
The Crucifixion as a Mockery, Witness, and Warning of the Judgment

***Abstract:** In its action, setting, and arrangement, the Crucifixion may be viewed as a stark mockery of the Final Judgment scene. This article provides a brief review of the relevant scriptures, considered together with some related apocryphal and other early Christian writings of interest regarding the Crucifixion. These sources point to the interpretation that the Gospel writers saw in the Crucifixion a striking symbolism that can provide a strong reminder, witness, and warning of the coming judgment. The Lord is seen in the Crucifixion as at once representing His humility in submitting Himself to be judged and, conversely, His authority and power to be the judge of all. The Crucifixion signifies the concept of a reciprocal or two-way judgment, as emphasized in the Book of Mormon, where mankind first judges the Lord, and later are to be judged accordingly by Him in return.*

An important and neglected aspect of the Crucifixion is its function as a vivid reminder and warning of the Final Judgment. A greater recognition of this relationship could be helpful at this time of growing

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secularization, allowing the Lord's suffering to reawaken a sense of reality in regard to the coming judgment. It could also be a constructive and vital influence in the maintenance of Christian morality. A most forceful and stirring witness and warning of the Judgment can be seen in the Crucifixion.

REMINDERS OF THE JUDGMENT IN THE CRUCIFIXION

In the New Testament description of the Crucifixion, Jesus is seen crucified together with two thieves or *malefactors*, “on either side one, and Jesus in the midst” (John 19:18). More specifically, in each of the three synoptic Gospels, the thieves are seen “*the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.*”¹ It is very significant that the Gospel writers expressed the arrangement in this manner, for the description is in the *language and imagery of the Judgment*—the right/left concept found many places in the scriptures.² The Crucifixion may be understood as an inexpressibly perverse and diabolical mockery of the Final Judgment scene. While hideously distorted and grotesque, it nevertheless portrays the Judgment, reflecting the striking imagery where men are separated on the right or left hand of God.

The two thieves, to whom the Lord is pointing or designating, may be considered as representing a sinful and “crucified” or judged humanity, exemplifying the separation of persons at the Judgment. Mankind may well relate to the thieves or malefactors, for “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The thieves represent persons of differing response to the outstretched Christ. One thief railed against the Lord's authority in words reminiscent of Lucifer in the temptation:³ “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Luke 23:39). The penitent thief,

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1. Mark 15:27. Parallels in Matthew 27:38 and Luke 23:33. Cf. Gospel of Philip 115:25 where the Apostles refer to the cross as “the right” and “the left” in R. McL. Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 128.
 2. As examples: Psalms 80:17; 110:1–6; Matthew 22:44; 25:31–34; 27:29; Acts 2:33–35; 7:55–56; Hebrews 1:3; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Mosiah 26:23–28; Alma 5:58; Moroni 9:26; Doctrine and Covenants 29:12, 27; Moses 7:56–57.
 3. Cf. Luke 4:3 on the temptation.

presumably on the Lord's right hand,⁴ acknowledges both the innocence of Jesus and his own transgressions while recognizing Christ's kingship and thus the right to preside at the Judgment: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). The narratives of the Crucifixion abound with overtones of judgment. Thus, the purple robe of royalty, the flimsy reed or scepter with the "reed in his right hand,"⁵ the mock title of kingship placed over His head, the crown of thorns, and the bended knee as they "*mocked him*, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!"⁶ It is His kingship that is being derided, with its right to judge.

In 1968 an ancient tomb dated from New Testament times was discovered in the area of Jerusalem, having the remains of a crucifixion. While extended on the cross, the person crucified nevertheless appears to have been in a *sitting posture*.⁷ This, the first archaeological example of crucifixion, tends to verify the statements of some prominent early Christian writers that there was in crucifixions a protrusion or crude seat extended from the cross. As Richard Lloyd Anderson has noted,

Justin Martyr speaks of a protrusion on the cross at its center, which carried the weight of the crucified. (*Dialogue* 91:2.). On this rough "seat," the contemporary Irenaeus says, "the person rests who is fixed by the nails." (*Against Heresies* 2.23.4.). In other words, the nails did not basically support the body: the makeshift saddle at the crotch did. Tertullian called this feature a "projecting seat." (*Ad Nationes* 1:12.) . . . These early scholars knew the normal ancient practices, which were designed to prolong death in punitive torture.⁸

4. In apocryphal sources, the penitent thief is distinctly on the right. Cf. M. R. James, *Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 104, 116, 163.

