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## The State of the Soul Between Death and the Resurrection

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# *The State of the Soul Between Death and the Resurrection*

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Monte S. Nyman

The Book of Mormon's teachings about the spirit world are not extensive. There are six verses in Alma 40 that relate directly to the topic (Alma 40:6–7, 11–14), and only a few other verses in the rest of the book that supplement Alma's teachings (2 Nephi 9:38; Alma 34:32–35). These verses have great value, however, for they clarify some of the biblical teachings on the spirit world. They also make comments about the spirit world that raise questions and occasionally leave misunderstandings about "the state of the soul between death and the resurrection" (Alma 40:11). Alma's comments about the spirit world were part of a discussion of the Resurrection. Had he been addressing the topic of the spirit world directly, he undoubtedly would have expanded his remarks and answered some of the questions that have since been clarified by latter-day revelation through modern prophets of God; such questions would include the following: What is the spirit world? Where is it? Are there divisions in the spirit world? If so, what are they? Who are the righteous spirits? Who are the wicked spirits? Is it possible for the wicked spirits to escape from their prison?

The topic of this chapter is Alma's teachings concerning the "state of the soul between death and the resurrection" (Alma

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40:11). I propose to analyze the six verses in Alma chapter 40 and, with the help of other passages from the Book of Mormon and explanations of latter-day prophets of God, attempt to answer the above questions and to clarify any misunderstandings that may have arisen.

## What Is the Spirit World?

The Bible mentions the spirit world in various ways. It speaks of spirits continuing to exist after death (Eccl 7:12); of spirits in prison being visited by the Savior (1 Peter 3:19; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18); and of a promise to the condemned thief on the cross to be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43). In addition, Jesus gave the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, both of whom had died but were in two separate places in the afterlife (Luke 16:19–31). Without further enlightenment, these few biblical passages on the spirit world might be confusing. It is the Book of Mormon, especially the book of Alma, that clarifies the purpose and function of the spirit world and enables us to better understand the biblical passages just noted.

Alma 40:7 enlarges upon the biblical teaching that the spirit continues to exist after the death of the body. Alma speaks of “a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection” and asks what happens to the souls (spirits) of men in this interim period. (Even though Alma uses the terms *soul* and *spirit* interchangeably here, latter-day revelation defines the soul as the union of the body and spirit [D&C 88:15]). Following some comments about the Resurrection, Alma teaches Corianton that an angel had made known to him “that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life” (Alma 40:11).



## Where Is the Spirit World?

Where are the spirits taken? The Book of Mormon does not answer this question, but President Brigham Young did. He also gave an interpretation of the phrase “being taken home to God”:

I will tell you. Will I locate them? Yes, if you wish me to. They do not pass out of the organization of this earth on which we live. You read in the Bible that when the spirit leaves the body it goes to God who gave it. Now tell me where God is not, if you please; you cannot. How far would you have to go in order to go to God, if your spirits were unclothed? Would you have to go out of this bowery to find God, if you were in the spirit? . . . It reads that the spirit goes to God who gave it. Let me render this Scripture a little plainer; when the spirits leave their bodies they are in the presence of our Father and God, they are prepared then to see, hear and understand spiritual things. But where is the spirit world? It is incorporated within this celestial system. Can you see it with your natural eyes? No. Can you see spirits in this room? No. Suppose the Lord should touch your eyes that you might see, could you then see the spirits? Yes, as plainly as you now see bodies, as did the servant of Elijah. [Elisha. See 2 Kings 6:17.] If the Lord would permit it, and it was His will that it should be done, you could see the spirits that have departed from this world, as plainly as you now see bodies with your natural eyes. (*Journal of Discourses* 3:368; hereafter cited as *JD*; see also Cannon 1:73)

Later in this same sermon, President Young said that the spirit world is “on this earth that was organized for the people that have lived and that do and will live upon it” (3:372).

