

Lesson 10: Judgment

He loveth righteousness and judgment...

Psalm 33:5

THIS LIFE IS A TEST

We didn't start on this earth and we won't end up here. We are here for *testing*. There are many situations in life that "test" and deliver a verdict, grade or evaluation of some kind after the test. There are tests in school, from spelling tests to oral exams for higher degrees and multi-day tests like the bar exam. A courtroom is also a testing process, where the testimony of various witnesses is examined and a judge renders a judgment declaring what is true and false, and who is innocent or guilty.

In all of these situations there is someone being examined and someone—the judge—who renders a verdict and pronounces a sentence, or punishment. In ancient times, the final authority for handing out judgments was the king. He was the ultimate authority for *everything*—judging included. Ultimately God Almighty is the one who has the authority to render a verdict on everyone and everything that has happened in this world. He is Lord of lords and King of kings. Although at times he has entered history in judgment—the flood of Noah was a judgment upon the world's wickedness and the captivity of Babylon was a judgment upon Israel for her sins—the more part of God's judgments are yet to come.

Because the Millennium will be a time when Christ himself will reign personally upon the earth, the earth must be purified of all unrighteousness before that wonderful period of 1,000 years can begin. There is a period of time just before his coming when the rate of God's judgments will pick up steam, until plagues are being poured out furiously upon the earth. Many will die.¹ Any impure thing that manages to get through all the calamities and the judgments of the last days, will be "burned up" at His coming, until none but the pure in heart, or those of Zion, are left.

EVERYTHING RESTS ON GOD'S LAW

God is the Author of Law—the set of divine decrees that sets the standards by which all testing takes place. God is good and his character is perfect; he is just and does not "respect persons." He judges truly, based upon what is inside a person's heart. "None else save God knowest the thoughts and the intents of the heart." (D&C 6:16) It is worth noting that at Christ's coming we will all have a ringside seat to the "rest of the story," as Paul Harvey said. A series of angels will fly above the earth, revealing "the secret acts of men, and the thoughts and intents of their hearts and the mighty works of God" for all to hear. (D&C 88:109) If we thought the judgment was going to be private we are in for a surprise. It will be very public. For faithful saints, it is reassuring to know that those who have their sins covered by Christ's atonement will be spared these humiliating revelations.

God instructed judges in ancient Israel: "thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." (Leviticus 19:15) In other words, the judge should not take into consideration whether the claimants were poor or rich, but justice should be blind. This high ideal has often fallen by the wayside in earthly courts, but it is still God's ideal, and in his final judgment day court he will judge according to what is in people's hearts and ignore the class and status differences among men.²

The justice reflected in the Mosaic code has been a blessing to all of mankind ever since it was given. It was an advance in several ways over any system of laws then in existence. Today these laws come in for criticism as part of the atheist attack on Biblical law. The passage that includes "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," is mocked for being a bad standard that would create a world of "blind toothless men." But in actuality, Old Testament justice never prescribed maiming such as

¹ This scares people. We are living in the time when we expect to see more and more of these judgments. But why should we fear? Everybody dies anyway. *Fear of God* is the more useful fear to take into the Last Days.

² Anciently, courts favored the rich. Today, it is often the opposite, judges taking without compunction from "deep pockets" so they can more "fairly" distribute wealth according to their own egalitarian ideas of fairness. These high sounding ideas are only a re-branding of Satan's preexistent promise of equal outcome for all. Mosaic law said that it was not a judge's right to do anything except judge a righteous and accurate judgment, favoring no one.

was common in the cultures of that day—cutting off the hands of thieves, etc. The “eye for an eye” passage was understood from the beginning to represent a principle that the punishment must fit the crime as closely as possible. It must not exact more than was fitting to the crime lest it be cruel and based on vengeance, and it must not allow the rich to “buy their way out of crimes” by paying something that was of little actual consequence to them. It's standard of having the “punishment fit the crime” is still the standard for the courts of democratic nations.

The Mosaic laws have also come under attack for supporting slavery. Slavery was the economic system on which the ancient world ran. There was no other. Without slavery or bond servanthood to provide some provision for the poor in society, the world would have been more brutal, not less, for there were no modern systems of public welfare to replace it. Yet the law given to Moses brought advancement in human rights. Slaves had rights. It was forbidden to mistreat a slave. They could marry and have children and these families could not be broken up. If a slave was beaten and lost sight or lost a tooth, he had to be set free. By law he had to be well provided for. A Hebrew who was in bond slavery because of debt had to be let go in the seventh year. Hebrews could sell themselves or their children as bondservants to pay debts. Much better than debtors prison. Other slaves could only be the spoils of war of enemy kingdoms. It was a crime punishable by death to kidnap a man and sell him for a slave. It was this type of prohibited slavery—kidnapping in Africa for selling to Western nations—that grew up in the Western Hemisphere to support plantation agriculture.

