

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing the Atoning Power of Christ. While this is a longer article (approximately 17 pages) I hope you'll take the time to consider it carefully..

I would encourage you to go to <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info> as I continue to update the site. I have links to several specific features below. Let me know what you think, whether you have any suggestions, or any requests.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

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The Atoning Power of Christ

By Jared D. Edson

Matthew 7:31 **For the day soon cometh that men shall come before me to judgment, to be judged according to their works.**

Revelation 20:1-13

1 And I saw an angel come down out of heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, **that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season.**

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them; and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 **But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.**

6 Blessed and holy are they who have part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years.

7 **And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,**

8 **And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle--the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.**

9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 **And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;** and the books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life; **and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.**

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; **and they were judged every man according to their works.**

Most people in the restoration are familiar with these passages, perhaps more so than many in the protestant world. (What follows in this article is somewhat lengthy, but I do not

apologize for that because this is a **very** important matter. Please read it carefully and with due consideration and soberness.)

The revelations given by Jesus and through John clearly show that all men must be judged according to their works, and in the vision given through John particularly we are shown what happens at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ, namely, that Satan will be loosed for “a little season.”

So far, I think everyone is on the same page – the prophecy is clear. During the little season Satan will be loosed to tempt the nations. Gotcha. Very clear. Understood.

We’re not done with trying to understand the passage though. When we start asking some more detailed questions about **why** Satan must be loosed during the little season at the end, we are confronted by the idea that it is necessary for men to be tempted so they will be able to make an informed choice concerning baptism, etc. That is to say, those born during the thousand years when Satan is bound – who are therefore unable to be tempted - - “must needs” be tempted so they can choose between faithfulness and disobedience. While there may be some truth in that conclusion, I’ve come to realize that it isn’t the entire truth. The debate becomes even more involved when you consider the “when” aspect of the little season.

When Christ comes in glory at the beginning of the thousand years it is prophesied that the dead shall be raised up in the first resurrection, also called the resurrection of the Just. Who is part of that resurrection is where we begin to walk in murky waters, because it is after the little season that a “second” resurrection (since the first resurrection will be finished), or resurrection of the Unjust takes place. How we read and understand the prophecies about the resurrections, the thousand years, and the little season matters in a big way for our understanding of salvation. Yes, salvation itself.

For clarification, the term “first resurrection” is not referred to as such because it is a one-time event – Jesus, after all, was the first one resurrected and there were “many saints” that were also resurrected after him, and they showed themselves to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (See Matthew 27:56-57). Rather, “first,” seems to refer to a “glorious” resurrection whenever it happens – such as at the beginning of the thousand years and, presumably, throughout the thousand years also as people are born, grow old, die, and are resurrected “in the twinkling of an eye” – see 1 Corinthians 15:52.

As Christians - and more especially as believers in the Book of Mormon as true scripture - we firmly believe in the saving power of Jesus Christ, and yet it seems that we sometimes equivocate on the finer details of “special case” scenarios.

To explain, I need to review some passages from the Book of Mormon that will provide some perspective on salvation. This passage is a bit lengthy, so I hope you will bear with me for a while:

2 Nephi 1:94-110

94 And now, my son, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning:

95 For there is a God; and he hath created all things, both the heavens, and the earth, and all things that in them are--

96 Both things to act and things to be acted upon.

97 **And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, and, in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition--**

98 Even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life--the one being sweet and the other bitter.

99 **Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself.**

100 **Wherefore, man could not act for himself, save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.**

101 And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven;

102 Wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

103 And because he had fallen from heaven and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind.

104 Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore, he said, Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die; but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

105 And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were driven out of the garden of Eden to till the earth.

106 And they have brought forth children, yea, even the family of all the earth.

107 And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh;

108 Wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men.

109 For he gave commandment that all men must repent;

110 For he showed unto all men that they were lost because of the transgression of their parents.

This shows in very plain language that man could not truly exercise “free agency” unless he had at least two things to choose from: good and evil. As Lehi says, “there must needs be an opposition” “in all things” – which is something at the heart of understanding the struggles we face concerning life and sin in this world.

That leads us to “the problem.”

