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Title What's in a Word?

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Abstract The use of the word *judge* in the scriptures can cause confusion. By researching the etymologies and scriptural uses of the words *judge* and *righteous*, Cynthia Hallen observes that there is a difference between judging and judging righteously.



WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Cynthia L. Hallen

To judge, or not to judge—is that the question? The seemingly contradictory uses of the word *judge* in the Book of Mormon can be confusing. In 3 Nephi 14:1 the Savior says, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Yet Moroni 7:15 says that “it is given unto you to judge.” Fortunately, Moroni 7:18 clarifies the concept of judging: “Seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.”

The real question seems to be whether we judge rightfully or wrongfully. The Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 7:1 confirms this interpretation: “Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged: but judge righteous judgment.”

A careful study of the roots of the words *judge* and *righteous* can help us better understand and apply these concepts. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the etymology of the noun *judge* in Latin is “*jū-s* right, law + *-dic-us* speaking, speaker.” Literally, a judge is someone who speaks rightly or someone who interprets the law for people. Because the concept of choosing rightly is inherent in the semantic DNA of the word *judge*, judgment presupposes righteousness.

The adjective *right* is related to the Latin root “*reg-* to make or lead straight” (OED). Righteous judgment helps us walk with others in a direct path towards the Lord. An example of unrighteous judgment would be false speaking. Self-righteous judgment would be a crooked or unbalanced interpretation of the law. Thus one paraphrase of 3 Nephi 14:1 and Matthew 7:1 JST could read, “Do not speak wrongly or unkindly of others, so that they will not speak wrongly or unkindly of you: rather, speak honestly and thoughtfully about others.”

Using the WordCruncher scripture concordance program developed at Brigham Young University, we can gather insights about righteous judgment from Hebrew and Greek language forms. In the Old Testament the main Hebrew root for the concept of judging is *špṭ. The root has a wide range of connotations that help define the scope of righteous judgment:

ʾiššāpəṭāh	“that I may reason with you” 1 Samuel 12:7
šāpaṭ	“the Lord [deliver] me [from] thee” 1 Samuel 24:15
šəpəṭū	“the Lord hath avenged him” 2 Samuel 18:19
yīšpōṭ	“who can [rule] this thy people” 2 Chronicles 1:10
māšōpəṭ	“I would make supplication to my [accuser]” Job 9:15
šipəṭū	“ defend the poor and fatherless” Psalm 82:3
yīšpōṭū	“they [do not do justice to] the fatherless” Isaiah 1:23
niššāpəṭah	“let us plead together” Isaiah 43:26
nišpāṭ	“I will [enter into controversy] with thee” Jeremiah 2:35

A few Old Testament scriptures refer to people who exercise unrighteous judgment. In such cases the Hebrew word for *judge* has connotations of futile contention or unjust condemnation:

mišpəṭê	“he shall . . . save him from those that condemn his soul” Psalm 109:31
nišpāt	“if a wise man contendeth with a foolish man . . . there is no rest” Proverbs 29:9

However, in most Old Testament occurrences, the concept of judging carries a positive meaning. In Ezra 7:25 a synonymous pair reveals another Hebrew root for judging: *dyn*. The phrase “magistrates and judges” in Ezra 7:25 reads šapṭon wədayyanon, wherein the špṭ root has the connotation of “leaders” and

the *dyn* root has the connotation of “defenders.” So judging righteously can mean to guide others and to protect them.

The main Hebrew word for *righteousness* is *ṣedeq*, which constitutes the second half of the compound proper noun *Melchizedek* (Hebrew *malko-ṣedeq*, “king of righteousness”), who is a type of Christ (see Genesis 14:8; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:15–17; Alma 13:14–18; D&C 107:1–4). Thus “righteous judgment” is the duty of those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and the responsibility of all who desire to emulate the Savior: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment [*mišpaṭ*]: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness [*ṣedeq*] shalt thou judge [*tišpoṭ*] thy neighbour” (Leviticus 19:15). Those who judge righteously are not influenced by the status of people. They neither shun people who are lowly nor flatter people who are powerful.

