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## A New Meaning of "Restoration": The Book of Mormon on Life After Death

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Richard O. Cowan

Our eternal life can be divided into three basic periods (see Chart 1). Before we came to this earth, we lived in a premortal estate. After our existence as intelligences, each of us was born as a spirit son or daughter of our heavenly parents. After having the gospel plan taught to us in its fulness, we were given agency to do or not do what was asked of us. While those who yielded to Satan’s temptations were cast out, those who did not were allowed to enter their “second estate,” or, life on earth. Everyone who has been or will be born proved to the Father that they were willing to do all that was required by him.

Abraham explained that what we did during our “first estate” influenced our condition during this “second estate” or the present period of probation (Abr 3:22–26). Alma the Younger specifically taught that priesthood bearers were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works,” while others “on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds” would not have “as great privilege as their brethren” (Alma 13:3–4).

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Mortality is merely a continuation of that pre-earthly estate with many of the same experiences recurring here. This time we were born with a physical body as children of earthly parents. The Book of Mormon places its major emphasis on this second estate, stressing the importance of living righteously now in preparation for our continued eternal existence after this life.

Chart 1.  
MAN'S ETERNAL LIFE

FIRST ESTATE	SECOND ESTATE	THIRD ESTATE
Pre-Earthly existence (Intelligence, Spirit)	Probationary State (Mortality, Post-Earthly Spirit World)	Four Final States (Celestial, Terrestrial, Telestial, or Perdition)
Spirit Birth	Death	
Physical Birth		Resurrection and Judgment

The teachings of Alma the Younger emphasize the importance of wisely using our earthly time to repent and serve God. Alma the Younger taught much about being spiritually prepared to leave this life and venturing on to meet our Father in Heaven. To the Church in Zarahemla he asked: "Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?" (Alma 5:27). On another occasion he continued this same thought: "This life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless [post-resurrection] state which has been spoken of by us" (Alma 12:24). Alma's missionary companion Amulek made this same point even more emphatically: "For behold, 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. . . . 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 emphasis on “this life” is consistent with the Book of Mormon’s announced mission—convincing “Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (Title Page). Some of the most powerful testimonies of the Savior and his atonement, and some of the most beautiful expositions of gospel principles are found in the Book of Mormon. In its pages we can read the admonitions of prophet after prophet exhorting us to take advantage in this present life, of the gift which Christ offers.

The Book of Mormon’s teachings on life after death seem intended primarily to give perspective and meaning to counsels concerning our present existence. Our conduct in this life will determine where and how we will continue our progression in what may be called the “third estate” or life following the resurrection and final judgment. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that even as our present state was influenced by what we did in our pre-earthly existence, we “will receive rewards hereafter for deeds done in the body” (*Doctrines of Salvation* 1:66). President Harold B. Lee concurred, insisting that “there is no truth more plainly taught in the Gospel than that our condition in the next world will depend upon the kind of lives we live here” (164).

We will not enter our ultimate condition in eternity immediately following death. Alma insisted that “there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection” (Alma 40:6). Upon leaving mortality, people are judged by “that God who gave them life.” The righteous will enter a state of happiness or rest called “paradise,” while the wicked will enter a place of torment sometimes referred to as the “spirit prison,” where repentance and obedience to gospel principles must be learned and accepted (see Alma 40:6, 11–14). This period in the world of spirits completes our probationary “second estate.”



### *The Doctrine of Restoration*

God's prophets have promised a restoration of all things (see Matt 17:1; Acts 3:21). When we hear the term *restoration*, we typically think of the latter-day return of the Church and the revelation of the gospel in its fulness. Book of Mormon prophets, however, use this term in a rather different sense. They teach that every individual will receive a temporal as well as a spiritual restoration, good for good, evil for evil (Alma 41:13).

Following our sojourn in the post-earthly spirit world, we will be resurrected and pass through the final judgment. Both of these steps are necessary to accomplish the promised restoration. This chapter will emphasize insights concerning our "third estate," including the resurrection, judgment, and the distinct conditions we may subsequently inherit.