At the heart of the issue is our notion of salvation. According to Lehi it was necessary that men should be given the opportunity to choose from good or evil so that those who choose rightly might be saved. This would indicate that you cannot be saved unless you are able to choose Christ over the devil. Or so it would **seem**. That “little season” prophecy from

Revelation appears to support the concept that our judgment depends on how we choose (it being the reason Satan would be loosed to “deceive the nations”), and verily so it is. There is always a “but,” namely, the “special cases” which seem to make that conclusion difficult to digest, breaking our sensibilities about cause and effect, choice, and eternal salvation versus eternal damnation. It’s the age-old problem of only reading one scripture to get our entire view of a subject: it makes our vision of the truth cloudy and confusing.

In blessing his children, Lehi made no exceptions about having to choose. But when we look at the issue of little children or those that have never been taught about Christ, and then further consider the thousand-year reign of Christ followed by the subsequent little season, we find questions that Lehi didn’t seem to answer very well. In the absence of information, it is natural for us to speculate about the special cases, but how dangerous it is when we walk down that path!

Why is this such a problem? What am I going on about? I’ll get to that.

Consider this: we are commanded that we should not baptize children under the age of eight (the age of accountability) because they are not able to make such profound life-choices as deciding between good or evil: Christ over Satan. Our question starts with asking how a little child who has died (before the age of accountability) can be saved with an eternal salvation if he or she is incapable of deciding upon eternal life over eternal death?

Again, Lehi minced no words on this matter.

100 *Wherefore, man could not act for himself, save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.*

This leaves us in a quandary. Little children, and for that matter, the nations at the end of the thousand years, are our “special cases.” Surely, they must be required to make a choice as well – Lehi made no exceptions in the matter. So, we are given the proposed answer: the resurrection from the dead gives the opportunity for those who have died without the ability to make that choice in their mortal life to make their choice when the little season erupts upon the world and they can be tempted. (If it were at the beginning of the thousand years, there would still be enough evil present in the world – even without Satan to provide the temptation, to bring about a knowledge of good and evil.)

This idea seems to be reinforced by the “great commission” –

Mark 16:14-15

14 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

15 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Is that really the answer? If a little child didn't get to choose before they died, would they later need to make their choice to believe and be baptized before or perhaps during the little season when they have been resurrected? Or, similarly, we can also consider those who may have died without the mental faculties to make choices (and thus may not have the ability to choose) – those that may have been born with serious mental hindrances due to their physical condition. Surely, they must have the opportunity to choose when they have been given a body without any physical defects. Lehi's statement is firm, and we depend on that for our answer. We **must** choose or we cannot be saved. **No exceptions.**

Or maybe not.

There is something that has always stayed in the back of my mind, and it is something that always bothered me about such a cut-and-dried answer: Mormon. In one of his letters, Mormon writes to his son Moroni and gives a no-holds-barred condemnation to his very own son – whom he loved dearly – about things he was doing that were, arguably, such a mistake that his (Moroni's) own salvation was at risk. His mistake evidently stemmed from a very significant misunderstanding of the role of Jesus Christ in salvation, and I have to wonder if we aren't equivocating about our little conundrum for the exact same reasons that Mormon gave to his own precious son.

Moroni 8:5-7

5 For if I have learned the truth, there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children.

6 And now, my son, I desire that ye should labor diligently ***that this gross error should be removed from among you***; for, for this intent I have written this epistle.

7 For immediately after I had learned these things of you, I inquired of the Lord concerning the matter.

Mormon considered this such a **terrible problem** that he went to the Lord to get clarification. The answer he received turns everything upside down regarding the conclusions we have drawn concerning choice and salvation. The following passage is longer than what we read earlier from Lehi, but it merits reading carefully.

Moroni 8:8-22

8 And the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying, Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord, and your God.

9 ***Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore, the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.***

10 And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God that ye should baptize little children.

11 Behold, I say unto you ***that this thing shall ye teach: repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin***; yea, teach parents that they must repent, and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and ***they shall all be saved with their little children***; and their ***little children need no repentance, neither baptism***.

12 Behold, baptism is unto repentance, to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

13 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism.