The Hebrew word *ṣedeq* is also associated with the concept of just weights and measures in Leviticus 19:35–36: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness [*awel*] in judgment [*mišpaṭ*], in meteyard [*mīddāh*], in weight [*mīšqal*], or in measure [*mešūrāh*]. Just [*ṣedeq*] balances, just [*ṣedeq*] weights, a just [*ṣedeq*] ephah, and a just [*ṣedeq*] hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.” This “just measuring” connotation of *ṣedeq* helps us understand the synonymous meanings of the two parallel phrases in 3 Nephi 14:2 and Matthew 7:2 JST:

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;
and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

The concrete imagery of the phrase “righteous judgment” lies in the metaphor of building or buying, in measuring dimensions with fair standards, and in weighing goods with accurate balances. In Western civilization this metaphor often appears in the image of the goddess Justice, who carries a pair of balances in her right hand. Job uses a similar image of judgment during his trial of faith: “Let me be weighed in an even [*ṣedeq*] balance, that God may know mine integrity” (Job 31:6). Righteous judgment includes the idea of giving people exactly what they deserve or purchase.

Unrighteous judgment includes the idea of cheating or shortchanging that which is due to others: “Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just [*ṣedeq*] weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: . . . For all that . . . do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 25:13–16).

A thorough survey of Old Testament references yields several specific characteristics of both righteous judgment and unrighteous judgment. Unrighteous judgment can include the following acts of cruelty, destruction, pride, and dishonesty:

despising the poor and favoring the rich (Leviticus 19:15)
being a respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 1:17)
perverting justice, showing partiality, taking bribes (Deuteronomy 16:19)
seeking to destroy the righteous (Psalm 37:30)
overthrowing righteous judgment (Proverbs 18:5)
oppressing others (Isaiah 5:7)
dealing unjustly (Isaiah 26:10)
wronging strangers, orphans, and widows (Jeremiah 22:3)
using violence and shedding innocent blood (Jeremiah 22:3)

In other words, unrighteous judgment tends to call good evil and evil good; it substitutes darkness for light and bitterness for sweetness (see Isaiah 5:20). Unrighteous judgment distorts or ignores the truth.

Righteous judgment, on the other hand, honors and upholds the truth. It includes acts of charity, mercy, humility, and justice:

hearing the cause of neighbors and strangers (Deuteronomy 1:15)
noticing the small as well as the great (Deuteronomy 1:17)

justifying the righteous and condemning the wicked (Deuteronomy 25:1)
 being eyes for the blind, feet for the lame, and father to the poor (Job 29:14–16)
 taking away spoil from the wicked (Job 29:17)
 speaking wisdom, having the law of God in one’s heart (Psalm 37:31–32)
 saving children and breaking down oppressors (Psalm 72:4)
 establishing equity (Psalm 99:4)
 keeping the Lord’s statutes (Psalm 119:6)
 opening the mouth and pleading the cause of the poor (Proverbs 31:9)
 slaying the wicked (Isaiah 11:4)
 having peace, quietness, and assurance (Isaiah 32:17)

In other words, righteous judgment balances justice and mercy through the atonement of Jesus Christ. The iconic chiasmus and parallelism of Alma 41:13–15 illustrate that righteous judgment is a perfect fulfillment of the Lord’s laws of restoration and compensation:

the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again . . .

[A] good for that which is good;
 [B] righteous for that which is righteous;
 [C] just for that which is just;
 [D] merciful for that which is merciful . . .
 [D] see that you are merciful unto your brethren;
 [C] deal justly,
 [B] judge righteously,
 [A] and do good continually;
 and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward;
 [D] yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again;
 [C] ye shall have justice restored unto you again;
 [B] ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again;
 [A] and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

As we have seen, the Lord commends righteous judgment and condemns unrighteous judgment in the biblical Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the translated English of the Book of Mormon.

The Savior also teaches the importance of judging righteously in the Greek of the New Testament. Jesus praises Simon Peter for correctly discerning [*orthos ekrinas*] the parable of the creditor and two debtors: “Thou hast rightly judged” (Luke 7:43). As in the Old Testament, the Lord, in John 7:24, urges us to judge according to the heart instead of judging the image of people with our eyes:

mh`	not
kri/nete	Judge
kat' ó/yin	according to the appearance
álla`	but
th`n dikai/an kri/sin	righteous judgment
kri/nete	judge

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (3rd edition), the reconstructed Indo-European (IE) root of the Greek words *krisin* and *krinete* is **krei-*, meaning to “sieve, discriminate, distinguish.” Latin variants led to the English words *discern* and *discriminate*, with meanings of “sifting, separating, and deciding.” In Greek the IE root took on the meaning “separate, decide, judge,” becoming the source of the English word for thoughtful judgment in *critic* and false judgment in *hypocrisy*. Although the words *discrimination* and *criticism* can have negative connotations, the basic meaning of their root implies righteous judgment.

