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The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels

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Abstract: Is the New Testament doctrinally complete? Does God condone anger as the book of Matthew seems to suggest? What does the book of Mormon teach us about the concept of hell as compared to the Bible and the teachings of other Christian faiths? What is the meaning of the word gospel? In this volume, fourteen Latter-day Saint scholars answer these and other questions with a collection of thought-provoking essays. These essays show that the Book of Mormon confirms the truth of the New Testament while offering a more complete understanding of the plan of salvation.



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THE
BOOK OF MORMON
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THE FOUR GOSPELS

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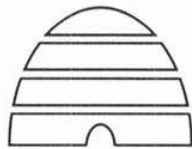
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THE FOUR GOSPELS

EDITED BY
RAY L. HUNTINGTON AND TERRY B. BALL



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Contents

<i>Introduction: Why the Book of Mormon?</i>	vii
1. <i>The Final Judgment</i>	1
Terry B. Ball	
2. <i>The Key of Knowledge</i>	19
Neil J. Flinders	
3. <i>The Priesthood</i>	33
H. Dean Garrett	
4. <i>The Meaning of the Word GOSPEL</i>	45
Ray L. Huntington	
5. <i>A Scriptural Comparison Concerning Anger:</i> <i>3 Nephi 12:22 and Matthew 5:22</i>	57
Daniel K Judd	
6. <i>Hell, Second Death, Lake of Fire and Brimstone,</i> <i>and Outer Darkness</i>	77
Dennis L. Largey	
7. <i>The Second Coming of Jesus</i>	91
W. Jeffrey Marsh	
8. <i>A Doctrinal Framework for the New Testament</i>	111
Robert J. Matthews	
9. <i>The Sacrament: Building upon Christ's Rock</i>	125
Monte S. Nyman	
10. <i>Baptism</i>	139
Craig J. Ostler	

Contents

11. <i>Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ</i>	159
Rex C. Reeve Jr.	
12. <i>Gethsemane and Golgotha: Why and What the</i> <i>Savior Suffered</i>	173
Bruce Satterfield	
13. <i>Spiritual Rebirth: Have Ye Been Born of God?</i>	201
Brent L. Top	
14. <i>The Resurrection: An Embattled Keystone</i>	219
Keith J. Wilson	
<i>Scripture Index</i>	235
<i>Subject Index</i>	251

Introduction: *Why the Book of Mormon?*

The Bible is a wonderful book of scripture. Indeed, it has blessed the lives of countless men and women throughout the ages and has caused men such as Daniel Webster to state that it is "a book of faith, and a book of doctrine, and a book of morals, and a book of religion, of special revelation from God."¹ Other great individuals, such as President Ezra Taft Benson, have expressed love and appreciation for the Old and New Testaments, since the Bible "teaches us about the life and ministry of the Master. From its pages we learn of the hand of God in directing the affairs of His people from the very beginning of the earth's history. It would be difficult to underestimate the impact the Bible has had on the history of the world. Its pages have blessed the lives of generations."²

Yet, as the prophet Nephi foresaw, after the writings contained in the Bible would go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, many plain and precious truths would be taken from the Bible by the great and abominable church (see 1 Ne. 13:26). Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated that "Satan guided his servants in taking many plain and precious things, and many of the covenants of the Lord, from the Bible."³ The removal of those precious truths had, and continues to have, a profound effect on God's children. For example, Nephi learned from a heavenly messenger that the great and abominable church removed the plain and precious truths in order to "pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men" (see 1 Ne. 13:27). In the same vision Nephi further learned that "because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them,"

such that they are in an “awful state of blindness” (1 Ne. 13:29, 32). Many of the individuals who are in this “awful state of blindness” are humble, devout, believing Christians who are led to err and stumble as a result of important truths that have been removed or altered from the original text of the Bible. Indeed, those honest men and women are much less secure in the salvation of Jesus Christ than they deserve to be as a result of the loss of those vital truths.⁴ The young Joseph Smith also found himself in the midst of confusion and strife while seeking to find which church was right, since “the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible” (JS-H 1:12).

Through an extraordinary vision, the prophet Enoch learned that in the latter days the Lord would send righteousness down from heaven and truth from out of the earth (see Moses 7:62). President Ezra Taft Benson stated that we have seen the marvelous fulfillment of this prophecy through the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, since the sacred record came forth from out of the earth.⁵ The Book of Mormon contains many plain and precious truths taken from the Bible (see 1 Ne. 13:34–35). The Lord refers to those truths as his “gospel,” his “rock,” and his “salvation” (1 Ne. 13:36). Thus, “part of the flood of light that accompanied the Restoration was the return of these lost truths.”⁶ When used in conjunction with the Bible, the Book of Mormon clarifies and restores precious truths regarding such doctrines as the Godhead, the resurrection and the nature of resurrected beings, the final judgment, the priesthood, and the Fall. It is no wonder, then, that President Benson taught that the Book of Mormon needs to be “enthroned in the minds and hearts” of the Latter-day Saints.⁷

While there could be a great deal written on the Book of Mormon’s clarification and restoration of missing truths from the texts of the Old and New Testaments, this volume will focus only on the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The purpose of the chapters in this book is to illuminate and clarify through the Book of Mormon many of the important doctrines and concepts found in the Gospels. Our hope is that the reader will better understand New Testament doctrine through the clarifying lenses of the Restoration.

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Notes

1. Daniel Webster, as quoted in *Dictionary of Quotable Definitions*, ed. Eugene E. Brussell (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), 48.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 23.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 164.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Rending the Veil of Unbelief," in *Nurturing Faith Through the Book of Mormon: The 24th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 3.
5. Benson, 26.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 24.
7. Benson, 26.

The Final Judgment

1

Terry B. Ball

The last judgment is one of many doctrines taught in the Gospels but clarified by the second witness of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon elucidates, for example, that Christ will be our primary judge. From it we also learn that the final judgment will occur after the resurrection, and we learn the criteria upon which we will be judged. Modern revelation teaches that we will be judged by our words, thoughts, feelings, and desires, and that we will be judged out of books – records kept both on earth and in heaven. We are judged because God requires that his kingdom be pure; and this life, the Book of Mormon teaches, is a probationary state, the time to prepare to meet God.

Paul identified two inevitable experiences through which each of us must pass when he wrote to the Corinthians: “For as in Adam *all die*, even so in Christ shall *all be made alive*” (1 Cor. 15:22; emphasis added). The newly converted Alma the Younger taught that each of us can also anticipate appearing before God’s judgment bar “even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged” (Mosiah 27:31).

Of these three inevitable events – death, resurrection, and the final judgment – the last is perhaps that which causes us the most concern. We wonder, “Who will judge us? When will we be judged? What are the criteria upon which we will be judged?” and “What are the rewards and punishments given at the judgment?” During his mortal ministry, as recorded in the four Gospels, Jesus gave answers to these important questions. The Savior answered these questions through the writings of the Book of Mormon prophets as well, frequently adding important insights and clari-

fications to the doctrines taught in the Gospels. Moreover, the Book of Mormon addresses some questions about the judgment which are not considered in the Gospels, such as “Why should we be judged?” and “When should we prepare for the judgment?” A careful study of the teachings concerning the judgment in these two canons can do much to help us prepare for this important event.