Mosaic law required farmers to leave some of their crops in the fields so that the poor could glean them for food. The powerful are continually enjoined in God's law to provide for the widowed and the fatherless. Women too had rights. For the first time, property could be passed down to daughters when there was no son. The position of the mother is higher under the Mosaic Law than any other system of antiquity. By the fifth commandment the mother is to be honored equally with the father, while in the moral law (Lev. 29:3) the command to "fear" the mother, that is, to treat her with respect, is placed even before the duty of "fearing" the father.

The Supreme Court of the United States has ordered the Ten Commandments taken out of public buildings. Yet God's baseline laws—the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic code contained in the 5 books of Moses—established a high standard of justice for the human race.³ The Mosaic law found in the first five books of the Bible was Israel's glory. It provided the Israelite nation with the structure, stability and meaning to daily life that allowed the Jews to flourish as a people.

JUSTICE IN ISRAEL

Israel's failure to follow the high standards given to her by the Mosaic Law brought God's judgments upon her. The prophet Amos rebuked Israel for “turning justice to wormwood.” (Amos 5:7) Isaiah railed against leaders who were “greedy dogs who can never have enough... they all look to their own way, every one for his gain.” (Isaiah 56:11) The prophets pled with the people to “Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate...let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” (Amos 5:15,24)

Justice will eventually prevail for the whole human race because of Jesus Christ. Through him there will be a fair outcome for all, with ultimate justice being meted out and all wrongs made up. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:4) Though this life is filled with injustice, we are to keep the perspective the Lord recommended to Joseph Smith in Liberty jail: “My [daughter], peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment. And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes...know thou, my [daughter], that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.” (D&C 121:7-8, 122:7) For the righteous, judgment day will be a day of triumph.

³ The Code of Hammurabi, established by a Babylonian king long before Moses, was an example of a law code that meant to cover all circumstances. It was a great advance over simple revenge but its idea of “justice” differs from that established by God through Moses in several respects. It sometimes punished innocents: If a man killed a pregnant woman, his *daughter* was killed in retribution. Also social class determined the punishments,

OUR RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

God the Father has appointed Jesus Christ to be the judge of this world. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." (John 5:22-23) The Father "has set him (Christ) at his own right hand... far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come... And hath put all things under his feet." (Ephesians 1:20-22) Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified for this position because he is the creator of this world. It is his and he has been given all authority over the earth.

But he is qualified in another sense to be a judge. He was Emmanuel or "God with us." He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:35) because he was one of us. In the garden and on the cross, he took our pains and he bore our iniquities. He uniquely understands what it is like to *be us* and will judge us with compassionate understanding.

The Father could also name Christ to the position of judge because he so perfectly modeled his life on the life of the Father, that any judgment made by Christ would be the same judgment given by his Father. As Christ said, "I and my father are one." (John 10:30,38) He also said, "the Father is in me, and I in him," so the judgments of one would be the the judgments of the other.

Some have wondered about the saying of Jesus that his 12 apostles would judge the House of Israel. D&C 29:12 clarifies this by saying that the twelve will be "clothed with robes of righteousness, with crowns upon their heads, in glory even as I am, to judge the whole house of Israel, even as many as have loved me and kept my commandments, and none else." This may very well be a governing role for judges are governors and provided leadership in ancient Israel. The crowns may also signify governing power. Certainly few could be better to serve in this role during the millennium than the apostles of the Lamb.

As for who is our judge in the final judgment that determines our fate, many scriptures make clear that *that* judge will be God and him only. John the Revelator saw "a great white throne, and him that sat on it...And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God." Nephi reminds us "the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate." (2Nephi 9:41) The Gospel of Matthew contains the famous scene of final judgment in which "before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." When the "goats" question his judgment, saying "Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ...and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (3 Nephi 14:22-23) Only Christ can say this for he is the Good Shepherd and "behold, I know my sheep." (3 Nephi 18:31)

LAMB OF GOD

Heaven, it's important to note, is spotless. No unclean thing can enter there. (Alma 11:37, 3 Nephi 27:19, Moses 6:57, etc.) All accountable adults who have lived on this earth have a spotted record. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) "All men sin." (D&C 109:34) Satan knows every one of these sins, having tempted us to do most of them, and so he plays his designated role as prosecuting attorney. The name Satan means Accuser, from a Hebrew root word meaning *to accuse*. We read in Revelation: "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony..." (Rev 12:10)