### *Nature of the Resurrection*

Perhaps the best known teachings of the Bible concerning the resurrection are found in 1 Corinthians 15:22, where Paul assures us that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." He explains that what is now a "natural body" will be "raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). Concerning the nature of these resurrected bodies, he further notes that there will be "celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor 15:40–42). These statements, however, leave many questions unanswered concerning the nature of the resurrected body itself and the qualifications to receive the respective degrees of glory enumerated by Paul. To find these answers we must turn to latter-day scriptures and teachings of modern prophets.

The book of Alma explains precisely how the physical restoration will take place in the resurrection. Amulek promised



that “the spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame” (Alma 11:43). Alma repeated this same promise: “The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23).

Expounding on these teachings, Elder Orson Pratt observed that many chemical substances from other sources become part of our bodies but are then later cast off. He estimated that during a typical person’s lifetime approximately seventy-two inches of nail is trimmed away from each finger and toe, and that approximately twenty-four feet of hair and beard is cut away. “Now can we suppose,” asked Elder Pratt humorously, “that when a man rises from the dead that he will come forth with nails six feet long? I cannot conceive any such thing.” He was sure that a resurrected being’s nails “will be of a reasonable length.” He did not believe that every element that had ever been a part of our bodies would rise with us in the resurrection but that “a sufficient amount of the particles which have once been incorporated in the system will be used by the Almighty in the resurrection to make perfect and complete tabernacles for celestial spirits to dwell in” (*Journal of Discourses* 16:355; hereafter *JD*).

President Brigham Young further explained that there are certain “particles” unique to each individual which will form the basis for his or her resurrected body:

The question may be asked, do not the particles that compose man’s body, when returned to mother earth, go to make or compose other bodies? No, they do not. . . . Neither can the particles which have comprised the body of man become parts of the bodies of other men, or of beasts, fowls, fish, insect, or vegetables. . . . At the sound of the trumpet of God every particle of our physical structures necessary to make our tabernacles perfect will be assembled, to be rejoined with the spirit, every man in his order. Not one particle will be lost. (“Resurrection” 153)



The Prophet Joseph Smith had earlier taught this same truth: "There is no fundamental principle belonging to a human system that ever goes into another in this world or in the world to come; I care not what the theories of men are. We have the testimony that God will raise us up, and he has the power to do it. If anyone supposes that any part of our bodies, that is, the fundamental parts thereof, ever goes into another body, he is mistaken" (*HC* 5:339).

There is a purpose for which the particles of our bodies return to the ground. "Yes, we will lay down these bodies in the grave," stated Brigham Young. "What for? That the dust, our mother earth, that composes the house of the spirit, may be purified by passing through this ordeal, and be prepared to be called up and united with the intelligent heavenly body that God has prepared. . . . We bear the image of our earthly parents in their fallen state," President Young continued, "but by obedience to the Gospel of salvation, and the renovating influences of the Holy Ghost, and the holy resurrection, we shall put on the image of the heavenly, in beauty, glory, power and goodness" (*Discourses of Brigham Young* 373–74).

The restoration of the body to its "perfect frame" is not complete at the moment of resurrection, but takes place immediately thereafter. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that "all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young, there will not be 'added unto their stature one cubit'" (*Woodruff* 3:752). President Joseph F. Smith felt certain that the immortal spirit would not be satisfied to inhabit an imperfect body in eternity. "From the day of the resurrection, the body [of a child] will develop until it reaches the full measure of the stature of its spirit, whether it be male or female" (594). Similarly, he explained that defects will be removed "in their course, in their proper time, according to the merciful providence of God" (592). In summary, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith declared: "Children will rise as they were laid away, but after the resurrection their bodies will grow to the full stature of their spirits. Deformities will be erased and in the resurrection



will be made whole” (*Church History and Modern Revelation* 2:301).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell offered a broader understanding of what will be restored in the resurrection: “It seems clear that our intelligence will rise with us, meaning not simply our IQ, but also our capacity to receive and apply truth. Our talents, attributes, and skills will rise with us; certainly also our capacity to learn, our degree of self-discipline, and our capacity to work” (12).