Christ’s Role as Judge

While explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son, Jesus identified himself as our judge: “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). Later, he assured that all the judgments he makes are according to the will of the Father (John 8:15–16, 26, 50). Christ taught the Twelve that they will assist him by serving as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

The Book of Mormon offers a second witness that Christ will judge us at the last day: “And 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” (3 Ne. 27:14).¹

Alma’s companion Amulek explained to the conspiring lawyer Zeezrom that the judgment bar would be composed not only of Christ but of “God the Father” and “the Holy Spirit” as well (Alma 11:44). Moreover, Mormon verified that the twelve whom Jesus called as apostles in the land of Jerusalem would also serve as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel. He then added that they will judge the twelve whom Jesus chose out of the Nephites. He further taught that the Nephite twelve would in turn help judge those who were a remnant of the Nephites and Lamanites (see Morm. 3:18–19).² Bruce R. McConkie summarized and clarified the roles of the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, and the apostles in the judgment: “The scriptural assertion that all men ‘shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil’ (Alma 11:44) means simply that Christ’s

judicial decisions are those of the other two members of the Godhead because all three are perfectly united as one. The ancient Twelve and the Nephite Twelve, and no doubt others similarly empowered, will sit in judgment, under Christ, on selected portions of the house of Israel; but their decrees will be limited to those who love the Lord and have kept his commandments, 'and none else'" (D&C 29:12; 3 Ne. 27:27; Matt. 19:28).³

Jacob taught that in a sense we will also judge ourselves, for at the judgment, "we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness" (2 Ne. 9:14). He further explained that because we will have such knowledge at the judgment bar, we will know what our reward or punishment should be, and accept it as just: "Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty – but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery" (2 Ne. 9:46).⁴

Apparently none of us will be taken away from the judgment bar protesting, "It's unfair! I demand a retrial! I want to appeal!" There will be no such nonsense. Rather, "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just" (Mosiah 16:1).

Although others may help with the judgment, Jacob testified that the final judgment which will allow us entrance into the kingdom ultimately belongs to the Savior (see 2 Ne. 9:41). Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained why this is important: "Jacob, in 2 Nephi 9:41, in speaking of the straight and narrow, reminds us that 'the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel' and that Jesus 'employeth no servant there.' The emphasis rightly is on the fact that Jesus 'cannot be deceived.' There is another dimension of reassurance, too: not only will the ultimate judgment not be delegated in order to serve the purposes of divine justice, but also divine mercy can best be applied by him who knows these things what only he can know."⁵ How appropriate it is that he who

atoned for our sins should have the privilege of determining whether we are worthy to enter the kingdom.

When Will We Be Judged?

Jesus taught his disciples that “the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).⁶ Thus, we understand that a judgment will follow the glorious return of the Savior. However, it is not clear in this passage from Matthew whether this judgment accompanying his Second Coming is the final judgment, or the destruction of the wicked and the rewarding of the righteous with millennial peace that will precede the final judgment (see D&C 43:29–31).

The Book of Mormon offers much more detail about the timing of the final judgment. Jacob taught that there was an early judgment passed upon man at the Fall of Adam, and that it would have been the final judgment were it not for the Atonement of Christ: “Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement – save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Ne. 9:7).

Alma taught that there will be another early judgment immediately after death to determine our place in the spirit world (see Alma 40:11–14). Abinadi suggested there must also be a type of judgment at the resurrection, for the wicked are to be resurrected after the righteous (Mosiah 15:21–26). Furthermore, throughout the Book of Mormon we are taught that certain judgments are poured out upon men during mortality (e.g., 1 Ne. 18:15),⁷ but none of these early judgments should be confused with the final judgment. The Book of Mormon teaches that the final judgment will occur only after we have conquered the first or physical death through the resurrection: “And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God” (2 Ne. 9:15).⁸

The Criteria of Judgment

Jesus taught his followers that, at the judgment, those granted entrance into his kingdom will have done more than simply confess faith with their lips. Rather, they will also have performed good works that are in harmony with the will of the Father: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21–23; see also 3 Ne. 14:21–23).

In the Book of Mormon, the teaching that all men shall “be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (Alma 11:44) is ubiquitous.⁹ The Gospels and the Book of Mormon specifically mention several works which must be done in faith and according to the will of the Father. These include accepting the gospel, receiving saving ordinances, forgiving others, judging others righteously, serving God and others, and teaching others. In addition to works, both canons also teach that we will be judged by our words, thoughts, feelings, and desires. Moreover, both texts teach that we will be held accountable for teachings and records contained in certain books, such as the scriptures and the Book of Life. While both canons mention these criteria, the Book of Mormon consistently adds insight and clarification to the doctrines as taught in the Gospels.

Accepting the Gospel

In the parable of the great supper, the Savior taught that we will be judged by how well we have taken advantage of opportunities to accept the gospel. He used the parable to chastise the lawyers and Pharisees who had professed righteousness but had not accepted the gospel or “come to the great supper.” Rather, they refused the opportunity by offering poor and worldly excuses. In contrast, those whom the lawyers and Pharisees despised as unworthy—the poor, halt, and maimed in the parable—accepted the invitation and were allowed to enjoy the blessings of the gospel (Luke 14:16–23).

Jesus clearly taught the Pharisees that having the opportunity to understand the gospel and then refusing to live it constitutes a sin for which they would be held accountable: "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:39-41).

In addition to the Pharisees, others had the opportunity to witness Jesus' mortal ministry yet failed to respond and fully accept him as the Christ. Consequently, Jesus warned that at the final judgment, those people who did not have the opportunity to see and hear him would be judged less harshly than those who had the privilege of knowing him: "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:20-24).¹⁰

The Savior used the parable of the faithful and wise steward to teach Peter why those who have the opportunity to accept Christ and his gospel are judged by a different standard than those who have not had a similar opportunity: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48).

Book of Mormon prophets likewise warned that those who had the opportunity to accept and live the gospel would be more accountable at the judgment. For example, Nephi, the son of Helaman, warned the apostate Nephites of his generation: "Ye

have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God; and even at this time, instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean, ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment" (Hel. 8:25).¹¹ In contrast, Alma vindicated those who had not had an opportunity to accept the gospel: "Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless" (Alma 29:5). Alma therefore suggested that at the judgment bar, ignorance of the law would be an acceptable excuse. The prophet Jacob explained why this is so: "Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel" (2 Ne. 9:25-26).¹²

Receiving Saving Ordinances

In his nighttime interview with Nicodemus, Jesus taught, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5; see also Mark 16:16). Latter-day Saints understand this admonition to include receiving the saving ordinances of baptism by water and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

The prophet Moroni made it clear that receiving these two ordinances in faith is an important part of preparing for the judgment: "If it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment" (Morm. 7:10).

The resurrected Savior taught the Nephites of another work that must follow baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost. "And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my

name shall be filled; and *if he endureth to the end*, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world" (3 Ne. 27:16; emphasis added). Thus, the Book of Mormon testifies that saving ordinances only save us if we continue in righteousness until the judgment.

Forgiving and Judging

After demonstrating how to pray while teaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave further detail about what he meant when he prayed, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). He explained, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).¹³

In the Book of Mormon, the Lord taught Alma that a refusal to forgive others constitutes a sin itself. "And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation" (Mosiah 26:31). In discussing the seriousness of such condemnation, President Spencer W. Kimball explained, "Condemnation, then, comes to you who will not forgive, probably even greater than to him who gave the offense."¹⁴

These teachings suggest that forgiving others is a part of the repentance process, and those who come to the judgment harboring grudges or malice against their fellow beings will not only find it difficult to obtain forgiveness for their own shortcomings but will also find that their refusal to forgive is an additional sin for which they are accountable.

Jesus taught that how we judge others will influence how we are judged. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2). The Joseph Smith Translation makes an important alteration to the above passage, helping us to understand this is not a prohibition against any judgment we might make. "Judge not *unrighteously*, that ye be not judged: *but judge righteous judgment* (JST Matt. 7:1-2; emphasis added). The principle that righteous judgment is allowed without condemnation is in harmony with John's recording of the

Savior's teachings: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Moroni also taught that unrighteous judgments made in mortality will be held against us at the judgment: "For behold, the same that judgeth rashly shall be judged rashly again" (Morm. 8:19). Later, as he closed his record, Moroni explained what constitutes "righteous judgment":

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. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; 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; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. And now, my brethren, 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 (Moro. 7:15-18).

Thus, righteous judgments are made according to the light of Christ, which inspires us to do good and to help God bring to pass his work and glory. In contrast, unrighteous judgments are motivated by evil feelings such as hatred, jealousy, greed, and lust. Moroni invites each of us to evaluate why we judge, and to be certain to judge in such a way that we invite "to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ" (Moro. 7:16).

Serving and Teaching

Through many of his parables, Jesus taught that we will be judged by how we have responded to opportunities to serve God and others. For example, in the parable of the talents, the good and faithful servants who increased the talents with which they were entrusted, and thereby took advantage of the opportunity to serve their lord, were each judged worthy of reward. "His lord

said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:23). In contrast, the slothful servant who failed to use the opportunity to increase the talent for which he was given stewardship was punished at his day of judgment: "His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:26-30).

