

Introduction

What happens to people after they die? Alma 40–42 focuses on Alma’s counsel to his wayward son Corianton, who had a similar question. In his response, Alma taught about the spirit world, the Judgment, the Resurrection, the law of restoration, and the punishment of sinners. As Alma concluded his teachings to Corianton, he answered questions about what life would be like without repentance, sin, law, and punishment. Alma’s answers to his son also help us understand the plan of happiness and the justice and mercy of God and how they affect our eternal progression.

Commentary

Alma 40:4–10. “All Is as One Day with God”

- After testifying to Corianton of the reality of the Resurrection, Alma expressed uncertainty of the timing of the Resurrection as it relates to all of mankind. Such concerns did not matter to Alma, for he said “all is as one day with God” (Alma 40:8). The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) revealed that for God all things “are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord” (D&C 130:7).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained how things are done in God’s way:

“God was redemptively at work long before mortal time began on this earth—and He will still be at work even after mortal time is no more (see D&C 88:110; Alma 40:8). . . .

“Mercifully, things then will ‘be done in [God’s] own way,’ not ours (D&C 104:16). Then God’s purposes, His patience, His power, and His profound love, which were at work long before time was, will also be at work even after time will be no more (see D&C 84:100; Alma 40:8).

“These and other truths are among what Paul called ‘the deep things of God’ (1 Corinthians 2:10)” (*A Wonderful Flood of Light* [1990], 50, 58–59).

The Prophet Joseph Smith also said that “the great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of

salvation, before it rolled into existence, or ever ‘the morning stars sang together’ for joy; the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal ‘now’” (*History of the Church*, 4:597).

Alma 40:11. The Spirits of All Men “Are Taken Home to That God Who Gave Them Life”

- If at death we enter the spirit world, not God’s actual presence, how are we to understand Alma’s words?

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained that Alma did not necessarily mean that we are brought back into God’s presence: “These words of Alma [40:11] as I understand them, do not intend to convey the thought that all spirits go back into the presence of God for an assignment to a place of peace or a place of punishment and before him receive their individual sentence. ‘Taken home to God’ [compare Ecclesiastes 12:7] simply means that their mortal existence has come to an end, and they have returned to the world of spirits, where they are assigned to a place according to their works with the just or with the unjust, there to await the resurrection. ‘Back to God’ is a phrase which finds an equivalent in many other well known conditions. For instance: a man spends a stated time in some foreign mission field. When he is released and returns to the United States, he may say, ‘It is wonderful to be back home’; yet his home may be somewhere in Utah or Idaho or some other part of the West” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 2:85).

President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) of the First Presidency explained that Alma “does not intend to convey the idea that they are immediately ushered into the personal presence of God. He evidently uses that phrase in a qualified sense” (*Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist [1987], 58).

Alma 40:11–15. The State of the Soul between Death and the Resurrection

- The following clarification helps us understand the condition of spirit beings after death and prior to their resurrection: “When the physical body dies, the spirit continues to live. In the spirit world, the spirits of the 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). A place called spirit prison is reserved for 'those who [have] died in their sins, without a knowledge of the truth, or in transgression, having rejected the prophets' (D&C 138:32). The spirits in prison are 'taught 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, and all other principles of the gospel that [are] necessary for them to know' (D&C 138:33–34). If they accept the principles of the gospel, repent of their sins, and accept ordinances performed in their behalf in temples, they will be welcomed into paradise" (*True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* [2004], 46–47).



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- President Brigham Young (1801–77) helped us better understand the difference between the location of the spirit world and God's abode: "When you lay down this tabernacle, where are you going? Into the spiritual world. Are you going into Abraham's bosom? No, not anywhere nigh there but into the spirit world. Where is the spirit world? It is right here. Do the good and evil spirits go together? Yes, they do. Do they both inhabit one kingdom? Yes, they do. Do they go to the sun? No. Do they go beyond the boundaries of the organized earth? No, they do not. They are brought forth upon this earth" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1954], 376).

Alma 40:16–22. The First Resurrection

- Alma was speaking of the First Resurrection in relation to earthly time. Jesus Christ would be resurrected first, followed shortly thereafter by the

righteous who had lived and died from the beginning of time for our mortal earth down to the time of Christ's Resurrection (see Alma 40:16, 20; D&C 133:54–55). This resurrection is what Alma called the First Resurrection.

- President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that the First Resurrection includes different time periods and events:

"While there was a general resurrection of the righteous at the time Christ arose from the dead, it is customary for us to speak of the resurrection of the righteous at the Second Coming of Christ as the first resurrection. It is the first to us, for we have little thought or concern over that which is past. The Lord has promised that at the time of his Second Advent the graves will be opened, and the just shall come forth to reign with him on the earth for a thousand years. . . .

"At the time of the [second] coming of Christ, 'They who have slept in their graves shall come forth, for their graves shall be opened; and they also shall be caught up to meet him in the midst of the pillar of heaven—They are Christ's, the first fruits, they who shall descend with him first, and they who are on the earth and in their graves, who are first caught up to meet him; and all this by the voice of the sounding of the trump of the angel of God' [D&C 88:97–98]. These are the just, 'whose names are written in heaven, where God and Christ are the judge of all. These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood' [D&C 76:68–69].