5. Matthew 27:29.

6. Matthew 27:29. Cf. Matthew 20:19, where Christ was delivered to the Gentiles to "mock" Him.

7. V. Tzaferis, "Jewish Tombs at and near Giv'at ha-Mivtar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, nos. 1-2 (1970): 18-32.

8. Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Ancient Practice of Crucifixion," *Ensign*, July 1975, 33.

The very painful sitting arrangement assured that the full weight of the body would not have been held by the nails above. It prevented the collapse of the body and would increase and extend the time of agony. It is a scene of even greater distress than that assumed in many later works of art that do not show a sitting position. Importantly, it strongly lends support to a belief that in the Crucifixion may be seen a *mockery of the throne or judgment seat, with the Lord sitting in judgment*. This accords with an apocryphal description of the mockery, as in the Gospel of Peter, which says that “they put on him a purple robe, and made him sit upon the seat of judgement, saying: Give righteous judgement, thou King of Israel.”⁹

In reviewing the scriptures pertaining to the Crucifixion, I am much impressed that early Christians apparently saw in the setting of the Crucifixion a remarkable symbolism that foreshadows Christ’s judgment of mankind. I also cite some apocryphal and related ancient Christian sources that display close affinity and tend to confirm this point of view. What especially supports the interpretation that the Gospels were deliberately written in terms alluding to the Judgment scene is the usage leading up to the Crucifixion narrative. In Matthew’s Gospel, the Lord first gives the parable of the sheep and the goats with its Judgment setting where the Son of Man sits on His throne in the judgment of all nations as “the King” and “separate[s] 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” (see Matthew 25:31–34, 41). Soon after this parable, the Lord is seen at the trial in which He was found guilty of death for blasphemy when He claimed He was the Christ and declared, “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man *sitting* on the *right hand* of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”¹⁰

Matthew unfolds a remarkable contrast here, showing the Lord’s humility in submitting Himself for judgment, but also His subsequent power and authority to preside in judgment. The description of the Crucifixion soon follows and also draws this contrast, even more impressively, simultaneously affording a strong reminder of *both* the Lord’s humility

9. Gospel of Peter 3:7–8, in James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 91.

10. Matthew 26:64. Christ is “set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Hebrews 8:1).

and His power and authority to be exercised later at the Judgment. After the mockery of the Crucifixion, in a post-Resurrection setting, the Lord declared: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE TWO-WAY JUDGMENT

In the Book of Mormon, the Crucifixion is closely related to the Judgment and is explained as essential preparation for it, “that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.”¹¹ The crucifixion was “done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.”¹²

The Judgment is viewed as a reciprocal or two-way action between Christ and mankind, for “it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.”¹³ Jesus voluntarily submitted to the judgment of men in the Crucifixion, not only to the judgment of His immediate generation but to those in every age as they learn of Him. Nephi saw that “the Son of the everlasting God was *judged of the world*” and “*lifted up* upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.”¹⁴ All will need to respond to a basic question raised in the Gospel: “What think ye of Christ?” (Matthew 22:42). Eventually, all men must judge Jesus and, according to their response to Him and His teachings, they will later be judged by Him, for “with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”¹⁵ His exemplary life and doctrine will afford everyone the opportunity to form a judgment of Him, while the contrasting and cruel manner of His death demands a response with the mind and the heart. Even today an

11. 2 Nephi 9:22.

12. Mosiah 3:10; cf. Helaman 14:15–29.

13. 2 Nephi 9:5. The term *two-way judgment* was suggested to me by Hugh Nibley when I corresponded with him on the principle of reciprocity in the Judgment. Hugh Nibley, letter to author, January 8, 1966.

14. 1 Nephi 11:32–33. Cf. Christ as “the measured” in Gospel of Philip 110:10–16.