One of the most poignant parables recorded in the Gospels, the parable of the sheep and the goats, also teaches the importance of service. This parable has a judgment-day context, with Jesus sitting as king. The nations are gathered before him to be judged. Like a shepherd dividing his flocks, he places the "sheep," the righteous, on his right side, and the rest, the "goats," on his left. He then rewards the righteous on his right side for the service they rendered to their king and others:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:34-40).

Turning to those on his left, he uses similar words to condemn them for failing to render the same service (see Matt. 25:41-46).

The principle that as we serve others we also serve God was taught by King Benjamin as well: "And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). King Benjamin further explained that in spite of all the service we might render God, we will ever be indebted to him for all that he has given us and will yet give us upon conditions of continued service and obedience.

The Savior instructed Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Speaking of this commandment, President Gordon B. Hinckley explained, "I believe, my brethren, that that great admonition applies to the men of the priesthood of the Church of Christ: ' . . . when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.' When thou art converted, go thou and convert thy brethren. This is our responsibility."¹⁵ The doctrine that those who have received the gospel should teach it to others is found throughout the Gospels.¹⁶ While the Gospels teach us that we should share Christ's teachings with others, the Book of Mormon explains that how well we do so may be considered at the judgment. The prophet Jacob's testimony illustrates the point well. Because he had been consecrated to be a teacher, Jacob was especially anxious to adequately warn his brothers and sisters, thereby exonerating himself from accountability for their sins: "And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day" (Jacob 1:19). Again, those who were taught the gospel will be judged by how well they accepted or rejected the message.

Words, Thoughts, Feelings, Desires

In response to the pharisaical accusations that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the Savior taught, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto

you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:34-36).¹⁷

Alma's teachings at Ammonihah are more inclusive in regard to the kinds of words for which we might be judged. He simply stated, "For our words will condemn us" (Alma 12:14). While discussing the importance of controlling our speech, Elder Bruce R. McConkie listed some of the kinds of words Alma may have had in mind for which one might be condemned: "The tongue is the mirror of the soul. Spoken words reveal the intents, desires, and feelings of the heart. We shall give an account before the judgment bar for every spoken word, and shall be condemned for our idle, intemperate, profane, and false words (Matt. 12:34-37; Alma 12:14). Implicit in this principle of judgment is the fact that we can control what we say. And what better test can there be of a godly self-control than the ability to tame the tongue!"¹⁸

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduced the higher principles by which those who live the gospel law should direct their lives. He taught that those who accept his gospel should govern not only their deeds but also their feelings. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). He gave a similar warning in regards to controlling our thoughts. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

As the resurrected Savior delivered these same teachings to the Book of Mormon peoples, he made a significant alteration to his teachings concerning the controlling of anger. He deleted the phrase "without a cause" (3 Ne. 12:22), thereby suggesting that at the judgment there will be no accepted justification for anger against a brother. In the same spirit, Alma taught that evil thoughts will condemn us at the judgment (see Alma 12:14). He also taught that our desires will play a significant role in our final judgment, for God will grant us that which we have desired: "I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according

to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction" (Alma 29:4). Later he taught this principle again to his son Corianton: "And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good" (Alma 41:3).

Out of the Books

While teaching in the temple during the passion week, Jesus stated, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Thus, Christ's words recorded in the Gospels will be part of the standard against which we will be judged.

Mormon taught that those who have access to the Book of Mormon will also be judged out of it "at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written" (W of M 1:11).¹⁹ The Savior taught the Book of Mormon peoples that there are additional books out of which we will be judged as well: "For behold, out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged, for by them shall their works be known unto men. And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged" (3 Ne. 27:25–26).²⁰ This teaching is in harmony with that of John the Revelator: "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" (Rev. 20:12).

The Doctrine and Covenants explains what constitutes the other books out of which we will be judged: "You will discover in this quotation that the books were opened; and another book was opened, which was the book of life; but the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works; consequently, the books spoken of must be the books which contained the record of their works, and refer to the records which are kept on the earth. And the book which was the book of life is the record which is kept in heaven" (D&C 128:7).

Orson Pratt described how these two records will be used at the judgment: "The sacred books kept in the archives of eternity are to be opened in the great judgment day, and compared with the records kept on the earth; and then, if it is found that things have been done by the authority and commandment of the Most High, in relation to the dead, and the same things are found to be recorded both on earth and in heaven, such sacred books will be opened and read before the assembled universe in the day of judgment, and will be sanctioned by Him who sits on the throne and deals out justice and mercy to all of his creation."²¹

Rewards and Punishments

The Gospels tend to stress the extreme verdicts, sentences, and rewards to be given at the judgment. The wicked are damned and relegated to hell, while the righteous are saved and allowed to dwell with Christ (e.g., Matt. 25:31–46).

The Book of Mormon prophets also tend to stress the extremes. We learn that the punishments of the wicked include being cast off forever from the kingdom of God (see 1 Ne. 10:21; 15:33), remaining eternally in a filthy or unclean state (see 1 Ne. 15:33; Morm. 9:14), existing in endless misery and unhappiness (see Alma 41:4–5; Morm. 9:14), having died as to things pertaining unto righteousness (see 1 Ne. 15:33; Alma 12:16), suffering torment as a lake of fire and brimstone (see 2 Ne. 28:23; Mosiah 26:27; Alma 12:17; Moro. 8:21), and being captive to the devil (see Alma 12:17). In contrast, the righteous will receive their just rewards, including the privilege of dwelling eternally with Christ (see Mosiah 26:24; Alma 41:4; 3 Ne. 28:40; Morm. 7:7) in a state of righteousness and happiness (see Alma 41:4; Mosiah 2:41; Morm. 7:7).

Neither the Gospels nor the Book of Mormon discusses what rewards or punishments are to be given to those who are worthy of something in between the extremes of heaven and hell. It is that very question which led Joseph Smith to receive the seventy-sixth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. (The reader is encouraged to consult D&C section 76 for further study of this topic.)

The Book of Mormon addresses two questions in regard to the judgment that are not answered in the Gospels: "Why should we be judged?" and "When should we prepare for the judgment?"

Preparing for the Judgment

The important question “Why should we be judged?” is rarely addressed in the scriptures, perhaps because the answer should be obvious to us. Yet, the Book of Mormon warns that in the last days there would be many who teach that God will not hold us accountable for our sins, or at least will not cast us off for them: “Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Ne. 28:7–8).

Some would suggest that God loves us so much that he will save us all regardless of our sins. Nephi taught the fallacy of such logic as he explained that there must be a judgment to protect the purity and righteousness of the kingdom of God: “Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works; and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also” (1 Ne. 15:33; see also Alma 40:26; 3 Ne. 27:19). Accordingly, the judgment will assure that only the righteous gain access to God’s kingdom, thereby preserving the kingdom’s purity and fulfilling the word of God (cf. Alma 11:34–37).

Some might question why it is so important for God’s kingdom to be pure. The eighty-eighth section of the Doctrine and Covenants answers that there are certain laws associated with each kingdom, and, in regard to God’s kingdom, it is obedience to those laws that preserves, perfects, and sanctifies the kingdom and those in it (see D&C 88:34–39). Accordingly, the celestial glory can only be maintained by righteousness. Moreover, the prohibition against evil in the celestial glory assures that only the righteous will have access to the powers of God. One can imagine the disastrous consequences should an evil and selfish being gain

access to such power. The judgment gives us the confidence that “the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36).