## Separations in the Spirit World

Although all the spirits are taken home to the spirit world, Alma further explains that the righteous and the wicked are separated as they depart this life: “the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow” (Alma 40:12).

Alma further taught Corianton



that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection. (Alma 40:13–14)

The description of the spirits' being in a "state of" happiness or fear seems to suggest a mental condition rather than two, separate places. This concept is supported by a statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "The righteous and the wicked all go to the same world of spirits until the resurrection (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 310; hereafter *TPJS*). However, President Joseph F. Smith referred to Alma's teachings as a separation, a partial judgment where the spirit is "assigned to its place, either to associate with the good and the noble ones who have lived in the paradise of God, or be confined in the 'prison-house' to await the resurrection of the body from the grave" (448–49). Although the words *paradise* and *prison* are used interchangeably in the Bible, President Joseph F. Smith uses Alma's definition of paradise as the state of the righteous, and the spirit prison as the state of the wicked in darkness and fear. I will use Alma's definition here. President Brigham Young spoke of those who reject the spirit of revelation as being "banished to another part of the spirit world, where the devil has power and control over them" (*JD* 2:141). Another statement by the Prophet describes the part of the spirit world (paradise) where the righteous reside: "When men are prepared, they are better off to go hence. . . . The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained



therewith” (*TPJS* 326). The just spirits being enveloped in flaming fire is certainly different from the darkness surrounding the wicked which comes from their having “no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord” (Alma 40:13). Joseph’s statement also verifies Brigham Young’s teaching that we could see the departed spirits plainly if the Lord would permit it. But where are the wicked spirits who depart this life and what is their condition?

### The Wicked Spirits

Alma’s explanation of the place of the wicked spirits is one of the more difficult passages in the Book of Mormon to understand because it sounds as if they are expelled from the earth into outer darkness at the time of death. However, we have just noted in Alma 40:13 that the state of darkness among the wicked is described as an absence of any “portion of the Spirit of the Lord,” the Spirit having withdrawn because of their wickedness. Among the wicked in the spirit world would be those who have chosen such evil works that the devil has taken “possession of their house [spirit],” and they are in “a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them” (Alma 40:13–14). Their condition seems to be similar to the pre-earth servants of the devil who know their final destiny and dreadfully fear its coming. That the servants of the devil know their destiny was illustrated when the Savior, in his earthly ministry in the country of the Gergesenes, met two who were possessed by devils. Upon recognizing him, they cried out: “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Matt 8:29). Concerning this passage the Prophet Joseph said: “It would seem also, that wicked spirits . . . know their future destiny” (*TPJS* 208). The mental attitude of these two satanic spirits seems to be the same as that of the wicked spirits described by Alma who were “fearful[ly] looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them” (Alma 40:14). The



spirits of the wicked in the spirit world are apparently assembled together somewhere where they will not have the Spirit of the Lord until the time of the Resurrection as Alma and President Joseph F. Smith said, but there are more than two divisions. There seem to be various degrees of wickedness and of righteousness, too, that exist in the spirit world.

Once more we turn to President Brigham Young for further insight: “We may enquire where the spirits dwell, that the devil has power over? They dwell anywhere, . . . on this continent; it is full of them. If you could see, . . . you would see millions on millions of the spirits of those who have been slain upon this continent. Would you see the spirits of those who were as good in the flesh as they knew how to be? Yes. Would you see the spirits of the wicked? Yes. Could you see the spirits of devils? Yes, and that is all there is of them” (*JD* 3:368). President Young is apparently describing three classes of spirits that the devil has power over in the spirit world. The first class, those who were as good as they knew how to be while they lived on the earth, are probably the terrestrial spirits, the honorable men of the earth (*D&C* 76:75). Although they were good people by earthly standards, they are still among the congregation of the wicked (*D&C* 62:5), having been “blinded by the subtle craftiness of men . . . [they] are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it” (*D&C* 123:12). They remain under the bondage of sin because they come not unto Christ (*D&C* 84:49–51) which means they were not baptized by Christ’s authorized servants (*3 Nephi* 12:1–2; 21:6; 27:20). The second group, the spirits of the wicked, would be the telestial spirits, or those who are not redeemed until the last resurrection because of the sins they committed while on earth (*D&C* 76:82–85). The third group, the spirits of the devils, would be those who became sons of perdition in this life, and those spirits who were denied a body because of their decision in the premortal life to follow Lucifer. The devil has power over those spirits because they did not attain the Spirit of the Lord in their lives when they had the opportunity to do so (*Alma* 34:34–35). These three degrees of