14 Wherefore, if little children could not be saved without baptism, these must have gone to an endless hell.

15 Behold, I say unto you that ***he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; for he hath neither faith, hope, nor charity; wherefore, should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell***.

16 For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.

17 Wo be unto him that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner, for they shall perish except they repent.

18 Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear; and I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike ***and partakers of salvation***.

19 For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.

20 ***Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy***.

21 And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.

22 ***Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment***.

The Lord spoke plainly to Mormon, saying that ***“little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore, the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them”***

Then Mormon gives Moroni a bombshell – that ***“it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them”*** and that those who say otherwise ***“are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment.”***

That’s pretty harsh, isn’t it? Mormon was telling his son Moroni that he was ***in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment*** for even thinking that they should baptize little children – so much so that it would be his terrible fate if he should die while even thinking it. All of his good works and faith would be undone by even considering it.

That brings us back to our problem. If we ourselves should consider that little children can't be saved unless they can choose – and verily we must be able to choose in order to be baptized, it would seem that we are placed in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. How is that even possible?

The answer Lehi gave says we must choose, but the Lord told Mormon that little children are saved.

Our previous answer was that little children don't have to be baptized, but if they should die before being able to choose, they are **ok temporarily** until the end, at which time they are then **not ok**, but must choose, via, their time after the resurrection. When they have been resurrected, they will be in their "adult" resurrected form and will then be tempted so that they can have the ability to choose.

This all seems very reasonable, except that Mormon says, "**No!**" because the Lord told him to say "**No!**"

Our problem seems to stem from Lehi's explanation of salvation to his son – his very much capable and accountable sons.

Let's consider a thought-experiment.

Suppose that Adam and Eve were never tempted by Satan, and therefore they never did choose to break the commandment concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Would we say that they would never have eternal life? Certainly not – if there had been no temptation, there would have been no need for Christ to have died for their sins because they wouldn't have had any sins.

Lehi also makes clear that if Adam and Eve had never sinned, they would never have had children, and all mankind as we know it now would have never come into being. If there had been no sin, there would have been no death, because sin brought about death, pure and simple, and I suspect we can all agree on that.

What condition is it called when we are not mortal, with no death? Immortality. Therefore, Adam and Eve were immortal – until they sinned. The Lord told them (Genesis 2:22) "For in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." And so it was. They died **spiritually**, and their bodies began the **process** of dying **physically**. The redemptive power of Christ addresses the spiritual death, not the physical one. The resurrection of Christ addresses the physical death, not the spiritual death. The first must be last and the last must be first – spiritual and physical, then physical and spiritual. While all must be resurrected, all will not be saved.

The Book of Mormon makes it clear why Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden – not because they had sinned -- but because there was a possibility that if they had remained in

the garden they could have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life and become immortal, without any space for redemption, and thus becoming physically immortal but spiritually dead forevermore. The Lord spared them that problem by casting them out of the garden of Eden and preventing them (via the Cherubim and the flaming sword) from returning and making the colossal mistake of becoming spiritually dead for eternity.

Lehi spoke the words we have quoted from to his son Jacob, who was Lehi's next-to-youngest son. He was young, but not "little," meaning that he was probably at least in his teenage years at the time, if not older. Lehi was explaining matters of choice to someone who could make choices. The audience he had makes all the difference in the world in how we read and react to Lehi's explanation. Otherwise, we find ourselves pitting Lehi against Mormon, which is counterproductive.

John, Lehi, and Mormon would, I am sure, agree that their words have been used incorrectly many times over the years, and I have considered upon this quandary for some time myself because I have always had that little voice in the back of my mind saying, "Don't do what Moroni did – remember what Mormon told him."

Mormon is quite adamant that little children who die before the age of accountability are "saved". **Not temporarily**. That is a word that some have inserted into Mormon's letter – perhaps unintentionally – but quite against his (Mormon's) intent.

Let us review Mormon's (and we must suppose it is the Lord's as well) perspective on the matter:

Moroni 8:16-18

16 For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.

17 Wo be unto him that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner, for they shall perish except they repent.

18 Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear; and I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation.

Let us reiterate: "all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and **they are all alike and partakers of salvation.**"

Is there any question that little children are partakers of salvation? If so, then why would they need to have the opportunity to choose between good and evil during the resurrection if they have salvation already?