Amulek declared, “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” (Alma 34:32). Many of the Book of Mormon prophets referred to this life as a probationary state granted to us for the very purpose of preparing for the judgment. “And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God” (Alma 12:24).²² However, Abinadi made it clear that those who had not had the opportunity to accept the gospel in this life would not be unjustly punished for any lack of preparation but would still be granted participation in the first resurrection (see Mosiah 15:24). We understand that any preparation we do not have the opportunity or ability to complete in this life will be accomplished through work in the spirit world and vicarious work in the temple.²³

Conclusion

From doctrines taught in the Gospels, it is evident that our Savior wants us both to understand and to prepare for the final judgment. Such a concern on his part is a significant manifestation of his love for us. His love and concern for us is further manifested in the fact that he gave us the Book of Mormon, not only as a second witness to the doctrines he taught in the Gospels, but also to add important insights, additions, and clarifications to those doctrines. One way we can demonstrate our gratitude for the Savior’s love is to study these two witnesses of his doctrine. As we do so, we will be better prepared for the final judgment, for we will know the answers to the following questions: Who will judge us? When will we be judged? What are the criteria upon which we will be judged? What are the rewards and punishments given at the judgment? Why should we be judged? and When should we prepare for the judgment?

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Notes

1. See also 2 Ne. 2:10; Mosiah 3:10; Alma 33:22; 3 Ne. 27:16; 28:31; Morm. 6:21; Ether 12:38.
2. See also 1 Ne. 12:9-10; 3 Ne. 27:27.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 215-16.
4. See also Mosiah 3:25; Alma 5:18; 12:15.
5. Neal A. Maxwell, *For the Power Is in Them* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 37.
6. See also Matt. 25:31-46.
7. See also 1 Ne. 13:34; Mosiah 3:4; 29:27; Alma 4:3; 58:9; Hel. 4:23; 9:5; 14:11; 3 Ne. 16:9; 24:5; Morm. 4:5; 5:2; Moro. 9:14-15.
8. See also Mosiah 16:10; Alma 5:15; 11:44; 12:12; 33:22; 40:21; 42:23; Morm. 6:21; 7:6; 9:13; Moro. 10:34.
9. See also 1 Ne. 10:21; 15:32-33; 2 Ne. 9:44; 28:23, 29:11; Mosiah 3:24; 16:10; Alma 5:10, 15; 11:41; 12:8, 12, 14; 33:22; 36:15; 37:30; 40:21; 41:3; 42:23; 3 Ne. 26:4; 27:14-15; Morm. 3:18, 20; 6:21.
10. Cf. Matt. 12:41-42; Luke 10:10-16.
11. See also 2 Ne. 1:10; Alma 9:14-15; 60:31-33.
12. Cf. Mosiah 3:11.
13. See also Mark 11:25-26; Luke 6:37; and 3 Ne. 13:14-15.
14. Spencer W. Kimball, "Except Ye Repent . . .," *Improvement Era*, November 1949, 768.
15. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Conference Report*, April 1961, 88.
16. E.g., Matt. 10:1-20, 28:19; Mark 3:14; Luke 10:1-3; John 21:17.

17. The Greek for the adjective translated here as “idle” is *argos*. It connotes laziness or shunning labor.

18. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol. 3: Colossians–Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 262.

19. See also 2 Ne. 25:18; 33:14–15.

20. See also 2 Ne. 29:11.

21. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 7:84.

22. See also 1 Ne. 10:21; 15:32; 2 Ne. 2:21; 9:27; Mosiah 15:26; Alma 42:4,10, 13; Hel. 13:38; Morm. 9:28.

23. For a scriptural discussion of this doctrine, see the Topical Guide in the LDS edition of the Bible under the heading “Salvation for the Dead.”

Neil J. Flinders

Christ decried the intellectual class of his society – the scribes and Pharisees – because they had “taken away the key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52). This warning is vague, though, especially as to what “the key of knowledge” is. Through the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, it becomes clear that the “key of knowledge” is revelation, and a warning is given to those who ignore revelation and to those who hinder the people trying to heed it. This warning has additional significance to the learned who are proud and will not humbly listen to the words of revelation spoken through the Lord’s servants.

Luke 11:52 reads “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” This passage is portrayed in Bible commentaries as one of the Seven Woes that Jesus leveled at the scribes and Pharisees.¹ It is obvious from the context that Jesus’ message was directed at his culture’s intellectual establishment. His accusation implied that something in the mindset of the learned community obstructed the spiritual welfare of the people. Exactly what the “key of knowledge” was in this particular passage is somewhat evident but less than clear in the Bible. Fortunately, knowledge obtained by the Prophet Joseph Smith while translating the Book of Mormon and correcting the Bible enabled him to clarify this biblical verse, as well as many others.²

We now know that the “key of knowledge” is revelation, contained in the fullness of the scriptures. The condemnation Jesus directed toward these leaders was twofold: (1) they rejected the revelation that would lead them into the kingdom of God, and

(2) they exercised an influence that prevented other people from entering therein. The Joseph Smith Translation of this verse reads: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge, *the fulness of the scriptures*; ye enter not in yourselves *into the kingdom*; and those who were entering in, ye hindered” (JST Luke 11:53; emphasis added). Luke 1:77 indicates that what was being blocked was a “knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,” which only comes by acting upon a revealed testimony (Matt. 16:16–17; 1 Cor. 12:3). Because the plan of salvation and the role of the Atonement were not accurately understood, the avenue to the saving ordinances was being blocked. The condemnation was indeed serious: many of those who would have believed and accepted the ordinances were being prevented from acting because of those who would not believe. This is often a consequence when man distorts what God has said. Consider the context for the Prophet’s changes that is offered in the Book of Mormon; the rationale is clear and simple.

A Prophetic Overview

The Book of Mormon clearly identifies what some have called the central issue in intellectual history – the tension line between solitary human reason and the voice of divine revelation. History is replete with examples of the perennial conflict between those who believe and accept divine revelation and those who want to invoke an alternative tradition in place of the divine plan. The Book of Mormon defines the causes and describes the solution to this age-old enigma. Nephi, for example, vividly portrays the plight of the people in his account of the instructions he received from an angel of God: “[H]e said unto me: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and *I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him*. And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; . . . And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; *and I beheld that they cast him out from among them*” (1 Ne. 11:24–25, 28; emphasis added). God came and spoke. Some who listened did so with humility and reverence, falling down at his feet and worshipping

him. Others who listened did so with pride and disdain, ultimately casting him out and rejecting his teachings. And as Jesus observed in his day, some who otherwise would have heard and acted did not do so because they were blinded by the sophistry of the system in which they were enveloped.

In another place Jesus warned those who would destroy the belief of others, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." He continued to explain that if anyone "shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:3-6). The Book of Mormon clarifies the gravity of teaching others not to believe because of one's own intellectual error. Korihor, a highly educated student in an early educational system, was guilty of "go[ing] about, leading away the hearts of this people" by teaching them there was no God or revelation. The judgment of God on Korihor was that it was "better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction, by thy lying and by thy flattering words" (Alma 30:6-60).

Nephi's record of his own visionary instruction continues with observations on the calling of the twelve apostles, Christ's crucifixion, a description of the work of Twelve, and the image of the house of Israel "gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (1 Ne. 11:34-35). Nephi bears testimony that he saw "that the great and spacious building [of his father's vision] was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great." At this point, his angelic instructor announces: "Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles" (1 Ne. 11:36). The pride described as characterizing the inhabitants of the "great and spacious building" is pervasive, personal, and universal.

The issue of accepting or rejecting divine instruction has been with the human family from the very beginning. Both Enoch and Moses note that after Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, an angel appeared to them and explained the mission and message of "the Only Begotten of the Father." The heavenly messenger and the Lord himself instructed Adam and Eve "to teach these things freely unto your children." They were to make

“all things known unto their sons and their daughters.” Our first parents did indeed teach their children. Some listened and obeyed, while others listened and rejected (Moses 5–6). As Nephi foresaw, the Savior himself encountered this dichotomy when he lived on the earth and wept over the negative responses (Luke 19:41–42; Matt. 23:37). His encounter with the lawyers, described in Luke 11:52, is typical of the lifelong challenge he faced.

