doctrine, see the Topical Guide in the LDS edition of the Bible under the heading “Salvation for the Dead.”