There was only one human being about whom Satan had nothing to say. Though Satan did his best to tempt him, Jesus Christ remained the "spotless lamb of God." He never sinned and thus he could declare, "the prince of this world cometh, but he hath nothing in me." (John 14:30) When we stand at the judgment bar of God, the Accuser will bring up all the ways that we fall short of the measure of Christ. And for each sin that Satan can accuse us of, Christ can say, "I paid for that. That is covered." (*Atonement* in Hebrew = "kaphar," or *cover*) It is Christ's victory that we will celebrate at the last day when "Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet, and shall have perfected his work; [and] when he shall deliver up the kingdom, and present it unto the Father, spotless, saying: I have overcome and have trodden the wine-press alone, even the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God." (D&C 76:107)

He suffered the punishments for the sins of all *as if* he had been the one who sinned. That is why Paul said, "For he hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2nd Corinthians 5:21) "He was numbered with the transgressors," says Isaiah. (Isaiah 53:12) This also explains why he had to "tred the winepress alone."⁴ (D&C 76:107) Just as the spirit must withdraw from us when we sin, so the Father had to withdraw his spirit from the Christ as he carried the burden of mankind's sins for us. For those who will not accept Jesus' gracious offer and repent of their sins, they must suffer this spiritual withdrawal and fierce wrath themselves. "Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit." (D&C 19:20)

He drank the wine of the wrath of the fierceness of God in our stead. He drank the dregs of the bitter cup, the punishments of those who deserved them. We may accept God's gracious offer of forgiveness in exchange for our repentance and a broken and contrite heart. And what about those who reject this offer? These remain in Babylon, breaking the first great commandment, having other gods before Jehovah. Babylon must drink the "cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" because she made "all nations ...drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." (Rev 16:19, 18:3)⁵ Those who remain in the world must be judged or punished for their sins. Babylon, the world system that rejects the authority of God and is based on getting gain and making merchandise of the souls of men, must fall and according to God's great plan of justice, receive the measure of her sins. The "reward" she earns is death. She will be judged.

The Book of Revelation in the Bible gives the most detailed picture of the judgments that God is going to pour out upon Babylon at the wrapping up scene of the world. Babylon is described as a woman who rides upon the back of a beast. The beast represents the government, or governments that support her and make her lifestyle possible. And she has some lifestyle! She lives "deliciously," and is perfumed and beautifully dressed. She represents a city, or cities, that buy and sell and get gain and get rich.

Her fall is said to come in "one day" or "one hour." In other words, her fall is sudden. The merchants of the earth who have been made rich by buying and selling in Babylon are amazed and horrified to see her burning. They lament her end because they will no longer be able to make a profit by buying and selling goods to her. The punishments that God has for her are represented by vials of plagues poured out by angels who have waited for God's command to bring down the fierceness of his wrath. The people who live in Babylon are those who worshipped the false gods of the world. God tells his followers to leave Babylon so they will escape these judgments. At the present time, we leave Babylon by leaving *spiritually*, by worshipping and following the true God, keeping his commandments and consecrating our lives in service to him. There may come a time when we will leave physically as well as spiritually. Those who are tuned in will be able to hear the messages of the prophet and Holy Spirit that will protect and lead the people of God to safety.

Those people and nations who refuse to hear will learn the hard way. They have ignored and mocked the message that Christ is the God of this world and that he is going to return to the earth as a lion, not a lamb, as at his first coming. The scriptures speak of the world's horrified surprise and amazement, hearts failing for fear, wanting rocks to fall on them, etc. But if they have refused to hear the peaceful voices that have preached the truth, they will have to hear the inescapable voice of judgments: the voice of thunders, earthquakes and plagues. The fact is that this winding up scene will convince a lot of people in a concentrated period of time that there *is* indeed a God and that there *was* such a thing as sin and consequences to it. "I come quickly to judgment, to convince all of their ungodly deeds which they have committed against me." (D&C 99:5)

The judgments of the last days will provide an opportunity to endure in faith till the end. When all things are in commotion, the saints will be able to show those around them an example of faith that will be a light to the honest in heart. There is no need to fear the judgments of God if you are living your life in accordance with God's will.

⁴ Watch the video from Elder Holland's conference talk here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpFhS0dAduc>

⁵ Babylon's sins are called *fornication* because she has made herself impure through unfaithfulness, giving herself to false Gods instead of the true God to whom she owed her devotion.