The IE root of the Greek word *dikaian*, translated as *righteous*, is *deik-*, meaning “to show, pronounce solemnly, to direct words or objects.” From Old English, this root led to the English words *teach* and *token*.

Latin derivatives led to the English words *benediction*, *dedicate*, *preach*, *indicate*, *index*, *avenge*, and *vindicate*. Another Latin variant led to the English word *judge*, mentioned above, including the connotation of rightness. In some ways the phrase “righteous judgment” is powerfully redundant, with righteousness being translated into judgment and judgment containing the concept of rightness. The concept of choosing the right appears symbolically in raising the right hand to make an oath in a court of justice. In Spanish the word for the right hand is *diestra*, which is cognate with the Greek word *dikaian*.

Some may feel that only Christ can judge righteously because he is the only sinless person: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Although Christ was the only perfectly righteous person in mortality, he has asked us to become perfect like him (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48). He calls us to follow him in distinguishing between good and evil, in judging between right and wrong. While judgment is a great responsibility, the counsel of the Lord to his servants is a guide to all: “the rights of the priesthood [of Melchizedek, Hebrew *malko-šedeq*] are . . . handled only upon the principles of righteousness [*šedeq*] . . . by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge” (D&C 121:36, 41–42).

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In response to “What’s in a Word?” in the last issue of the *Journal* (vol. 10, no. 1, 2001), I received three interesting questions. Jeffrey Marsh asked for more information on the word *deseret* in Ether 2:3. Kevin Farnsworth asked about the grammar of the clause “they punished according to their crimes” in Words of Mormon 1:15. John Farmer asked about the term *Anti-Nephi Lehi(es)* in the book of Alma.

Ether 2:3 states that the word *deseret* means “honey bee,” and Hugh Nibley documents the importance of bee cultivation in ancient societies. Nibley’s book *Abraham in Egypt* contains a whole chapter on the word *deseret* (ed. Gary Gillum, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000], 608–31). The Egyptian word *d_r* refers to the Red Crown of the Red Land of Lower Egypt and may be a sacred taboo term for royal bee symbols that represent deities (632–34).

Some readers may feel that a passive *be* verb form is missing in Words of Mormon 1:15. According to Royal Skousen, editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, the original text probably read “and they *were* punished according to their crimes.” However, we do not have the original manuscript for this passage, and the printer’s manuscript and all other editions are missing the verb *were*. A similar construction in verse 16 suggests that passive form was intended in verse 15: “all these having been punished according to their crimes” (see Alma 1:17, 18; 30:10, 11; 3 Nephi 5:5; Mormon 4:5).

Finally, the terms *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *Anti-Nephi-Lehies* in Book of Mormon headings are interesting in two ways: the meaning of the prefix *Anti* and the omission of the expected *-ite* suffix for naming a group of people. Royal Skousen has documented insightful evidence for understanding these forms, and the following discussion is based on his observations.

In the Book of Mormon the morpheme *Anti* is probably not the Greek *anti* (except in cases like *anti-Christ* in Alma 30). Instead, consider the many Book of Mormon names or words that involve *Anti*: Ani-Anti, Anti-omno, antion, Antionah, Antiparah, Antipas, Antipus. So the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were probably not the Lehies who were against Nephi, nor were they a people trying to distinguish themselves from the other Nephites.

Alma 27:27 in the original manuscript reads “& they were numbered among the People of Nephi & also numbered among the People which were of the Church of God.” The first occurrence of the word *numbered* was accidentally dropped by Oliver Cowdery when he copied the text from the original manuscript into the printer’s manuscript. Also, the use of *Anti-Nephi-Lehis* is found in the early printings of the 1953 RLDS edition. Later printings have *Anti-Nephi-Lehies*, as with all other printed editions. In every occurrence of the name in every edition of the Book of Mormon but one, the form is *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* or *-Lehies*, not *Lehites*. In the last heading of the original manuscript, Oliver Cowdery wrote “AntiNephiLehites.” The use of the *-ite* morpheme was probably a mistake. By analogy to the forms *Nephite* and *Lamanite*, readers might expect the *-ite* form, but there is no evidence to support that transcription. 

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