wickedness described by Brigham Young, plus the celestial spirits, are all in the same world of spirits, but they are separated from each other by the state of their souls (spirits).

Although the wicked and the righteous are received into separate states in the spirit world as explained by Alma and President Brigham Young, there does not seem to be a physical barrier, such as a wall or fence that separates the various groups; however, there are some other forms of restriction imposed. As the Prophet Joseph Smith said, the “wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed or controlled” (*TPJS* 208). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, there was a gulf between the two (Luke 16:19–31). That gulf is described in the Book of Mormon as the justice of God that separates the righteous from the wicked:

And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God. And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked. And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end. (1 Nephi 15:28–30)

A God of justice is a God of law (2 Nephi 2:5; Alma 42:13). All blessings of the gospel are predicated upon obedience to law (D&C 130:20–21). Law also inflicts a punishment for breaking it (Alma 42:22). The brightness of the justice of God, likened to a flaming fire, is probably the Spirit of the Lord that envelopes the spirits of the just as the Prophet Joseph said (*TPJS* 326). Either the flaming fire or the Spirit of the Lord would prevent wicked spirits from passing through it because of fear or possibly restrictions placed upon them. Any restrictions would probably be imposed by the priesthood. The following interpretation comes from Joseph Smith regarding Job 1:7, “when Satan presented himself before the Lord, among the sons of God, he said that he came ‘from going to and fro in the earth, and from wandering up and down in it;’ and he is emphatically called the prince of the power of the air; and, it is very evident



that they possess a power that none but those who have the Priesthood can control” (TPJS 208). The priesthood is an eternal power and is held by people in the spirit world (Alma 13:7–9). Those not meeting the prerequisites, such as worthiness or priesthood ordinances, would not be allowed to enter certain areas where the righteous are assembled. Mercy cannot rob justice (Alma 42:25).

## The Paradise of God

More information about the gulf that separates the righteous from the wicked in the spirit world comes through an analysis of the dream given to Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 8). Those people who in mortal life desire to partake of the fruit of the tree, which is eternal life (1 Nephi 15:36), must enter the path to that tree. The gate to the path is faith, repentance, and baptism. In the justice of God, baptism in mortal life is required for entrance to that path (2 Nephi 31:9, 17). The Prophet Joseph taught the following:

God set the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens, and gave them their laws, conditions and bounds, which they cannot pass, except by His commandments; they all move in perfect harmony in their sphere and order, and are as lights, wonders and signs unto us. The sea also has its bounds which it cannot pass. . . . Upon the same principle do I contend that baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God, . . . It is a sign and a commandment which God has set for man to enter into His kingdom. Those who seek to enter in any other way will seek in vain; for God will not receive them, *neither will the angels acknowledge their works as accepted*, for they have not obeyed the ordinances, nor attended to the signs which God ordained for the salvation of man. (TPJS 197–98; emphasis added)

Therefore, it seems that a requirement for entrance to what Alma calls the spirit world paradise is the ordinance of baptism.

The vision of the redemption of the dead shown to President Joseph F. Smith on October 3, 1918, as he pondered over the meaning of 1 Peter 3:28–20, seems to verify the concept that the righteous spirits who have been baptized and have lived



according to those baptismal covenants will be in the state of paradise.