"Following this great event, and after the Lord and the righteous who are caught up to meet him have descended upon the earth, there will come to pass another resurrection. This may be considered as a part of the first, although it comes later. In this resurrection will come forth those of the terrestrial order, who were not worthy to be caught up to meet him, but who are worthy to come forth to enjoy the millennial reign" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 2:295–97).

- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave the following explanation regarding the First Resurrection, which

is also referred to as the Resurrection of the Just and as the Resurrection of Life: “Those coming forth in the morning of this resurrection do so with celestial bodies and shall inherit a celestial glory; these are they who are Christ’s the firstfruits. Those coming forth in the afternoon of this resurrection do so with terrestrial bodies and consequently shall inherit that kingdom; they are described as being Christ’s at this coming. All who have been resurrected so far have received celestial bodies; the coming forth of terrestrial beings does not commence until after the Second Coming. (D.&C. 76:50–80; 88:95–99.)” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. [1971–73], 1:196).

Alma 40:23. “Proper and Perfect Frame”

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles referred to the comfort brought by knowing that defects will be corrected in the Resurrection:

“What a comfort to know that all who have been disadvantaged in life from birth defects, from mortal injuries, from disease, or from the natural deterioration of old age will be resurrected in ‘proper and perfect frame.’ . . .



“The assurance of resurrection gives us the strength and perspective to endure the mortal challenges faced by each of us and by those we love, such things as the physical, mental, or emotional deficiencies we bring with us at birth or acquire during mortal life. Because of the resurrection, we know that these mortal deficiencies are only temporary!” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 16–17; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 14).



- President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) had the following to say in relation to deformities in the Resurrection: “Deformity will be removed; defects will be eliminated, and men and women shall attain to the perfection of their spirits, to the perfection that God designed in the beginning. It is his purpose that men and women, his children, born to become heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, shall be made perfect, physically as well as spiritually, through obedience to the law by which he has provided the means that perfection shall come to all his children” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 23).

Alma 40:26. “An Awful Death Cometh upon the Wicked”

- The following statement helps us understand what this “awful death” refers to: “The scriptures sometimes speak of salvation from the second death. The second death is the final spiritual death—being cut off from righteousness and denied a place in any kingdom of glory (see Alma 12:32; D&C 88:24). This second death will not come until the Final Judgment, and it will come to very few (see D&C 76:31–37). Almost every person who has ever lived on the earth is assured salvation from the second death (see D&C 76:40–45)” (*True to the Faith*, 153).

Alma 41. The Law of Restoration

- Like some people today, Corianton may have wondered why it was important to live righteously if everyone receives the blessings of resurrection. Alma 41 addresses these concerns.

For Heavenly Father’s children, the outcome of the law of restoration is dependent upon their faithfulness in keeping His commandments. Thus Alma explained to Corianton that one cannot “be restored from sin to happiness” (Alma 41:10 ). This is akin to the law of the harvest: as we sow, so shall we reap (see Galatians 6:7; D&C 130:20–21 ). Alma encouraged his son to “do good continually” in order to “have good rewarded unto you again. For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored” (Alma 41:14–15).

Alma also taught his son that the law of restoration provides for a perfect restitution of the body in the

Resurrection: “The soul shall be restored to the body . . . ; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost” (Alma 40:23). However, the degree of glory of the resurrected body is dependent upon the degree of faithfulness of each individual (see D&C 88:28–32).

Alma 41:10. “Wickedness Never Was Happiness”

- The following counsel reinforces the importance of seeking happiness by living gospel standards:

“Many people try to find happiness and fulfillment in activities that are contrary to the Lord’s commandments. Ignoring God’s plan for them, they reject the only source of real happiness. They give in to the devil, who ‘seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself’ (2 Nephi 2:27). Eventually they learn the truth of Alma’s warning to his son Corianton: ‘Wickedness never was happiness’ (Alma 41:10). . . .

“As you seek to be happy, remember that the only way to real happiness is to live the gospel. You will find peaceful, eternal happiness as you strive to keep the commandments, pray for strength, repent of your sins, participate in wholesome activities, and give meaningful service. You will learn to have fun within the limits set by a loving Father in Heaven” (*True to the Faith*, 79–80).

ALMA 41:11–14

What do we receive if we “deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually”?

Alma 42:1–10. “A Probationary Time”

- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the purpose of the probationary time called mortality: “The main purpose of earth life is to allow our spirits, which existed before the world was, to be united with our bodies for a time of great opportunity in mortality. The association of the two together has given us the privilege of growing, developing, and maturing as only we can with spirit and body united. With our bodies, we pass through a certain amount of trial in what is termed

a probationary state of our existence. This is a time of learning and testing to prove ourselves worthy of eternal opportunities. It is all part of a divine plan our Father has for His children” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 16; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 13–14).