15. Matthew 7:2. Even the dead will learn and be judged of him; 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6; Doctrine and Covenants 138.

unbelieving generation can “judge him to be a thing of naught,”¹⁶ and may even “assent unto” His death¹⁷ and “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame,”¹⁸ thus sharing responsibility for His Crucifixion. Indeed, all who have sinned must share that responsibility to some degree.

The two-way judgment receives its clearest expression in the Book of Mormon. It is found in a saying of the Lord to the Nephites after His Resurrection:

My Father sent me that I might be *lifted up* upon the cross; and after that I had been *lifted up* upon the cross, that I might *draw all men* unto me, that as I have been *lifted up* by men even so should men be *lifted up* by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—And for this cause have I been *lifted up*; therefore . . . I will *draw all men* unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:14–15)

This passage should be compared with that in John’s Gospel where the same terminology appears but without the explanation given in the Book of Mormon: “Now is the judgment of this world . . . and I, if I be *lifted up* from the earth, will *draw all men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.”¹⁹ It has generally been recognized that John’s use of the term *lifted up* here refers to the exaltation and glorification of Christ.²⁰ Indeed the term is used in the scriptures to denote exaltation.²¹ However, in the Book of Mormon here *lifted up* clearly has a double meaning and is used as a technical term to refer at once to contrasting concepts, both to His humility in submitting to the judgment of men and to His subsequent

16. 1 Nephi 19:9; cf. Mark 9:12.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 132:27.

18. Hebrews 6:6; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 76:35.

19. John 12:31–33; cf. John 8:28.

20. The possible *double entente* in John is noted in C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 375–78. The term *lifted up* could suggest “either promotion or execution,” although the “passage . . . remains enigmatic, and probably intentionally so.”

21. See, for example, Psalms 30:1; Acts 3:7; 3 Nephi 27:22.

exaltation and judgeship. He is *lifted up* or held up for evaluation and judgment, only to be *lifted* up and exalted to the judgment seat. Similarly, the term *draw all men* can convey two meanings, where men may be drawn to the Lord through love²² or forced to Him in the Judgment.

In Latter-day Saint scriptures, the term *lifted up* is of great antiquity and appears in a context that mentions or alludes to both the Crucifixion and the Judgment. It is used thus by Enoch, the brother of Jared, Nephi, and Zenock.²³ In an early source, it appears in a setting that draws a touching contrast between the Lord's humility and exaltation—the Lord shall “be treated with outrage, and He shall be *lifted up* upon a tree. . . . And I know how lowly He shall be upon earth, and how glorious in heaven.”²⁴ This is reminiscent of Peter's use of *cross* as *tree* in Acts 5 and Acts 10, where in each passage, with striking economy of expression, appear the ideas of rejection, humiliation, crucifixion, exaltation, and judgeship.

Implicit in the concept of a two-way judgment is the idea that a great reversal will occur among men, when “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”²⁵ This truth applied eminently to Christ, but it will also apply to all mankind. In the Old Testament, this reversal is a basic and recurring theme in Isaiah. There, when the Lord “shall judge among the nations . . . the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted . . . [the] proud and lofty . . . every one that is *lifted up* . . . shall be brought low.”²⁶ All nature is called upon to witness this reversal among men, for “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low” (Isaiah 40:4). In the Book of Mormon, there is an allusion to this figure in the description of the destructions or *judgments* accompanying the

22. 2 Nephi 26:24.

23. Pearl of Great Price, Moses 7:55–56; Ether 4:1–10; 1 Nephi 11:33–36; 19:10.

24. Emphasis added; *Testament of Benjamin* 9:3–5, in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 2:358–59.

25. Matthew 23:12. Cf. Luke 1:52; 16:19–26; 1 Samuel 2:1–10; Psalms 147:6; Ezekiel 17:24.

26. Isaiah 2:4–12.

Crucifixion, and these upheavals are seen as preliminary witnesses and warnings of the future Judgment.²⁷