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. (D&C 138:12–14)

A definition of what “the testimony of Jesus” includes being baptized. In the vision of the celestial world shown to the Prophet Joseph and Sidney Rigdon, they recorded that

*They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power (D&C 76:51–52; emphasis added).*

Although this scripture describes the people in the celestial kingdom, the same definition would be applicable to the corresponding group of spirits in the spirit world.

Conversely, the wicked are described in the Doctrine and Covenants as those who do not come unto Christ (D&C 84:49–51). To come unto Christ is to be baptized (3 Nephi 12:1–3, 21:6; 27:20). Jesus did not go among the wicked while visiting the spirit world, that would include the unbaptized, but he “organized his forces and appointed messengers” to teach those who had died in their sins, “faith in God, repentance from sin, *vicarious baptism for the remission of sins*, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands” (D&C 138:20, 30–33; emphasis added). President Joseph Fielding Smith concluded that his father’s vision was evidence that baptism was required to be among the righteous spirits. “There, as I understand it, *the righteous—meaning those who have been baptized and who have been faithful*—are gathered in one part and all the others



in another part of the spirit world” (2:230). I do not know of any scriptures or teachings of modern prophets that give direct evidence of unbaptized people being in the paradise described by Alma.

## Associations in the Spirit World

There are also some natural restrictions that exist in both paradise and the spirit prison. Such restrictions are defined here as the tendencies of people to associate with others of similar moral standards, interests, or family connections. If our eyes were opened, we would probably see some association among the several groups of spirits similar to the associations of peoples upon the earth. Brigham Young said:

The spirits that dwell in these tabernacles on this earth, when they leave them, go directly into the world of spirits. What, a congregated mass of inhabitants there in spirit, mingling with each other, as they do here? Yes, brethren, they are there together, and if they associate together, and collect together in clans and in societies as they do here, it is their privilege. No doubt they yet, more or less, see, hear, converse, and have to do with each other, both good and bad. (*JD* 2:137)

The natural associations would have existed among the righteous in paradise who are baptized, the unbaptized who are in the spirit prison, and those who are judged not to have lived up to their baptismal covenants. Since the Savior’s journey to the spirit world after his crucifixion, the associations between spirit groups have increased through the missionary program that he organized among the righteous messengers appointed to “carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men” (D&C 138:30).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

The organization of the spiritual and heavenly worlds, and of spiritual and heavenly beings, was agreeable to the most perfect order and harmony: their limits and bounds were fixed irrevocably, and voluntarily subscribed to in their heavenly estate by themselves, and were by our first parents subscribed to upon the earth. (*TPJS* 325)



Man may thus act for himself and choose to follow or not to follow the commandments of God (2 Nephi 2:11–16), but only those who follow the commandments may eventually attain that perfect order of “the spiritual and heavenly worlds.” President Brigham Young told of the Prophet Joseph’s appearing to him in a dream and instructing him to tell the people to follow the Spirit of the Lord, and promising that “if they will, they can find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion” (Romney 141). If the Father’s perfect order is attainable in the mortal earth, it must also exist and be attainable in the spirit world. The most righteous would have “their limits and bounds” but would be in “perfect order and harmony.” On the other hand, the wicked spirits would not have complied with this “perfect order and harmony” and would be grouped together by priesthood restrictions as well as by natural association. Elder Parley P. Pratt said, “Many spirits of the departed, who are unhappy, linger in lonely wretchedness about the earth, and in the air, and especially about their ancient homesteads, and the places rendered dear to them by the memory of the former scenes” (117). On another occasion, he reasoned as follows:

If we reason from analogy, we should at once conclude that things exist there after the same pattern. I have not the least doubt but there are spirits there who have dwelt there a thousand years, who, if we could converse with them face to face, would be found as ignorant of the truths, the ordinances, powers, keys, Priesthood, resurrection, and eternal life of the body, in short . . . ignorant of the fulness of the Gospel. . . . (*JD* 1:10)