I realize that there may be some who think that this interpretation is not fair. Why do we – those who grow to adulthood - have to endure temptations and trouble, while little children never have to? Do little children get a free pass to eternal life?

Yes – Mormon says the Lord told him “**Yes!**”

You might continue thinking, “But is this really fair and consistent for an impartial God – one who is not a respecter of persons - to do?”, or, “Why do they get a free pass when I have to go through life’s struggles?”

I can see the point of that argument. But consider this – are we all equally tempted? Do we all have the same opportunities? Is it fair for someone to be born into wealth and comfort, while others struggle to meet their basic necessities, or others who must suffer? Does someone born without legs or arms suffer the same temptations as those who are whole? Is God truly not a respecter of persons?

The reality is that no two people experience the same struggles in life, so what constitutes fair in human terms is entirely subjective. However, God has a different view on things.

Let us consider another few verses of scripture.

Moroni 8:26-29

26 For the power of redemption cometh on all they that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing.

27 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.

28 Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; **for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law.**

29 And the firstfruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith, unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart, cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.

Here is the key: the function of **the law**. It is the law that declares what is good and what is evil, and they who cannot choose one or the other by virtue of being incapable of committing sin must not be held accountable by the law. The atonement of Christ is sufficient for them.

Do you suppose that those who died as little children must later, in the resurrection and in their adult body, be required to choose good over evil in order for their salvation to be assured? How can that be if they have already been saved (for Mormon says the Lord told

him that “little children ... are all alike and partakers of salvation”)? How can you be a partaker of eternal life and then be drawn into sin – that would mean for an immortal or saved being that they would be consigned to endless woe and misery. That is a form of double-jeopardy. That would deny the sure mercies of Christ. Mormon was not using the phrase “partakers of salvation” in a pejorative sense – he meant it literally.

The apostle John wrote what, at first glance, might seem at odds with both sides that we have discussed:

1 John 5:12-13

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God--**that ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may continue to believe on the name of the Son of God.

Here it would be in error (in my opinion) to suggest that John was telling the people he was writing to say that they were finished, that their eternal life was already secured. I suspect, rather, that John was telling them that by continuing in their belief on the Son of God their eternal life was the necessary outcome, as if to say, “It is yours.” Just as Jesus said, “...he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” (Matthew 10:19). Therefore, John finished his statement with “that ye may continue to believe on the name of the Son of God.” If they had ceased to believe on the name of the Son of God, their expected outcome would not be eternal life.

If little children are indeed partakers of salvation, but in the course of life they grow up beyond the age of accountability, they may learn or commit sin, the line of demarcation concerning salvation and choice is centered squarely on the ability to choose. The atonement of Christ is sufficient for those that cannot choose by virtue of their innocent and incapable nature. If they die young, their salvation is assured, but if they live to arrive at the age when they can choose, they must choose. Salvation is not taken away from us as we grow up, but is given away by us when we choose evil – just as Adam and Eve did when they chose to sin. But remember what John said, “...that ye may know that ye have eternal life...”? If you were to grow up without sin, just as Jesus did, you would still need baptism to fulfill all righteousness, and if you continue without sin your eternal life is secure. The atonement of Christ overcomes the curse we received through Adam and Eve – making the spiritual death we inherited from them to vanish, even from the foundation of the world.

The redemption of Christ was designed to keep us from suffering a second death – which is a second spiritual death – by taking away the first spiritual death that was passed along to us by the curse that was put upon Adam and Eve. That first spiritual death required an atonement, which was performed by Jesus in the meridian of time. Thus, men were given a time of probation in which to choose.

Indeed, Adam himself had to be reborn spiritually – through the baptism of the Spirit – on account of his spiritual death resulting from the sin he had committed, as recorded in the Inspired Version of the bible:

Genesis 6:57-69

57 And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying, Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so, when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts; and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.

58 And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore, they are agents unto themselves.

59 And I have given unto you another law and commandment; wherefore, teach it unto your children that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God.

60 For no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name; and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.