Significantly, when the Lord is *lifted up*, John sees both His rejection and exaltation prefigured in Old Testament prophecy. It is to Isaiah that he calls attention following his reference to the Lord *lifted up*, citing both Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's rejection and his contrasting vision of the Lord in glory, "sitting upon a throne, high and *lifted up*."²⁸ Clearly it was the understanding of John that Isaiah saw the premortal Christ and comprehended the contrasts of His mission, an interpretation also given in the Book of Mormon.²⁹ It is most instructive to see how the remarkable term *lifted up* is used in opposite and contrasting ways and meanings in the scriptures. It is like the rites and ordinances that have rich meanings, at once representing or symbolizing more than one thing.³⁰

Further, in John 3:14–15, Jesus is quoted as saying that "as Moses *lifted up* the serpent . . . so must the Son of Man be *lifted up*: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." This was said in reference to Numbers 21, where those who were bitten by serpents were healed if they would but *look upon* the symbol *lifted up* by Moses. In the Book of Mormon, this type and symbol is explained as foreshadowing both the Crucifixion of Christ and the judgment of men and thus illustrates the reciprocal concept.³¹ Men judge Christ as they *look upon* Him, or "view his death, and suffer his cross."³² Those who reject Him refuse to be

27. Helaman 14:20–29; 3 Nephi 8:5–25; 9:3–12; 10:9–14.

28. Isaiah 6:1; cf. John 12:37–41.

29. 2 Nephi 9:1–5; 11:1–8.

30. See the discussion of *lifted up* in Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Matthew L. Bowen, "By the Blood Are Ye Sanctified": The Symbolic, Salvific, Interrelated, Additive, Retrospective, and Anticipatory Nature of the Ordinances of Spiritual Rebirth in John 3 and Moses 6," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 24 (2017): 123–316, esp. 128–31.

31. 2 Nephi 25:13–20; Alma 33:19–22; Helaman 8:13–16. Cf. Epistle of Barnabas 12:2–6, in "The Epistle of Barnabas," Early Christian Writings, earlychristianwritings.com/text/barnabas-lake.html.

32. Jacob 1:8.

healed.³³ Christ can heal the individual soul or “heal the nations”³⁴ when He is looked upon with faith, while healing is essentially an act of judgment whereby things are set in order by appropriate authority.

The Crucifixion then is a crucial or pivotal thing, and may be seen as symbolic of the two-way judgment. A prominent feature of the post-Resurrection narratives is their mention of the Lord’s display of the tokens of the Crucifixion, such as the marks in His hands.³⁵ In the Judgment, men are to be reminded of the Crucifixion, for “they shall *look upon* me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.”³⁶

REPENTANCE, JUDGMENT, AND FIGURATIVE CRUCIFIXION

If through the Crucifixion Jesus submitted to the judgment of the world, it is also Jesus “by whom the world is crucified” (Galatians 6:14).³⁷ In every person there is a direct counterpart to the Crucifixion, whether in repentance or in the coming Judgment. This relationship is strongly reflected in rites and ordinances that at once symbolize the Crucifixion and anticipate the Judgment.³⁸ The concept may be seen in the rites and ceremonies in which the Latter-day Saints participate and is most apparent in the scriptures regarding baptism. It was Jesus who made the analogy in alluding to His coming sacrifice: “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized.”³⁹ This passage calls to mind the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as well as baptism. The Lord’s Supper provides a frequent reminder of the Crucifixion and the broken body and blood of Jesus, while relating the recipient to these

33. John 12:40.

34. 2 Nephi 25:20.

35. John 20:25–28; Luke 24:38–40; 1 John 1:1; 3 Nephi 11:14.

36. Zechariah 12:10; cf. Revelation 1:17; Doctrine and Covenants 45:49–53.

37. Cf. “For Jesus came crucifying the world,” in Gospel of Philip 111:24.

38. On the judgment aspects see C. F. D. Moule, “The Judgment Theme in the Sacraments,” in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 464–81.

39. Mark 10:39.

things through repentance. It also looks to the promise that in the time of judgment, the righteous will literally eat and drink as the Lord's companions as did the disciples during His post-Resurrection appearances.