The Book of Mormon notes that translated beings are different from resurrected ones. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “translated bodies are designed for future missions” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 191; hereafter *TPJS*). Moses and Elijah, for example, retained their physical bodies, enabling them to restore keys by the laying on of hands at the time of the Savior’s transfiguration. The three Nephite disciples were similarly promised: “Ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.” Mormon explained: “That they might not taste of death there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not suffer pain nor sorrow. . . . Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day” (3 Nephi 28:7, 38–39). What was the nature of this initial change? Joseph Smith observed that many have incorrectly supposed that translated beings are “taken immediately into the presence of God, and into eternal fulness.” He explained, “Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order” (*TPJS* 170–71). Hence, the three Nephites were quickened from our present telestial condition to a higher terrestrial state. What, then, will be the nature of their greater future change? The Savior had specifically told them that “when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality” (3 Nephi 28:8). In summary, we are telestial mortals, translated beings are terrestrial mortals,



while exalted resurrected beings are celestial immortals (see Chart 2).

Chart 2.  
TYPES OF BODIES

	Spirit	Mortal	Immortal
Celestial	Holy Ghost (Us—in pre-mortal existence)		Father and Son; resurrected in celestial kingdom
Terrestrial		Translated beings; mortal during millennium	Resurrected in terrestrial kingdom
Telestial		Our present state	Resurrected in telestial kingdom
Sons of Perdition	Those who followed Satan in pre-mortal existence		Resurrected who committed unpardonable sin

*Sequence of Resurrections*

Not all will be resurrected at once, but “every man in his own order” (1 Cor 15:23; see Chart 3). Joseph Fielding Smith taught that the first resurrection is for those worthy of the celestial kingdom and who are caught up to meet Christ in the air at his Second Coming. Shortly afterwards, but still part of the “first resurrection,” another raising from the dead will include those who lived at least a terrestrial law and those who died without a knowledge of the gospel plan. The “second resurrection” or “resurrection of the unjust” will not occur until after the millennium and will include the remainder of those who have ever lived on the earth, that is, “liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers and all who love and make a lie.” These will inherit the telestial kingdom or become sons of perdition (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:297).

Chart 3.  
SEQUENCE OF RESURRECTIONS

FIRST RESURRECTION (Resurrection of the Just)		SECOND RESURRECTION (Resurrection of the Unjust)	
Morning Celestial	Evening Terrestrial, Some Celestial	Telestial	Sons of Perdition
Resurrection of Christ	Second Coming	End of the Millennium	Final Judgment

Alma also believed there may be more than one time when people will be resurrected. He said: “Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead” (Alma 40:5; see also “Alma on the Resurrection” 495). Alma acknowledged that he was not sure when the various groups would be resurrected. He supposed that all who died before the resurrection of Christ would come forth before any who died after that event (Alma 40:19). “It is evident,” observed Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, that “Alma’s understanding of the extent of the resurrection at the time the Savior came forth from the dead was limited, therefore he stated only his opinion” (“Alma on the Resurrection” 495). Alma correctly suggested that only the righteous will rise with Christ from the grave (Alma 40:20–21). This confusion stands in marked contrast to Alma’s positive testimony concerning the spirit world which he declared had been made known to him by an angel (Alma 40:11–14).

Alma’s supposition that at least the righteous would be resurrected with Christ had been taught earlier by the prophet Abinadi. He declared that the righteous, as well as those who had died without a knowledge of the gospel, would come forth in the “first resurrection” or resurrection of the just, which started at the time of Christ and will conclude at the end of the



millennium. On the other hand, he affirmed that the wicked would have no part in the first resurrection (Mosiah 15:22–26).

The Prophet Brigham Young provided an interesting insight into one factor influencing the precise time of a given individual's resurrection:

We have not, neither can we receive here, the ordinance and the keys of the resurrection. They will be given to those who have passed off this stage of action and have received their bodies again. . . . They will be ordained, by those who hold the keys of the resurrection, to go forth and resurrect the Saints, just as we receive the ordinance of baptism, then the keys to baptize others for the remission of sins. This is one of the ordinances we can not receive here, and there are many more. (*JD* 15:137)

President Spencer W. Kimball quoted this statement and emphasized that we still do not have the power to resurrect one another (49).

### *The Final Judgment*

The Book of Mormon teaches that the spiritual "restoration" is accomplished through the judgment. Amulek testified: "The day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works." He warned that on that occasion we will "have a bright recollection of all our guilt" (Alma 11:41, 43). "Therefore the wicked remain," he explained, "as though there had been no redemption made, except it be for the loosing of the bands of death" (v 41). In conclusion he emphasized: "This restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous" (v 44).