A Historical Snapshot

Jesus was born in a time of deep intellectual crises. The Israelite culture had experienced a severe apostasy from the Abrahamic covenant. The Judaism of his day had long been divided over the *vertical* (revelatory) heritage of the prophets and a *horizontal* (rational) religious perspective that succeeded in dominating the local power structure.³ The record indicates that the intellectual community had forsaken the “key of knowledge” and replaced it with their own reasoning. Thus the learned were “astonished” and “marvelled” at what Jesus, who really knew and understood both earth and heaven, was able to say and do. His presence filled them with questions and intense frustrations. Jesus recognized that forces were in motion that suppressed or “hindered” those who would have listened and “entered in” to the kingdom of God. (In this last dispensation, he explained to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the primary cause of such spiritual darkness was the “wicked one,” who comes and takes away light and truth from the children of men through “disobedience” and “the tradition of their fathers” [D&C 93:39]). It is an ideological dilemma.

The difficulties in Jesus’ day had been smoldering for a long time. Six centuries earlier, Lehi and his family had been forced to flee into exile over a similar conflict; its shadows seemed to stretch throughout the known world (1 Ne. 1:18–20). For example, across the Mediterranean, the Greek Enlightenment was about to dawn, shine, and fall into a secular confusion destined to complicate the spiritual plight of humankind through many centuries of a darkened age.⁴ This was to be a time during which the Prophet Joseph Smith proclaimed that “the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies,” would be “riveted” on the “hearts of the children” and subsequently fill the world with confusion until the earth would

groan under “the weight of its iniquity” (D&C 123:7). Nephi saw the turbulent conditions that would emerge—perilous times—that could only be settled when the Lord would do “a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men” (2 Ne. 25:17). Issues surrounding the “key of knowledge” are not new, nor have they been fully resolved. Jesus offered a straightforward explanation in Luke 11:52 (JST Luke 11:53). His statement is clearly enhanced by the teachings brought forth in the Book of Mormon.

The Savior Chastises the Lawyers, Scribes, and Pharisees

The description in the Gospel of Luke of the confrontation between Jesus and a prominent segment of the literate and learned of his day—lawyers, scribes, and Pharisees—is not unlike the challenge in our own day regarding a prophet’s voice. Jesus rebuked this privileged group because they had forsaken “the key of knowledge” and persecuted those who sought intelligence through that key (Luke 11:52; see also JST Luke 11:53). In this setting, the Savior was calling attention to the same issue that Nephi had foreseen in his vision. The Joseph Smith Translation of the text reveals that a major failing of the academe of the day was a rejection of the revelation associated with the fullness of the scriptures: “Ye enter not in yourselves into the kingdom; and those who were entering in, ye hindered” (JST Luke 11:53). The infraction was the rejection of the power of revelation—the complete revealed word of God, including its spiritual affirmation⁵—and the substitution of something less in its place. It was the denunciation of the legitimacy of the revealed message and the disregard or demeaning of the action that should follow that message. The result was a cultural blindness.

Jacob (Nephi’s brother) observed in one of his discourses: “The Jews were a stiff-necked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand” (Jacob 4:14). The stumbling that resulted at that time was the same type of stumbling that Nephi saw would befall many people in the latter days who would “suffer pride” because of “false teachers, and false doctrine” (2 Ne. 28:12). Losing the spiritual safety of the “precepts of God” and being left at the mercy of the “precepts of men” is the common

difficulty (2 Ne. 27:25; 28:14–15). The Book of Mormon makes it clear that “to be learned is good” if we “hearken unto the counsels of God”; otherwise being learned can turn to our detriment (2 Ne. 9:29, 42).

With the translation of the Book of Mormon came a parting of the heavens. The priesthood and its keys were restored to humankind, and the Church was organized once more on the earth. God spoke again through living prophets. Light and truth were brought to bear upon matters that had resisted comprehension by the powers of human reason. Reason is a necessary but insufficient power; it is a fine copilot but an unreliable pilot in eternal matters. The latter-day revelations, in tandem with the clear and simple message of the Book of Mormon prophets, make plain the message associated with Jesus’ statement regarding the “key of knowledge.” Human reason without divine light is a dangerous guide. A search for truth without a search for light is a vain expedition – no matter how popular or convenient it seems.

The key to knowledge is intelligence. Intelligence is light and truth – not truth alone but also the light God gives that makes it possible for us to properly understand and apply truth (D&C 93:36–37). “He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:28). Joseph Smith was explicit on this point: men will be judged by the light they receive, not by the volume of truth that surrounds them. “God judgeth men according to the light he gives them,”⁶ he said. And “he that will not receive the greater light, must have taken away from him all the light which he hath; and if the light which is in you becomes darkness, behold how great is the darkness.”⁷ In such is “fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive” (Matt. 13:14). As Nephi warned, to seek the truth is folly if one does not also seek the light to know what to do with the truth when one obtains it. The error is rejecting divine truth that is plainly manifest and substituting one’s own conjectures – “seeking their own counsel in the dark.” Prophets have taught that this is a curse worldly men have brought upon themselves from the earliest ages (see Moses 5:25; 6:28, 43, 49). Prophets have also made it clear that men of great temporal learning may be spiritual, but it is not their great learning that makes them so. President John Taylor observed

more than a century ago: "One great reason why men have stumbled so frequently in many of their researches after philosophical truth is, that they have sought them with their own wisdom, and gloried in their own intelligence, and have not sought unto God for that wisdom that fills and governs the universe and regulates all things. That is one great difficulty with the philosophers of the world; . . . any new law and principle which he happens to discover he claims to himself instead of giving glory to God."⁸

The Book of Mormon teaches that those who enter the covenant are under command to acknowledge God's hand "at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:8-9; See also D&C 59:21). To create a secularized curriculum that leaves God out of one's worldview or to develop a secularized life-style – one that presumes that the more humankind learns about the temporal, the less need there is for the spiritual – has been a temptation from the days of Cain and Abel. Such secularization has dominated western culture in the twentieth century, and it is repeatedly described as the philosophy of those who live in this day by prophets who saw the cycles of history as portrayed in the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson makes this observation: "It seems fashionable today for historians to 'secularize' our history. . . . All events are explained from a 'humanistic' frame of reference. This removes the need for faith in God or a belief that He is interested in the affairs of men." He explains further that "today, students are subjected in their textbooks and classroom lectures to a subtle propaganda that there is a 'natural' or rational explanation to all causes and events. Such a position removes the need for faith in God, or belief in His interposition in the affairs of men."⁹ Apparently, we face a temptation similar to the temptation of the Jewish teachers of Jesus' day.

Part of the storyline in the Book of Mormon portrays the development of a secularized (horizontal) curriculum in the lives of the priests of wicked King Noah.¹⁰ In brief, Amulon and the others who sat on King Noah's advisory council claimed to teach morality and uphold the laws of Moses, but they did not live those laws themselves (Mosiah 12:28-30). Challenged by Abinadi, the council and the king became irate – all except Alma. The king and his council threatened Alma's life, and he fled from their midst; they then put Abinadi to death. Subsequent attacks on King

Noah's community by Lamanites, who governed the surrounding territory, resulted in King Noah's death and put his counselors in exile. While hiding from their enemies, the corrupt priests kidnapped a number of young Lamanite women. Subsequently, this group fell captive to the king of the Lamanites. The king was persuaded by the Lamanite women, who now had borne children to the priests, to spare the lives of these men who were now the fathers of their children. The Lamanite king agreed to do so on the condition that these learned individuals establish an educational system among his people in the hopes it would improve the circumstances of his own nation.

The implications of these events become more meaningful when we follow Nephi's counsel and "liken all scriptures unto us" (1 Ne. 19:23-24). When perceived in terms of modern educational terminology and practice, Mormon's brief but poignant description of the curricular content reveals the nature of the educational program designed by these dissident priests. He specifically calls attention to the three elements Amulon and his colleagues omitted: They did not make provision to (1) "teach them anything concerning the Lord their God," (2) "neither the law of Moses," (3) "nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi" (Mosiah 24:1-7). They did include fundamentals such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, which are beneficial skills but are insufficient without moral and spiritual application. Their school system was noteworthy for deleting those things which are most vital. The lack of balance is reminiscent of the chastisement Jesus leveled at the scribes and Pharisees who became preoccupied with lesser matters to the neglect of weightier matters: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23). Perhaps this is why Alma, Abinadi's sole convert from King Noah's council, bluntly informed the people he taught that they should "trust no one to be [their] teacher . . . except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments" (Mosiah 23:14).