As a fundamental initiatory rite, the symbolism behind baptism is common to such rites, since "the primary object of 'initiation ceremonies' is to effect rebirth by means [that] mimic death and resurrection."⁴⁰ Baptism relates each initiate to crucifixion, death, judgment, and resurrection. The repentant are baptized "after the manner of his burial,"⁴¹ the baptismal font being "instituted as a similitude of the grave."⁴² The Apostle Paul taught that the Christian is "baptized into his death . . . buried with him by baptism into death," and that "our old man is *crucified with him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed . . . for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:3–4, 6, 23).

In his early *Lectures on the Ordinances*, Cyril of Jerusalem (d. AD 386) has this insightful description of the imitative quality of the ordinances:

O strange and paradoxical thing! We did not die in reality, nor were we really buried, nor did we rise up after having been actually crucified. Rather, it was imitation (*mimesis*) by a token (*eikoni*), while the salvation part is the real thing. Christ was really crucified, really was buried, and really rose again, and all that for our benefit, so that by sharing his sufferings in imitation we might attain to a real salvation. O love of men overflowing! Christ really received the nails in his blameless hands and feet and suffered pain; while I, without any pain or struggle, by his sharing of suffering the pain, enjoy the fruits of salvation!⁴³

Because death "represents, to biblical thinking, the ultimate verdict on sin, . . . [b]aptism is voluntary death . . . a pleading guilty, an acceptance of

40. E. O. James, "Initiatory Rituals," in *Myth and Ritual: Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Cultural Pattern of the Ancient East*, ed. S. H. Hooke (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 147.

41. Doctrine and Covenants 76:51.

42. Doctrine and Covenants 128:13.

43. As quoted by Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 515, 520. Cf. Romans 8:17.

the sentence.”⁴⁴ Repentance, then, is an early and voluntary submission to the judgment of God. As it precedes the symbolic burial it is a counterpart to Christ’s Crucifixion, or His voluntary submission to the judgment of the world. Those who repent must also endure “the crosses of the world,”⁴⁵ and each must, as Jesus said, “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”⁴⁶

If sins are great, repentance can indeed be painful, as Alma witnessed in the Book of Mormon: “So great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror . . . there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as my pains,” yet through the process of repentance he came to be “filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!”⁴⁷ The theme is *judgment*, with the willingness to experience it while repentance is possible and the suffering of one’s “crucifixion” can be minimized, that one may be “*lifted up* at the last day.”⁴⁸

But if the righteous are figuratively “crucified” through repentance, so are the unrepentant “crucified” in the Judgment. The Lord has said that the suffering of “those who are found on my left hand” may be *likened* to the Crucifixion in the following remarkable passage:

Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

For 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—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

44. Moule, “Judgment Theme in the Sacraments,” 465.

45. 2 Nephi 9:18.

46. Mark 8:34; cf. Luke 9:22–23.

47. Alma 36:14–21.

48. Alma 36:3.

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (Doctrine and Covenants 19:15–19)

Here we are reminded that there are many counterparts to the Crucifixion. If the Lord was pierced, “the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow.”⁴⁹ If He was scourged, they shall be scourged.⁵⁰ If He is rejected of men, they shall be rejected in the Judgment.⁵¹ If He was made to tremble and shrink,⁵² those “who live without God in the world” shall “tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye.”⁵³ Those who are ashamed of the Lord, of them “also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh.”⁵⁴ If they failed to “see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart” when the Lord was *lifted up*,⁵⁵ in the Judgment “there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated.”⁵⁶ Conversely, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered . . . the heart” the blessings of those who love the Lord in the Judgment (see 1 Corinthians 2:9). Many examples could be cited showing the reciprocal or contrasting use of such terminology.

The faithful find no need to fear the Judgment. Rather, the reminders of His suffering engender their love: “Because thou didst receive a crown of thorns for our sakes, let us who have loved thee put on a crown that does not fade away. . . . Because thou didst rise and come to life again, let us come

49. Doctrine and Covenants 1:3; cf. Revelation 1:7.

50. Matthew 20:19; 1 Nephi 19:9, 13. Cf. Acts of John 95:6: “I will be wounded, And I will wound,” in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 2:228.