The prophet Alma warned that more than our actual deeds will be taken into account at the judgment: "Our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence" (Alma



12:14). Later, counseling his wayward son Corianton, Alma affirmed: “The plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. . . . And it is requisite with 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. And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil” (Alma 41:24).

Continuing his counsel to Corianton, Alma taught clearly the eternal principle that mercy cannot rob justice. The principle of justice specifies that God operates according to laws, obedience to which will always bring blessings (D&C 130:20–21), but disobedience to which brings punishment (Alma 42:22). According to the principle of mercy, however, another person, if willing and able, may pay the penalties resulting from our sins. Christ was willing to make this payment because of his great love for us (D&C 34:3), and he was able to make an infinite atonement because he was the son of God and was sinless. He made this payment in a way as not to rob justice, requiring that we repent in order to qualify for the payment he has made in our behalf. Alma insisted: “Justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:24–25).

Alma had pointed out that there is a relationship between understanding gospel principles and being accountable for our actions. He warned the wicked Nephites in Ammonihah: “If this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have . . . it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them” because the Lamanites had sinned in ignorance (Alma 9:23). Elder George Albert Smith similarly declared: “We will not be judged as our brothers and sisters of the world are judged, but according to the greater opportunities



placed in our keeping” (47). Therefore, those that are born into heathen countries and do not learn the gospel, President John Taylor had earlier explained, will be “judged without law” (52). Centuries earlier the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob testified: “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 justice upon all those who have not the law given to them” (2 Nephi 9:25–26). Nevertheless, Jacob warned: “But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!” (2 Nephi 9:27).

For these reasons Alma counseled his son Corianton: “Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.” Alma continued:

Is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in a state opposite to its nature? O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful. Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again. (Alma 41:12–14)

### *Final Rewards*

In contrast to the Doctrine and Covenants which clearly describes four basic final kingdoms, the Book of Mormon gives relatively little detail about the precise nature of our ultimate rewards, or what Alma refers to as “that endless state” (Alma 12:24). Nephite prophets seem to emphasize the extremes to be



inherited by the righteous or the wicked respectively. (Even Doctrine and Covenants, section 76 devotes most of its attention to the contrasting rewards of damnation and exaltation.) In his counsel to Corianton, for example, Alma declared that following the judgment all shall be “raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on the one hand, the other on the other” (Alma 41:4). The prophet Jacob had stated this same truth much earlier:

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 . . . they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them. . . . But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever. (2 Nephi 9:15–16, 18)

Interestingly, Jacob used the term “hell” in this discourse in reference to the spirit prison rather than the ultimate fate of the wicked (vv 12–13).

Alma characterized the reward of the righteous as being received into glory (Alma 14:11). King Benjamin described this kingdom in somewhat the same terms as did Jacob and Alma, testifying that those who keep the commandments and endure to the end “are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

Book of Mormon prophets had more to say concerning the fate of the wicked. For example, Jacob warned the wicked: “The power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God[.] And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone



is endless torment" (Jacob 6:9–10; compare 2 Nephi 9:19; 28:23). Jacob had also declared that the lake of fire is the "second death" (Jacob 3:11). Samuel the Lamanite prophet explained the nature of this "second death." Because of the Fall, all are "considered as dead," being cut off from the presence of God, nevertheless the atonement of Christ "bringeth them back into the presence the Lord" to be judged. Those who do not repent are "hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness" (Hel 14:15–19).

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that these references to "fire and brimstone" are only figurative. Jacob and Alma, for example, declare that the torment of the damned would be "as" or "like" a lake of fire (2 Nephi 9:16; Alma 12:17). Old Testament prophets had wanted to compare eternal damnation to the worst possible place known to the people at that time. Hinnom, a sulfurous dump outside Jerusalem where garbage was continually being consumed by fire, became a most fitting symbol (2 Kings 23:10–14; see also Jer 32:35).

In his great discourse, king Benjamin explained what the actual nature of this torment will be. If a person does not repent, "the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever" (Mosiah 2:38; compare 3:25–27).

## Conclusion

Mormon, who abridged most of the records to create the Book of Mormon, reflected on the main thrust of the prophets' messages he had recorded. As a conclusion to those records he declared: "And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam;

and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil; And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you. . . . And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ” (Mormon 3:20–22).

Moroni, Mormon’s son, concluded the Nephite record with a similar plea: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

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