When one learns to read and write without learning that God exists, that moral laws and principles should govern human conduct, and that Christ has performed a mission in behalf of fallen man, one's education is totally secularized – it is spiritually incomplete and potentially dangerous. Mormon specifically describes the strengths and weaknesses and the ultimate conse-

quences of this type of horizontal literacy: “They taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another. And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people . . . delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren” (Mosiah 24:6-7).

The full story in the Book of Mormon suggests a connection between this educational system and the rise of the order of Nehor, an alternative source of authority to the Holy Order of the Son of God (Alma 13:1, 6-11; 21:4; 24:28-29; Hel. 8:18). It is evident that a social order developed from these secular schools; Mormon identifies it as the order of Nehor. It is also apparent that those who staffed and administered this special society and its unique curriculum were primarily dissidents who left the Nephite communities and went to live among the Lamanites. The professionals who belonged to this order were well educated according to the standards of the school system—much like the lawyers, scribes, and Pharisees whom Jesus confronted. The Book of Mormon descriptions indicate that these individuals apparently studied a number of disciplines and became influential lawyers, priests, and teachers. Mormon describes the teachers and students in this system as those “who loved the vain things of the world” and sought after “riches and honors” (Alma 1:16). He identifies the basic beliefs, policies, and practices of these professionals; their general strategies are also described in several instances that involved Alma and his associates as they interacted with these people.

Amlici, a prominent member of the order of Nehor, is mentioned by name as “a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world” (Alma 2:1). He had both professional reputation and credentials. When Alma and Amulek were confronted by Zeezrom—also a product of this educational order (a lawyer by specialization)—it is apparent that the general society was still conversing in theistic terms, as ours does today. There was a nominal acknowledgment of a God—whatever meaning that term might have had for different individuals. (The Lamanites, for example, spoke of a Great Spirit. And the questions posed by Zeezrom [82 B. C.] were still in the quasi-religious context used by Nehor a decade earlier.) But the growing conflict between the

doctrine of the Holy Order of the Son of God and the philosophical premises of the order of Nehor is evident. There were vital disagreements over the fundamental doctrines of life and salvation. Those different schools of thought had different aims and purposes. They fostered different types of societies. They were headed in opposite directions.

On the one hand there was the community driven by teachings like those of Alma that espoused a responsibility to suffer with, sacrifice for, and serve one another (Mosiah 18). On the other hand, there was the community driven by a secularized philosophy that pursued personal power, pleasure, and possessions. Those who Mormon says condemned the righteous because of their righteousness sought offices at the head of government to “rule . . . according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world, and, moreover, that they might the more easily commit adultery, and steal, and kill, and do according to their own wills” (Hel. 7:5-9, 21). Here we see polar positions, the opposition of which Lehi spoke, what might be called the twin trinities of governance: power, pleasure, and possessions versus sacrifice, suffering, and service. The priorities that arise in the field of tension created by these competing aims is critical. The tension was present when Lucifer tempted Jesus in the wilderness, it was present among the Nephites, and it is present in each of our lives today. Alma, like many others, was warned of the negative consequences that follow when one embraces a secular, selfish perspective.

The significance of the difference between these two views of life is evident in the instructions given to Alma by an angel sent from God when Alma visited the great city of Ammonihah. He was told by the messenger that the ideological trend in the professional circles of the day was negative. Based on the philosophy of their learning, it is evident they were intent on perverting the laws of the land to serve their selfish purposes. Alma was told to return to Ammonihah – a popular center for those of the order of Nehor – after he had already been cast out of the city. The angel told Alma of a project underway among this group that would “destroy the liberty of thy people.” They were designing a system “which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments” which God had given to his people (Alma 8:17).

Amulek, Alma's companion, explained these conditions in his testimony to the people of Ammonihah, but they were not interested (Alma 10:1-32). They, too, had been "hindered" and were prevented from "entering in." They preferred the contemporary lifestyle, philosophy, and evidence presented by the other school of thought; they later reaped the self-destructive consequences of their choices in a manner reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem who rejected Jesus and his message. This narrative is sobering when one considers that in our own day book after book is being written that reflects this same debate: why and how is it possible for people who once believed in God to disbelieve? We are immersed in recent titles like *Culture Wars*; *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*; *Without God, Without Creed*; *Killing the Spirit*; *Impostors in the Temple*; and *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*.¹¹

By the time another decade passed in the Book of Mormon account (74 B.C.), an educated man named Korihor emerged, flaunting distortions of religious doctrines and publicizing a full-blown denial of the supernatural worldview. Korihor used a polished rational approach to knowledge – a thoroughly naturalistic argument – as a basis for denying the existence of God and the validity of religious doctrine as taught by the believers. He followed the age-old pattern by rejecting the "key of knowledge" and substituted in its place his own rhetoric and his own understanding. Then he set about seeking others to follow him and reject their religious heritage. The principles and purposes of life as revealed by God to man, he claimed, were superstitious notions and evidence of "frenzied" and "deranged" minds (Alma 30:6-60). He maintained that whatever cannot be demonstrated and confirmed through the physical senses does not exist.

Alma challenged Korihor's conclusions by pointing out that they were based on the use of an empirical method in areas where that method could not properly apply. In a different setting with a more open and honest audience, Alma explained another approach to gaining knowledge that went beyond Korihor's limited technique, adding balance to the learning process that can protect as well as expand man's efforts to understand and grow. Alma taught that knowledge could also be acquired by exercising faith as well as by reason. He acknowledged both the natural and supernatural paths to learning and used experimentation, reason,

and revelation. His invitation to those who desired to obtain the “key of knowledge” was to “experiment” with an idea and to “exercise” faith as part of that experiment. He favored an inclusionary rather than an exclusionary path to learning; reason had its role, but revelation was also a necessary component (Alma 32:17–43).

Conclusion

The implications of the Savior’s chastisement of the lawyers, priests, and Pharisees runs deep in the lives of every generation, as the Book of Mormon testifies. Rejecting the “key of knowledge” and “hindering” others who are seeking the plan of salvation is a serious transgression. The evidence presented in the Book of Mormon illustrates that to deny that human beings have a soul – a spiritual dimension – is no trifling matter. Nor is it a wise strategy to reject the reality of a Supreme Being in order to become a law unto ourselves so that we will have no one to answer to except ourselves (D&C 1:15–17). We may be unable to escape choosing between the twin trinities of governance – power, pleasure, and possessions versus sacrifice, suffering, and service. But if we embrace the “key of knowledge,” we can certainly enhance the quality of our choices and avoid the consequences of blocking others from choosing the blessings that flow from divine revelation.

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Notes

1. E.g., *Dummelow's One Volume Bible Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 700; Matt. 23:13–36; Mark 12:38–40; Luke 11:37–54. A lawyer was a scribe or a professional teacher of the law. See “Scribe” and “Lawyer” in the Bible Dictionary.

2. See Robert J. Matthews, *“A Plainer Translation”: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible – A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), chapter 2, for a detailed account of how the Prophet’s

knowledge of the scriptures was enhanced by revelation as he worked with these two sacred texts – the Book of Mormon and the Bible – during the early years of the Restoration.

3. E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), vols. 1, 4, 13; see also 1:1, 6, 12; 2:4–6; 12:74–77.

4. The following sources provide an introduction, help identify issues, and illustrate the pervasive nature of the conflict between the vertical and horizontal perspectives: H. Curtis Wright, “The Central Problem of Intellectual History,” *Scholar and Educator* 12, no. 1 (fall 1988): 52–67; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); James L. Barker, *Apostasy from the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1960).

5. See Matt. 16:17 (13–20) wherein Jesus acknowledges Peter’s experience with this power.

6. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 204; see also Acts 17:30; Rom. 2:12; D&C 45:43; 76:72; 88:99.

7. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 94–95.

8. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86): 11:74.

9. Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 319–20.

10. A more complete account would include the establishment of a distant colony (Mosiah 9–22) during the reign of the kings (Mosiah 7) and continuing down to its impact on the period of the judges (Mosiah 29).

11. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Charles J. Sykes, *ProfScam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1988); James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit* (New York: Viking, Penguin Books, 1990); Martin Anderson, *Imposters in the Temple* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

H. Dean Garrett

The New Testament provides a perspective of the priesthood during the ministry of Christ in the Holy Land. The Book of Mormon supplements that perspective with revelation and instruction given to the Nephites. Through studying the priesthood among the Nephites, we better understand the priesthood in the New Testament as it relates to foreordination, the work of John the Baptist, the law of Moses, baptism, the calling of apostles, and the administration of the sacrament as instituted by the Savior. Combining our study of the Book of Mormon with the New Testament enriches our understanding of the divine role and power of the priesthood.

The priesthood is the power of God and the authority to act in His name. Although the word *priesthood* is not found in the four Gospels, sufficient biblical references reveal that the priesthood, in some form or another, was active during the New Testament period. These references are reinforced by a study of the Book of Mormon, which provides insights into the working of the priesthood and the extent of its use. We learn from the Book of Mormon that all who hold the priesthood were foreordained in the pre-earth life. We gain insights regarding the nature of the priesthood under the law of Moses and a better understanding of the mission of John the Baptist, including the function of the priesthood which he held. The Book of Mormon enables us to see more clearly the authority given to the apostles, and how the keys of the priesthood functioned with them. Thus the Book of Mormon clarifies greatly the purpose and the function of the priesthood as it was used in the time of the four Gospels.

Foreordination and Priesthood

The doctrine of foreordination is not discussed in the four Gospels; however, it is referred to elsewhere in the New Testament. For instance, Luke, the writer of Acts, recorded Paul's statement that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Paul taught that "whom he [God] did foreknow, he also did predestinate [meaning foreordain]" (Rom. 8:29). Paul also taught the Ephesians that God chose us "before the foundation of the world" to be his in Christ (Eph. 1:3-4). This same concept was taught by Paul to the Thessalonians (2 Thes. 2:13) and to Timothy (2 Tim. 1:9). Peter also declared this doctrine (1 Peter 1:2, 20). It is evident from this review that the doctrine of foreordination was understood and taught in the early Church.

However, from the Book of Mormon we obtain a clearer understanding of foreordination as it applies to the priesthood. Alma, in his discussion on the priesthood (see Alma 13), takes our minds back to the early days of the children of God. He explains that men were ordained priests after "[God's] holy order, which was after the order of his Son," to teach the nature of the Fall and the Atonement to the people (Alma 13:1). Alma teaches that these prophets, as well as everyone who holds the priesthood, were foreordained and prepared for it from the very beginning. They were "called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such" (Alma 13:3).

From Alma's teachings we learn that those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood (the holy order of God's Son) were foreordained to it in the premortal spirit world. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught a similar truth when he said: "Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council."¹

President Wilford Woodruff added further support by teaching: "So do I believe with regard to the apostles, the high priests, seventies and the elders of Israel bearing the holy priesthood, I believe they were ordained before they came here; and I believe the God of Israel has raised them up, and has watched over them from their youth, and has carried them through all the scenes of life both seen and unseen, and has prepared them as instruments in his hands to take this kingdom and bear it off."² In his vision of the spirit world, President Joseph F. Smith identified some of those individuals as Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and "other choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times . . . among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God" (D&C 138:53, 55).

Note in Alma's statement that the basis of individual foreordination in the premortal spirit world was "on account of their exceeding faith and good works" (Alma 13:3). This verse appears to imply that there existed a gradation of faithfulness and obedience in the premortal spirit world. Abraham saw those spirits who were "noble and great" (Abr. 3:22), suggesting that perhaps there were some who were not as noble and great.

Alma also taught that we had a choice between good and evil in the pre-earth life, for men were "left to choose good or evil" (Alma 13:3). To choose to be good and obey the Father requires faith. Thus a test took place in the spirit world just as there are trials and tests in our mortal lives. Those who kept their first estate in the pre-earth life came to earth, and men who were faithful and obedient in their first estate were called and ordained to hold positions in the priesthood on earth. Furthermore, we learn from Alma that the premortal experience was preparatory, and that there was a "preparatory redemption" based on the future Atonement of Jesus Christ (Alma 13:3; see also D&C 138:56). Just as all the prophets from Adam's time to the time of Christ taught and practiced a gospel based on the future Atonement of Christ, the experience in the spirit world was based on the future Atonement of Christ. A third part of the hosts of heaven chose not to accept the Atonement and were cast out with Satan. All others exercised faith, to one degree or another, in the Atonement that Christ was to make in the meridian of time on this earth. All the doctrines and principles practiced in the premortal world were based on the

reality of that future Atonement. Some who manifested great faith in the Atonement were foreordained to receive the priesthood during mortality. Thus, priesthood ordinations on this earth fulfill the foreordination. Alma was faithful and obedient because of his great faith in the Atonement, and so are all those who receive the Melchizedek Priesthood in this life. As Alma recorded: "And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren" (Alma 13:4).

However, being foreordained to the priesthood in the premortal life does not guarantee that the ordination will take place in this life. Although many are called, "few are chosen" (D&C 121:34). In addition to foreordination, great faith and obedience are required in this life to qualify one to receive the priesthood. Elder Neal A. Maxwell emphasized: "Foreordination is like any other blessing—it is a conditional bestowal subject to our faithfulness. Prophecies foreshadow events without determining the outcome, because of a divine foreseeing of outcomes. So foreordination is a conditional bestowal of a role, a responsibility, or a blessing which, likewise, foresees but does not fix the outcome."³ Even after receiving the priesthood in mortality, men need continued faith and obedience to receive all the blessings of the priesthood and to qualify to retain it in the postearth worlds. In many ways, the impact of the premortal life on this life is similar to the impact of this life on the postmortal life.

Another possible insight gained from Alma's discussion of foreordination to the priesthood is the implied concept of priesthood and church organization in the premortal world (see Alma 13:3-7). Joseph Smith taught that the Melchizedek Priesthood was instituted "prior to 'the foundation of this earth' . . . and is the highest and holiest Priesthood, and is after the order of the Son of God,"⁴ and that Adam "obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed."⁵ Thus a priesthood existed in the premortal world.

Joseph Fielding Smith commented: "In regard to the holding of the priesthood in pre-existence, I will say that there was an organization there just as well as an organization here, and men there held authority. Men chosen to positions of trust in the spirit

world held priesthood.”⁶ Accordingly, the doctrines of the gospel and the priesthood, and the priesthood’s organization, are not new but had their roots in the premortal world of the spirits.

Priesthood of John the Baptist and the Nephites

During the hundreds of years that the Jews functioned without prophets, they changed the ordinances and the doctrines of the gospel. By Nephi’s time the apostate Jews had changed the ordinances of the gospel so dramatically that Nephi refused to teach his own children many things concerning the Jews because “their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abominations” (2 Ne. 25:2).

We learn in the scriptures that worthy men of God ministered in the lesser or the Aaronic Priesthood around the time of Christ. For example, the priest Zacharias officiated in the temple in behalf of the Jewish people. Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, walked in righteousness before the Lord and kept all of his commandments and ordinances (Luke 1:6). By divine intervention a son was born to them, a son who was named John and is known as John the Baptist. He became an Elias, preparing the way before the coming of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His mission was to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, to baptize individuals, and to assist in setting up the kingdom of the Lord (D&C 84:28). John was fulfilling this mission when the Savior came to him to be baptized (see Matthew 3).