President George Q. Cannon attributed a similar teaching to the Prophet Joseph:

Brother Joseph Smith gave an explanation of [evil influences]. There are places in the Mississippi Valley where the influence or the presence of invisible spirits are very perceptibly felt. He said that numbers had been slain there in war and that there were evil influences or spirits which affect the spirits of those who have tabernacles



on the earth. I myself have felt those influences in other places besides the continent of America; I have felt them on the old battle grounds on the Sandwich Islands. I have come to the conclusion that if our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, we should feel differently on this subject than we do; we would not be so unguarded and careless and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not; but we would be continually watchful and prayerful to our Heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit and His holy angels to be around about us to strengthen us to overcome every evil influence. (1:82)

Therefore, were we permitted, we would see the assemblies of spirits of various orders of wickedness and righteousness in the spirit world. We would also see righteous spirits carrying the gospel to those who sit in darkness, so that all may have the opportunity to attain the “perfect order and harmony” that exists in the “spiritual and heavenly worlds.”

### Escape from Spirit Prison

The work of the righteous is to preach the gospel to as many as will receive it, so that whosoever receives it unto repentance may leave the spirit prison and enter into paradise when the ordinances have been done vicariously for them on earth. Through the institution of baptism for the dead, the Church is able to open the gate of baptism, which allows the repentant spirits to exit the spirit prison of hell, the state of the wicked in the spirit world. The performance and acceptance of this ordinance lifts the imposed restriction and allows entrance among the righteous spirits. The gates of hell do not prevail against the Church (see 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:5–6; 1 Corinthians 15:29). Jesus apparently taught this doctrine during the forty days of his post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:31). Based upon a Coptic (Christian Egyptian) manuscript discovered in 1895 and authenticated by modern scholars, Professor Hugh Nibley has written:

To the Jews “the gates of hell” meant something very specific. Both Jews and Christians thought of the world of the dead as a prison—*carcer*, *phylake*, *phoura*—in which the dead were detained



but not necessarily made to suffer any other discomfort. . . . The Christians talked of “the prison of death” to which baptism held the key of release—a significant thought, as we shall see.

It is the proper function of a gate to shut creatures in or out of a place (Isaiah 45:1); when a gate “prevails,” it succeeds in this purpose; when it does not “prevail,” someone succeeds in getting past it. But *prevail* is a rather free English rendering of the far more specific Greek *katischyō*, meaning to overpower in the sense of holding back, holding down, detaining, suppressing, etc. Moreover, the thing which is held back, is (Matthew 16:18) not the church, for the object is not in the accusative but in the partitive genitive: it is ‘hers,’ part of her, that which belongs to her, that the gates will not be able to contain. . . . In one of the very earliest Christian poems Christ is described as going to the underworld to preach to the dead, “And the dead say to him, ‘Open the gate to us!’” whereupon the Lord, “heeding their faith,” gives them the seal of baptism. Baptism for the dead, then, was the key to the gates of hell which no church claimed to possess until the nineteenth century, the gates remaining inexorably closed against those very dead of whose salvation the early Christians had been so morally certain. . . . this poem in its conclusion definitely associated the release of the dead with the “rock.”

The same idea is even more obviously expressed by Ignatius in what is perhaps the earliest extant mention of the rock after New Testament times:

This is the Way which leads to the Father, the Rock . . . the Key . . . the Gate of Knowledge, through which have entered Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and all the host of prophets. . . .

From which it is clear that Matthew 16:17–19, with its combination of gates, keys, and rock, definitely hinges on the subject of salvation for the dead, and the work by which they are admitted to the presence of the Father.

