



The Postmortal Spirit World

Chapter 41

Life after Death

- What happens to us after we die?

Heavenly Father prepared a plan for our salvation. As part of this plan, He sent us from His presence to live on earth and receive mortal bodies of flesh and blood. Eventually our mortal bodies will die, and our spirits will go to the spirit world. The spirit world is a place of waiting, working, learning, and, for the righteous, resting from care and sorrow. Our spirits will live there until we are ready for our resurrection. Then our mortal bodies will once more unite with our spirits, and we will receive the degree of glory we have prepared for (see chapter 46 in this book).

Many people have wondered what the spirit world is like. The scriptures and latter-day prophets have given us information about the spirit world.

- What comfort do you receive from your knowledge that there is life after death? How can we use our understanding of the postmortal spirit world to comfort others?

Where Is the Postmortal Spirit World?

Latter-day prophets have said that the spirits of those who have died are not far from us. President Ezra Taft Benson said: “Sometimes the veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 18; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 33). President Brigham Young taught that the postmortal spirit world is

on the earth, around us (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* [1997], 279).

What Is the Nature of Our Spirits?

Spirit beings have the same bodily form as mortals except that the spirit body is in perfect form (see Ether 3:16). Spirits carry with them from earth their attitudes of devotion or antagonism toward things of righteousness (see Alma 34:34). They have the same appetites and desires that they had when they lived on earth. All spirits are in adult form. They were adults before their mortal existence, and they are in adult form after death, even if they die as infants or children (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 131–32).

- Why is it important to know that our spirits will have the same attitudes in the spirit world that they have now?

What Are the Conditions in the Postmortal Spirit World?

The prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon taught about two divisions or states in the spirit world:

“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.

“And then shall it come to pass, 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 40:12–14).

The spirits are classified according to the purity of their lives and their obedience to the will of the Lord while on earth. The righteous and the wicked are separated (see 1 Nephi 15:28–30), but the spirits may progress as they learn gospel principles and live in accordance with them. The spirits in paradise can teach the spirits in prison (see D&C 138).

Paradise

According to the prophet Alma, the righteous spirits rest from earthly care and sorrow. Nevertheless, they are occupied in doing the work of the Lord. President Joseph F. Smith saw in a vision that immediately after Jesus Christ was crucified, He visited the righteous in the spirit world. He appointed messengers, gave them power and authority, and commissioned them 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 Church is organized in the spirit world, and priesthood holders continue their responsibilities there (see D&C 138:30). President Wilford Woodruff taught: “The same Priesthood exists on the other side of the veil. . . . Every Apostle, every Seventy, every Elder, etc., who has died in the faith as soon as he passes to the other side of the veil, enters into the work of the ministry” (*Deseret News*, Jan. 25, 1882, 818).

Family relationships are also important. President Jedediah M. Grant, a counselor to Brigham Young, saw the spirit world and described to Heber C. Kimball the organization that exists there: “He said that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities. . . . He said, ‘When I looked at families, there was a deficiency in some, . . . for I saw families that would not be permitted to come and dwell together, because they had not honored their calling here’ ” (*Deseret News*, Dec. 10, 1856, 316–17).

For teachers: To help class members or family members understand the differences between paradise and spirit prison, consider drawing a vertical line in the middle of the board or on a large piece of paper, making two columns. At the top of one column, write *State of the Righteous*. At the top of the other column, write *State of the Wicked*. Ask members to describe each state in the spirit world, based on their reading in this section. Summarize their comments in the appropriate columns.

Spirit Prison

The Apostle Peter referred to the postmortal spirit world as a prison, which it is for some (see 1 Peter 3:18–20). In the spirit prison are the spirits of those who have not yet received the gospel of Jesus Christ. These spirits have agency and may be enticed by both good and evil. If they accept the gospel and the ordinances performed for them in the temples, they may leave the spirit prison and dwell in paradise.

Also in the spirit prison are those who rejected the gospel after it was preached to them either on earth or in the spirit prison. These spirits suffer in a condition known as hell. They have removed themselves from the mercy of Jesus Christ, who said, “Behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (D&C 19:16–18). After suffering for their sins, they will be allowed, through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, to inherit the lowest degree of glory, which is the telestial kingdom.

- How are conditions in the spirit world similar to conditions in this life?

Additional Scriptures

- 1 Peter 4:6 (gospel preached to the dead)
- Moses 7:37–39 (spirit prison prepared for the wicked)
- D&C 76 (revelation about the three kingdoms of glory)
- Luke 16:19–31 (fate of beggar and rich man in the spirit world)