51. John 12:48.

52. Doctrine and Covenants 19:18.

53. Mosiah 27:31.

54. Mark 8:38. Those “wicked on my left hand will I be ashamed to own before the Father” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:27).

55. Isaiah 6:1, 10. Cf. Matthew 13:14–15; John 12:40.

56. Doctrine and Covenants 1:2.

to life again and live and stand before thee in righteous judgment!”⁵⁷ The righteous welcome the “pleasing bar” of God when they “may not shrink with awful fear” on that “glorious day when justice shall be administered” unto them.⁵⁸ The reminder of the cross is not necessarily one of fear but of a two-way responsibility. The Judgment “will become a day of covenant for the elect and inquisition for the sinners.”⁵⁹

THE ARMS OF MERCY AND JUDGMENT

Both the submission of God and the judgment of men are tersely expressed in the Gospel of Philip, where Christ appears as “the spread out” or stretched-out One who “came crucifying the world.”⁶⁰ Similarly, in the early *Christian Sibyllines* we read of the “tree . . . on which God was stretched out” in the Crucifixion, “when he stretches out his hands and measures all things, And wears the crown of thorns,” or when “He shall stretch out his hands and measure the whole world.”⁶¹ This imagery is representative, for the stretching out or extension of the hands and arms is very often interpreted as a sign of the Crucifixion in early Christian literature.⁶² The figure appears in a post-Resurrection prophecy of Jesus found at the close of the Gospel of John. Here, Peter is warned that “when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands,” John adding, “This spake he, signifying

57. Acts of Thomas 158, in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:526. Cf. Gospel of Bartholomew 4:62: “You who wore a crown of thorns, in order to prepare for us repentant sinners the precious heavenly crown,” in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:501.

58. 2 Nephi 9:46; cf. Jacob 6:13; Moroni 10:34.

59. *1 Enoch* 60:6, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:40.

60. Gospel of Philip 111:23–24. Compare Christ as the “Word stretched out” in Acts of Peter 38, in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:320.

61. *Christian Sibyllines* 6:26; 1:372; 8:302, in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:720, 711, 735. Conversely, consider Christ as “the measured” in Gospel of Philip 110:13.

62. “I extended my hands and approached my Lord, because the stretching out of my hands is his sign. And my extension is the common cross, that was *lifted up* on the way of the Righteous One.” *Odes of Solomon* 42:1–2, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:770; emphasis added.

by what death” Peter “should glorify God.”⁶³ The “analogy points to crucifixion, and traditional history is without contradiction as to this being the death by which Peter sealed his testimony of the Christ.”⁶⁴

The figure of the outstretched arms is rich with varied connotations representing God’s agency, dominion, power, protection, blessing, designation, or instruction.⁶⁵ It touches on many aspects of His relationship to humankind. Among humankind it shows supplication, or the sharing of God’s power, as when “Moses . . . spread abroad his hands unto the Lord; and the thunders and hail ceased.”⁶⁶ However, the imagery of the extended arms and hands is used prominently to represent God’s judgment, or conversely, to show His mercy, forbearance, and redemption. Consequently, it may be seen as a symbol of the contrasting and two-way aspects of the Crucifixion. Thus, it is declared that the Lord “will redeem you with a stretched out arm,”⁶⁷ while His mercy and forbearance is manifested in Isaiah 65:2—“I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people.” The latter passage is cited in the Epistle of Barnabas as being a specific reference to the cross. In contrast, the same writing points to Exodus 17 where the idea of judgment and power is associated with this figure.⁶⁸ There, Moses prevailed in battle while “extending holy arms,” typifying the Christ.⁶⁹ Here “Israel prevailed” while “Aaron and Hur stayed up his

63. John 21:18–19; cf. John 12:33.

64. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1916), 693. Cf. 2 Peter 1:14; Acts of Peter 37, in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:319.