Those who fondly suppose that “the gates of hell shall not prevail” is a guarantee of the security of the church on *this* earth are inventing a doctrine diametrically opposed to the belief of the early church. If there was one point on which the primitive Saints and their Jewish contemporaries saw eye to eye, it was the belief that Satan is “the prince of *this* world,” nay, “the god of *this* world.” It is here that men are under his power, and here that he overcomes the kingdom of God by violence. (788)

Jesus told Peter that His church would be built upon the rock of revelation (see *TPJS* 274) and that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). One of the gates that will not prevail against the Church will, at least in one sense, be the one that would prevent the repentant spirits from exiting the



spirit prison. The Lord also told Peter that He would give him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19). This binding power is the priesthood. Ordinances that are performed by the priesthood on earth are for eternal purposes and are effective in the hereafter. The loosing power given to Peter would include, but not be limited to, the power to perform ordinances on earth that would loose the spirits from bondage in the spirit world or in other words would open the gate of the spirit prison for those who have been vicariously baptized on earth and are repentant to be able to exit. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church.

When people accept the gospel in the spirit world, they must depend on the people on earth to perform essential ordinances for them. Joseph Smith said the following about baptism for the dead:

Every man that has been baptized and belongs to the kingdom has a right to be baptized for those who have gone before; and as soon as the law of the Gospel is obeyed here by their friends who act as proxy for them, the Lord has administrators there to set them free. A man may act as proxy for his own relatives; the ordinances of the Gospel which were laid out before the foundations of the world have thus been fulfilled by them, and we may be baptized for those whom we have much friendship for; *but it must first be revealed to the man of God, lest we should run too far.* (TPJS 367; emphasis added)

When people in the spirit world are ready to receive the ordinances, there will be some kind of communication between the spirit world and those on earth. There will be people ministered to by angels or moved upon by the spirit to get the work done. Elder Melvin J. Ballard related this story that happened at the time of the dedication of the Logan Temple:

The day before the dedication while writing recommends to the members of his ward who were to be present at the first service, two elderly gentlemen walked down the streets of Logan, approached my two younger sisters, and, coming to the elder one of the two placed in her hands a newspaper and said:



“Take this to your father. Give it to no one else. Go quickly with it. Don’t lose it.”

The child responded and when she met her mother, her mother wanted the paper. The child said, “No, I must give it to Father and no one else.”

She was admitted into the room and told her story. We looked in vain for these travelers. They were not to be seen. No one else saw them. Then we turned to the paper. The newspaper, *The Newbury Weekly News*, was printed in my father’s old English home, Thursday, May 15th, 1884, and reached our hands May 18th, 1884, three days after its publication. We were astonished, for by no earthly means could it have reached us, so that our curiosity increased as we examined it. Then we discovered one page devoted to the writings of a reporter of the paper, who had gone on his vacation, and among other places had visited an old cemetery. The curious inscriptions led him to write what he found on the tombstones, including the verses. He also added the names, date of birth, death, etc., filling nearly an entire page.

It was the old cemetery where the Ballard family had been buried for generations, and very many of my father’s immediate relatives and other intimate friends were mentioned. . . .

I will tell you what will happen. When you have gone as far as you can go, the names of your righteous dead who have embraced the gospel in the spirit world will be given you through the instrumentality of your dead kindred. But only the names of those who have received the gospel will be revealed. (250–51)

The essential requirement for entrance into paradise in the spirit world is, therefore, baptism. As stated by Elder Parley P. Pratt, “As in earth, so in the spirit world. No person can enter into the privileges of the Gospel, until the keys are turned, and the Gospel opened by those in authority, for all which there is a time, according to the wise dispensations of justice and mercy” (*JD* 1:11). Baptism for the dead must be performed vicariously before those who are in the spirit prison can leave the state of the wicked. Elder Melvin J. Ballard, in speaking of the celestial kingdom said: “And those who are prepared to enter into this exaltation, before they can pass by the angels to their glory and their exaltation, must subscribe to every gospel principle, not only live it in the spirit world, but be judged according to men in the flesh. They cannot ignore baptism” (227). It should be remembered that the phrase “the wicked” is a general category



for those who have not been baptized (see D&C 62:5; 84:49–51). One of the oft-cited scriptures by those who object to the idea that baptism is a requirement for entering paradise is the promise of Jesus to the thief on the cross: “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The objection is answered by the following explanation by the Prophet Joseph Smith:

I will say something about the spirits in prison. There has been much said by modern divines about the words of Jesus [when on the cross] to the thief, saying, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” King James’ translators make it out to say paradise. But what is paradise? It is a modern word: it does not answer at all to the original word that Jesus made use of. Find the original of the word paradise. You may as easily find a needle in a haymow. Here is a chance for battle, ye learned men. There is nothing in the original word in Greek from which this was taken that signifies paradise; but it was—This day thou shalt be with me in the world of spirits: then I will teach you all about it and answer your inquiries. And Peter says he went and preached to the world of spirits [spirits in prison, I Peter, 3rd chap. 19th verse], so that they who would receive it could have it answered by proxy by those who live on the earth, etc. . . .

Hades, the Greek, or Sheol, the Hebrew, these two significations mean a world of spirits. Hades, Sheol, paradise, spirits in prison, are all one: it is a world of spirits.

The righteous and the wicked all go to the same world of spirits until the resurrection. ‘I do not think so,’ says one. If you will go to my house any time, I will take my lexicon and prove it to you. (TPJS 30910)

When baptism for the dead is performed, the gates of hell will not prevail in the spirit world.

Being baptized is not all that is required for a spirit to be in paradise or to be released from the spirit prison. Those who have been baptized must live up to the covenants made in that ordinance. Those who are judged not to have kept their covenants will be cast into prison until their sins have been paid for either by the Savior through their repentance or by their own suffering (see 3 Nephi 12:23–26; D&C 19:16–18). If they have kept their covenants, they will find a state of peace in paradise. This peace will be both internal and external. It will be internal because of they will know they have done as the Lord would have them do. It will be external because of the caliber of people



with whom they associate. Theirs will be a state of rest from the cares, troubles, and sorrows of the mortal world. Although they may be pained from their observations of friends and family who are still in mortality, they will know that they “have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it” (2 Nephi 9:18). However, they will still look forward to the Resurrection, considering “the long absence of [their] spirits from [their] bodies to be a bondage” (D&C 45:17). Nevertheless, they will eventually be “received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

On the other hand, the wicked have several different groupings. There are those “who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house” (Alma 40:13). These are the sons of perdition. Their eventual fate is to be cast into outer darkness with those who rebelled in the premortal state. Perhaps it is this group of whom Jacob says they “die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins” (2 Nephi 9:38). They are, as king Benjamin describes, in “open rebellion against God” and choose “to obey the evil spirit, and [become] an enemy to all righteousness . . . and [remain] and [die] an enemy to God” (Mosiah 2:37–38). Their fate seems to be set and when they see God it will be to bring about “the demands of divine justice [that] do awaken [their] immortal soul to a lively sense of [their] own guilt which doth cause [them] to shrink from the presence of the Lord” (Mosiah 2:38). Their “final doom is to endure a never-ending torment” (Mosiah 2:39). The burning of their conscience is a torment “*like* an unquenchable fire, whose flame [ascends] up forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38; emphasis added).

Between these two extremes—never-ending torment and never-ending happiness (Mosiah 2:39, 41)—there are several degrees of torment or happiness. President Brigham Young said that some were as good as they knew how to be (terrestrial



spirits), and others were wicked (telestial spirits). He also said that there are differences within each of these groups teaching that:

All men, excepting those who sin against the Holy Ghost, who shed innocent blood or who consent thereto, will be saved in some kingdom; for in my father's house, says Jesus, are many mansions. Where is John Wesley's abode in the other world? He is not where the Father and the Son live, but he is gone into what is called hades, or paradise, or the spirit-world. He did not receive the gospel as preached by Jesus Christ and His apostles; it was not then upon the earth. The power of the Holy Priesthood was not then among men; but I suppose that Mr. Wesley lived according to the best light he had, and tried to improve upon it all the days of his life. Where is the departed spirit of that celebrated reformer? It occupies a better place than ever entered his heart to conceive of when he was in the flesh. (JD 11:126)

However, President Young appears to be using several terms as general designations of the spirit world rather than identifying specific places.