- While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder Ronald E. Poelman added that mortality is a time to learn of opposites and to choose between them: “The plan of salvation presented to and accepted by us in our premortal state includes a probationary period on earth, during which we experience opposites, make choices, learn the consequences thereof, and prepare to return to the presence of God. Experiencing adversity is an essential part of the process. Knowing this, we elected to come into mortality. (See 2 Nephi 2:11–16.)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 29; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 23).

- Elder William R. Bradford of the Seventy concluded that the purpose of mortality is to become like our Father in Heaven: “This life is a probationary period. It is a marvelous gift of time during which we can learn to be like our Heavenly Father by following the teachings of His Son, Jesus Christ. The path He leads us on is not a cluttered path. It is simple and straight and lighted by the Spirit” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 40; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 29).

Alma 42:11–31. The Laws of Justice and Mercy

- President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explained that the Savior’s sacrifice allows mercy to be extended to us without violating the law of justice:

“Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around in restless agony for someone, anyone, to help us.

“And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our redemption.

“Unless there is a mediator, unless we have a friend, the full weight of justice untempered, unsympathetic,

must, positively must fall on us. The full recompense for every transgression, however minor or however deep, will be exacted from us to the uttermost farthing.

“But know this: Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is such a Mediator.

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5.)

“Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice.

“This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. . . .

“The extension of mercy will not be automatic. It will be through covenant with Him. It will be on His terms, His generous terms, which include, as an absolute essential, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

“All mankind can be protected by the law of justice, and at once each of us individually may be extended the redeeming and healing blessing of mercy” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 80; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 55–56).

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell shared this insight: “The justice and mercy of God will have been so demonstrably perfect that at the Final Judgment there will be no complaints, including from those who once questioned what God had allotted in the mortal framework (see 2 Nephi 9:14–15; Alma 5:15–19; 12:3–14; 42:23–26, 30)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 92; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 74).

Alma 42:18–30. Remorse of Conscience

- President Boyd K. Packer explained the value remorse of conscience can have:



“It is my purpose to ease the pain of those who suffer from the very unpleasant feeling of guilt. I feel like the doctor who begins his treatment by saying, ‘Now, this may hurt a little. . . .’

“Every one of us has at least tasted the pain of conscience which follows our mistakes.

“John said, ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us’ [1 John 1:8]. Then he said it more strongly: ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make [the Lord] a liar, and his word is not in us’ [1 John 1:10].

“All of us sometime, and some of us much of the time, suffer remorse of conscience from things we did wrong or things left undone. That feeling of guilt is to the spirit what pain is to the physical body. . . .

“We all make mistakes. Sometimes we harm ourselves and seriously injure others in ways that we alone cannot repair. We break things that we alone cannot fix. It is then in our nature to feel guilt and humiliation and suffering, which we alone cannot cure. That is when the healing power of the Atonement will help.

“The Lord said, ‘Behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent [D&C 19:16]’ (in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 27–28; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 22–23).

- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) spoke of the value of a sensitive conscience: “How wonderful that God should endow us with this sensitive yet strong guide we call a conscience! Someone has aptly remarked that ‘conscience is a celestial spark which God has put into every man for the purpose of saving his soul.’ Certainly it is the instrument which awakens the soul to consciousness of sin, spurs a person to make up his mind to adjust, to convict himself of the transgression without soft-pedaling or minimizing the error, to be willing to face facts, meet the issue and pay necessary penalties—and until the person is in this frame of mind he has not begun to repent. To be sorry is an approach, to abandon the act of error is a beginning, but until one’s conscience has been sufficiently stirred to cause him to move in the matter, so long as there are excuses and rationalizations, one

has hardly begun his approach to forgiveness. This is what Alma meant in telling his son Corianton that ‘none but the truly penitent are saved.’ (Al. 42:24.)” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [1969], 152).

Alma 42:23. “The Atonement Bringeth to Pass the Resurrection”

• President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) bore the following witness of the magnificence of the atoning sacrifice which made the Resurrection possible:



“The magnificent expression of His love came in His death, when He gave His life as a sacrifice for all men. That Atonement, wrought in unspeakable pain, became the greatest event of history, an act of grace for which men gave nothing

but which brought the assurance of the Resurrection to all who have or would walk the earth.

“No other act in all of human history compares with it. Nothing that has ever happened can match it. Totally unselfish and with unbounded love for all mankind, it became an unparalleled act of mercy for the whole human race.

“Then with the Resurrection that first Easter morn came the triumphal declaration of immortality. Well was Paul able to declare, ‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Corinthians



15:22). He not only granted the blessing of the Resurrection to all, but opened the way to eternal life to those who observe His teachings and commandments” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 92; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 73).

ALMA 42:27–30

What relationship between agency and accountability is suggested in these verses?

Points to Ponder

- Why can wickedness never lead to happiness? Why does it sometimes seem that wicked people are happy?
- What must we do to have the Savior’s Atonement applied in our behalf?
- How does the law of justice work in your favor?
- How does the law of mercy work in your favor?

Suggested Assignments

- Prepare and if possible deliver a short talk on the spirit world using two or more references from Alma 40–42.
- What did Alma teach his son Corianton about resurrection?
- Write a brief definition or explanation for each of the following: the law of restoration, the law of justice, the law of mercy.