61 Therefore, I give unto you a commandment to teach these things freely unto your children, saying that by reason of transgression cometh the fall, **which fall bringeth death**; and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so become of dust a living soul,

62 Even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten, that ye may be sanctified from all sin and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world and eternal life in the world to come--even immortal glory.

63 For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified; and by the blood ye are sanctified.

64 Therefore, it is given to abide in you the record of heaven, the Comforter, the peaceable things of immortal glory, the truth of all things, that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things, that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment.

65 And now, behold, I say unto you, This is the plan of salvation unto all men through the blood of mine Only Begotten, who shall come in the meridian of time.

66 And behold, all things have their likeness; and all things are created and made to bear record of me: both things which are temporal and things which are spiritual, things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath; all things bear record of me.

67 And it came to pass when the Lord had spoken with Adam, our father, that Adam cried unto the Lord; and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth out of the water; and thus he was baptized.

67 And it came to pass when the Lord had spoken with Adam, our father, that Adam cried unto the Lord; and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into

the water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth out of the water; and thus he was baptized.

68 And the Spirit of God descended upon him; **and thus he was born of the Spirit and became quickened in the inner man.**

69 And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying, Thou art baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost; this is the record of the Father and the Son from henceforth and forever;

The first spiritual death was swallowed up in the sacrifice of Jesus, which was sufficient for all from before the foundation of the world. Now we are only required to face the temporal death. After this, we face the judgment.

Hebrews 9:24-28

24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,

25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the meridian of time hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,

28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many. And he shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation unto them that look for him.

The scriptures are clear that we need to make our choices in this life. There is little given to suggest we get other chances to choose. Alma is very straightforward about declaring when we get the opportunity to choose and what determines what kind of spirit that will be abiding with us in the eternal world.

Alma 16:228-232

228 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.

229 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;

230 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.

231 Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God.

232 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.**

The prophet Abinidi tells us who shall be in the first resurrection:

Mosiah 8:52-60

52 Yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people, yea, he who has granted salvation unto his people.

53 *For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, Were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.*

54 But behold, ***the bands of death shall be broken***, and the Son reigneth and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead.

55 And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection, yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ; for so shall he be called.

56 And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

57 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

58 *And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them.*

59 And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

60 *And little children also have eternal life.*

According to Abinidi, little children will be part of the first resurrection and will be partakers of eternal life. We get “the other side of the coin” from Alma:

Alma 9:28-32

28 And now, behold, I say unto you, ***Then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death.***

29 *Then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death;* yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness;

30 Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames ascendeth up forever and ever;

31 And then is the time that they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan, he having subjected them according to his will.

32 Then I say unto you, They shall be as though there had been no redemption made; for they cannot be redeemed according to God's justice; and they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption.

Just to reiterate, all men must die **once**, but not all must die **twice**:

Alma 9:44-46

44 And now, behold, if it were possible that our first parents could have gone forth and partaken of the tree of life, they would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state;

45 And thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated, and the word of God would have been void, taking none effect.

46 *But behold, it was not so; but it was appointed unto man that they must die; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end.*

The mercy of Christ is so much bigger than just forgiveness of sins. It is his appointing of grace and of blessing, considering that he has had mercy on us before we have ever repented. His mercy came to us by giving us a probationary time in which to choose.

Alma 9:54-55

54 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son (this being the plan of redemption which was laid), saying, If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you through mine Only Begotten Son.

55 *Therefore, whosoever repenteth and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.*

If a little child cannot sin (because he “hardeneth not his heart”), he cannot be forbidden to “enter into my rest.”

The difference between Adam and Eve before their sin was not that they were once saved, and then because of sin, they were no longer saved and hence required an atonement to save them. No, the difference was that before, while they were in the garden, they were only immortal, not “saved.” After all, how can you be saved if you have done nothing wrong that required you to be saved from it? Rather, they would have never known death if they had never sinned. After they were cast out, they were both mortal and they were in need of atonement to save them from their sins.

This question about little children naturally leads to questions about adults that have not yet heard about Christ at the time of their death. There is a difference. Young people and adults have been exposed to many or all of the elements of sin and have made choices based on what they knew to be right or wrong. How they have chosen to behave given those choices distinguishes good people from bad people. Either way you look at it, Christ has some say in how their judgment is to be handled, and thankfully we don’t have to be the ones to make that judgment. Perhaps that should be the subject of another article.