Elder Parley P. Pratt also taught that there are different grades or classes in the spirit world:

I will suppose, in the spirit world, a grade of spirits of the lowest order, composed of murderers, robbers, thieves, adulterers, drunkards, and persons ignorant, uncultivated, &c., who are in prison, or in hell, without hope, without God, and unworthy as yet of Gospel instruction. Such spirits, if they could communicate, would not tell you of the resurrection or of any of the Gospel truths, for they know nothing about them.

Take another class of spirits—pious, well-disposed men; for instance, the honest Quaker, Presbyterian, or other sectarian, who, although honest, and well disposed, had not, while in the flesh, the privilege of the Priesthood and Gospel. They believed in Jesus Christ, but died in ignorance of his ordinances, and had not clear conceptions of his doctrine, and of the resurrection. They expected to go to that place called heaven, as soon as they were dead, and that their doom would then and there be fixed, without any further alteration or preparation. (JD 1:12)

These various groups are in some degree of darkness until the light of the gospel is carried to them. When vicarious baptism has been performed for them and they have repented and



accepted the gospel, they can enter paradise to await the Resurrection.

The counsel of Amulek to prepare to meet God in this life is fitting:

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. (Alma 34:34)

Some readers of the Book of Mormon may interpret these verses to say that people have the same character and attributes when they enter into the spirit world as they had in this life. While that is a true principle (see Alma 41:3–6), it is not the main point of Amulek’s statement, which is to admonish the people to seek the Spirit of the Lord in this life or else the spirit of the devil will have power over them, as shown in the following verse:

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked. (Alma 34:5)

The degree to which we entertain either spirit will continue into the spirit world.

Amulek taught that

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.

And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. (Alma 34:32–33)

The following, given to the Prophet Joseph concerning the Resurrection, is consistent with Alma’s teachings:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection [spirit world].



And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the [spirit] world to come. (D&C 130:18–19)

The Prophet Joseph also said:

Salvation is nothing more nor less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet. And when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world, and a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come, then we are saved, as in the case of Jesus, who was to reign until He had put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy was death. (*TPJS* 297)

Satan has power in the spirit world too but the degree of his influence there is dependent upon how we have learned to control him here. “The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power” (*TPJS* 181).

## Conclusion

Since we have relied heavily on President Brigham Young to help us understand the spirit world, a testimony born by Heber C. Kimball at the funeral of Jedediah M. Grant, both of whom were counselors in Brigham Young’s First Presidency, seems a fitting conclusion to lend authority to the statements previously cited.

[Brother Grant] said to me, brother Heber, I have been into the spirit world two nights in succession, and, of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worst was to have to again return to my body, though I had to do it. . . . O, says he, the order and government that were there! When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion. . . . that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities; and when he looked at them he saw grade after grade, and all were organized and in perfect harmony. . . . “Why, it is just as brother Brigham says it is; it is just as he has told us many a time. . . .”



He saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world, and there were no wicked spirits among them. (*JD* 4:135–36)

With the teachings in the book of Alma and those from our latter-day prophets, supplementing the Bible, we Latter-day Saints know more about the spirit world than any other people on earth. However, there is still much that we do not know, but the additional teachings that we do have should inspire us to prepare ourselves for the time when we enter into that “state of the soul between death and the resurrection” (*Alma* 40:11). In the meantime, may we try to fashion our lives in such a way that our righteous ancestors who know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions are not pained therewith, and may we be diligent both in preaching the gospel here upon the earth and in finding the names of our departed dead and performing the vicarious ordinances for them so they can live in the paradise until the Resurrection.

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