65. See, e.g., Jeremiah 15:6; Ezekiel 20:33; Mosiah 1:14; 3 Nephi 12:1; Book of Abraham 2:7; 3:12.

66. Exodus 9:29, 33. Cf. 1 Kings 8:22; Psalm 88:9; 143:6; Mosiah 12:2; Alma 14:10. Conversely, the opposition will “stretch forth his hand against the Son . . . and crucify him on a tree.” Ascension of Isaiah 9:14, in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:657.

67. Exodus 6:6. This formula appears repeatedly: Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2–9; cf. Psalms 136:10–16.

68. Epistle of Barnabas 12:2–4.

69. *Christian Sibyllines* 8:251, in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:733. Cf. Justin Martyr, “Chapter XC—The Stretched-Out Hands of Moses Signified Beforehand the Cross,” in *Dialogue with Trypho*, earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html. Compare also Justin Martyr, “Chapter CXI,” in *Dialogue with Trypho*.

hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side” (Exodus 17:11–12).

Usage in the Book of Mormon strongly suggests the same concept. Emphasis there is given to God’s “arm of mercy,”⁷⁰ and in a context that treats both repentance and judgment, with a reminder of reciprocal relationships: “cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you,” for “how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel . . . and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long. . . . And while his arm of mercy is extended . . . harden not your hearts” (Jacob 6:4–5). Those who reject the Lord’s offer of repentance are warned that they “shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works . . . having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended toward them.”⁷¹ They will have made “a mock of the great plan of redemption.”⁷² Christ’s “arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins.”⁷³ His mercy and Crucifixion prepare the way for repentance and redemption.

AN ENDURING IMAGE AND WITNESS

Rise up, rise up, O holy cross,
And lift me, O cross,
I shall mount upon you, O cross
They shall hang me upon you as
a witness to them.⁷⁴

70. 3 Nephi 9:14.

71. Mosiah 16:10–12; cf. Alma 19:36; 29:10. In anger the Lord “stretched forth his hand against” those who despised his word (Isaiah 5:24–25).

72. Jacob 6:8.

73. Doctrine and Covenants 29:1.

74. From a hymn attributed to Jesus in “an ancient Christian prayer book” discovered in Egypt in 1965. See Sangka Knox, “Old Coptic MS. Unearthed Near Abu Simbel,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1965. This and texts related to it appear to reflect the *lifted up* concept and the witness or testimony purpose. See Tony Burke & Brent Landau, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 1:195–96 and context.

When Christ the Judge and King came in meekness, and with an arm of mercy, those who rejected Him did not know and recognize the time of their *visitation*.⁷⁵ Men will yet be visited in judgment, and “he that will not take up his cross and follow me” shall “know mine arm and mine indignation, in the day of *visitation* and of wrath upon the nations.”⁷⁶

In the Crucifixion we see Jesus extended and suffering on the cross, showing His great humility and mercy while portraying the Judgment scene. Viewed in this perspective, the Crucifixion becomes a deeply impressive witness of the Judgment, albeit a stark mockery of the same. His submission and love are evident as He allows Himself to be *lifted up* for judgment, praying to the Father to forgive His persecutors. His restraint symbolizes man’s probationary state and freedom of choice to accept or reject the Lord and His teachings. Conversely, the Crucifixion is a standing reminder of man’s future accountability and relationship to Christ as Lord and Judge.

The image of the Judgment scene can leave a marked and enduring impression on the mind, affording a most compelling reminder and warning of the Judgment whenever the Crucifixion is contemplated. The remembrance of the cross as a symbol can also serve like a *crossroads*, where throughout life we frequently must make decisions left or right—to the wrong or to the right. If it “behoved Christ to suffer”⁷⁷ and to provide a witness of such transcendent import, the world should know and feel that “the Lord in his condescension” has “visited men in . . . much mercy.”⁷⁸ One can begin to feel the overwhelming contrasts to be experienced at the last day.

75. Cf. Luke 19:44. The *visitation* is in mercy or judgment according to the preparation of men, 1 Nephi 19:11. The term is used in either sense. The contrasts are drawn in Hebrews 2:3–11 and strikingly in the Decalogue, Exodus 20:5–6.

76. Doctrine and Covenants 56:1–2.

77. Luke 24:46.

78. 2 Nephi 4:26.