Aside from little children there is no one else born (excepting those that may have some mental/physical hindrance to doing so) that cannot make a choice between good and evil.

We know this because it is that same Mormon -- the father of Moroni who spoke about the atonement of Christ being sufficient for all little children -- who wrote these words:

Moroni 7:11-15

11 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, **everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him is inspired of God.**

12 Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.

13 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

14 For behold, **the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that they may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge: For everything which inviteth to do good and to persuade to believe in Christ is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ;**

15 Wherefore, ye may know with a perfect knowledge, it is of God; **but whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge, it is of the devil.**

Does Mormon here say that only those that have been taught the Gospel of Christ can choose good from evil? No, he refers to **every man** (verse 14). Clearly, he is not referring to little children, but to men (and women) who have reached the age of accountability.

You cannot lump little children into the same category as the adult who dies without a knowledge of Jesus Christ. One can choose to do good or evil; the other cannot.

What I fear is that although we have been given so much knowledge about the scriptures, we sometimes still struggle with a basic belief about the atonement of Christ. Does it truly cover those whom the scriptures tell us it does? Or shall we invent a new way to deny the mercies of Christ?

You might be inclined to think, “well, it doesn’t really matter what I think – God will work it all out.” Yet Mormon very seriously tells us that if we should die mid-thought about little children needing baptism, we must be consigned to that hell which holds adulterers and murderers. What you think really does matter.

Mormon made it clear that the very reason we might think this is unfair, is exactly the reason it must be fair.

Mormon 8:13 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; **if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons;** for how many little children have died without baptism.

The reason little children are alive in Christ is **exactly** because God is not a respecter of persons. God cannot condemn someone for something they didn't know or do or even have the capacity to do. Because they could not know or do something, he must save them, otherwise we must all be condemned for those things we didn't know or didn't do.

King Benjamin further spoke on this issue, as the angel instructed him.

Mosiah 1:105-108

105 And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world.

106 And behold, all these things are done, that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.

107 **For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died, not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.**

108 But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God; for salvation cometh to none such, except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Truly our savior is a loving, merciful and gracious Lord. Benjamin continues...

Mosiah 1:112-116

112 And also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming.

113 And yet **they hardened their hearts and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing**, except it were through the atonement of his blood;

114 **And even if it were possible that little children could sin, they could not be saved; but I say unto you, They are blessed;**

115 For behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.

116 And moreover, I say unto you that there shall be no other name given, nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

117 For behold, he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy;

This is not a uniquely Book of Mormon concept. We find it in the New Testament also:

Matthew 19:13-14

13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them and pray. And the disciples rebuked them, saying, **There is no need, for Jesus hath said, Such shall be saved.**

14 But Jesus said, **Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.**

Again, it is because God is not a respecter of persons that these things are so. It is also reiterated in the Doctrine and Covenants:

Doctrine and Covenants 28:13a-13b

13a But, behold, I say unto you, that ***little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world, through mine Only Begotten***; wherefore they can not sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me;

13b for ***it is given unto them even as I will, according to mine own pleasure***, that great things may be required at the hand of their fathers.

The hint or suggestion we have about how this comes about is this little phrase – “it is given unto them even as I will, according to mine own pleasure...” Jesus has said more than once that it is his pleasure to give us the kingdom. If we who need baptism get to receive of his pleasure in granting us the kingdom, how much more so should it be for innocent children?

These are profoundly serious things to consider, and I hope that you will consider them in this light – that whomever Jesus Christ saves, he saves them with an eternal salvation, not a temporary one. His grace and mercy are, we must hope and believe, sufficient for them just as it will be sufficient for us. Let us not take away our own hope for salvation by even thinking otherwise.

John 10:27-30

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me;

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

The atoning power of Jesus Christ is truly miraculous on a scale that we can only partly understand. It is my hope and desire that we might each truly embrace the truths given to us through the scriptures and by the voice of the Lord to us today so that we might be able to look forward with a perfect brightness of hope for those things which God has prepared for his people.