John the Baptist had rights to the priesthood through the lineage of his father and was given the authority and power necessary to preach the correct doctrine and perform the ordinances necessary to prepare for the Lord’s coming. He was ordained “by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power” (D&C 84:28). In the context of this verse, “unto this power” refers to more than the priesthood authority held by his father, Zacharias. Apparently the additional authority that John held necessitated a restoration of priesthood power. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained the need for an angel to act in giving this power and authority to John:

The reason Zacharias could not ordain John is because of the fact that John received certain keys of authority which his father Zacharias did not possess. Therefore this special authority had to

be conferred by this heavenly messenger, who was duly authorized and sent to confer it. John's ordination was not merely the bestowal of the Aaronic Priesthood, which his father held, but also the conferring of certain essential powers peculiar to the time among which was the authority to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews and to 'make straight the way of the Lord.' Moreover, it was to prepare the Jews and other Israelites for the coming of the Son of God. This great authority required a special ordination beyond the delegated power that had been given to Zacharias or any other priest who went before him, so the angel of the Lord was sent to John in his childhood to confer it.⁷

John the Baptist's mission was understood by Lehi and his family even though the name of John is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Lehi prophesied concerning a prophet who would come before the Messiah and "prepare the way of the Lord – yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight" (1 Ne. 10:7-8). According to Lehi, this prophet would testify of one among the Jews whom they would not know, who would be mightier than John, "whose shoe's latchet" John was not worthy to unloose (1 Ne. 10:8). Lehi also prophesied that John would baptize in Bethabara, would baptize the Savior, and would later bear testimony of that baptism (1 Ne. 10:9-10).

When Lehi established his family in the promised land and set about to teach them the doctrines of the kingdom, it appears that he did so under the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. He left Jerusalem at a time when there were prophets, such as Jeremiah, who held the Melchizedek Priesthood. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that "all the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood."⁸ Lehi was definitely a prophet, as were many other men from Nephi to Moroni. Therefore, it may be assumed that they held the Melchizedek Priesthood and that the Nephite church functioned under the order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, thus differing from the Jewish organization found in the New Testament during the early ministry of John the Baptist, which functioned under the Aaronic Priesthood. The high priest of the Aaronic Priesthood was always the firstborn son of the direct descendants of Aaron, and the priests were always descendants of Aaron, who were of the tribe of Levi. Consequently, "there was no Aaronic Priesthood among the Nephites prior to the ministry

of the resurrected Lord among them, for none of the tribe of Levi accompanied the Nephite peoples to their promised land.”⁹

The Law of Moses

What John the Baptist taught might be understood by comparing and examining Nephite doctrines and practices before the coming of Christ. Both John the Baptist and the Nephites practiced the law of Moses in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Paul spoke of the law of Moses as being a “schoolmaster” until Christ (Gal. 3:24). Abinadi echoed that same concept when he addressed the priests of Noah: “And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God; therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him. But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:29–31).

Although the Nephites held the Melchizedek Priesthood, they also understood and lived the law of Moses. In fact, one of the reasons Nephi gave for wanting to obtain the plates of Laban was that they contained the law of Moses: “Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law. And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass. And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause – that I might obtain the records according to his commandments” (1 Ne. 4:15–17). As holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the Nephites looked forward to the coming of Christ and understood that the law of Moses was to prepare them for that great event. Nephi proclaimed: “Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Ne. 11:4).

However, a major difference between the Nephites and the Jews was the Nephite understanding of the purpose of the law of

Moses. It was apparent that the Jews felt that the law was an end in itself. Nephi taught the preparatory role of the law of Moses:

And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments. And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away (2 Ne. 25:24-27).

Jacob also understood the role of the Law of Moses: "Behold, they [all the holy prophets who went before] believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God" (Jacob 4:5). This concept of the law of Moses pointing one to Christ was lost among the Jews well before the time of John the Baptist, but it appears that John the Baptist lived the law of Moses in a way similar to the Nephite practices. John kept the law of Moses, but he also believed in Christ, talked of Christ, rejoiced in Christ, and prophesied of Christ. A study of the Nephites' practices and doctrine provides great insights into what John probably believed and taught as he prepared the way for Christ.¹⁰

Use of the Priesthood by the Savior

We see a similar relationship between the Nephites' teachings and practices and what the Savior practiced during his ministry concerning the use of the priesthood. The Savior gave the authority to baptize to both the Jewish and Nephite disciples before they were called to the apostleship (see John 4:1-3 and 3 Ne.

11:22–28). After calling the Twelve apostles in Jerusalem, Christ gave power and a charge to the Twelve that they were to go to the lost sheep of Israel and “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils” (Matt. 10:8). Similarly, according to the Nephite account, the Twelve disciples called in the Americas received authority to preach and baptize (3 Ne. 12:1) and to grant the Holy Ghost (3 Ne. 18:36–37). The Savior placed his hand upon each of the disciples to bestow upon them this authority.

It is important to note that the authority to baptize was not new to the Nephites nor the Jews at the coming of the Savior but had been present from the very beginning whenever the fulness of the gospel was found. For example, Jacob taught that all men “must repent, and be baptized in [Christ’s] name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel” (2 Ne. 9:23). Nephi testified of the necessity of the Savior’s baptism in 2 Nephi 31. Furthermore, this doctrine was not specific to the Nephites. Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that the Jews were familiar with baptism as an eternal law: “John’s procedure was not new to them [the Jews]. Baptism had been performed by them and their forbearers for four thousand years. It was a well known ordinance which of itself caused no stir among them.”¹¹ The Book of Mormon enlightens us that priesthood authority was necessary for the ordinance of baptism to be performed. For instance, when Alma baptized Helam at the waters of Mormon, he declared that he did so with authority from the Almighty God (see Mosiah 18:13), and those who were baptized by the power and authority of God were “added to his church” (Mosiah 18:17–18). When King Limhi and his people were desirous to be baptized “there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant” (Mosiah 21:33). As mentioned above, when Christ came to visit the Nephites, he renewed this authority with Nephi and the twelve disciples.

The New Testament record of the calling of the Twelve (see Matt. 4:17–22) does not define their roles nor the authority they would hold (see Matthew 10). However, the Book of Mormon prophets understood very early the role and authority that these apostles would bear. Six hundred years before the apostles were called in Jerusalem, Nephi saw the Twelve as they followed Christ, and he beheld that their glory “did exceed that of the stars in the firmament” (1 Ne. 1:10). He also saw that after the death of

the Savior, the multitudes would be gathered together to fight against the apostles (see 1 Ne. 11:34–36). Moreover, Nephi prophesied of the apostles' judging the house of Israel (see 1 Ne. 12:9) and writing a book of scripture (see 1 Ne. 13:24).

The calling of the Twelve disciples during the ministry of Christ to the Nephites also gives insights into the function and mission of the Twelve apostles, because their authority and duties were similar to those of the Twelve apostles. According to 3 Ne. 27:27, the Twelve disciples will judge the Nephites. They were granted power to baptize and minister unto the Nephites (see 3 Ne. 12:1–2). The Nephite disciples also assumed their place at the head of the Church after the Savior left for a time (see 3 Ne. 19:1–14), which is similar to the Twelve apostles' role after Christ ascended from Jerusalem.

There is perhaps evidence that Christ also instituted the Aaronic Priesthood and its offices among the Nephites when he visited them. Four hundred years after the visit of Christ, Moroni left instructions on the plates detailing how an elder would ordain priests and teachers (see Moroni 3). Paul refers to the office of teacher in the early New Testament Church (see Eph. 4:11). From both accounts it appears that when the Savior organized the Church on both continents, he instituted the offices of the Aaronic Priesthood.

The use of the priesthood in administering the sacrament is also clarified in the Book of Mormon. In the New Testament, the Savior introduced the sacrament in the upper room just prior to his arrest. Mark's account simply states that the Savior took bread and blessed it and gave it to his disciples with the declaration that "this is my body" (Mark 14:22). The wine was presented similarly with the pronouncement: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (Mark 14:24).¹² The Book of Mormon prophets wrote about the administration of the sacrament in a more illuminating manner. When the Savior introduced the sacrament to the Nephites, he indicated that there would be one "ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church" (3 Ne. 18:5). This emphasized the fact that the sacrament was a priesthood ordinance to be performed only with the authority of the priesthood. The Savior also instructed the Nephites as to the covenant-making and renewing aspect of the sacrament. He

taught that by partaking of the sacrament, they were testifying to the Father “that [they] do always remember me” (3 Ne. 18:7), and “that [they] are willing to do that which I have commanded” (3 Ne. 18:10) with the promise that if they lived up to this covenant, they would always have his spirit with them (see 3 Ne. 18:11). This is re-emphasized in the sacramental prayers recorded in Moroni 4 and 5. We also see the repetitive nature of the sacramental covenants when the Savior administered the emblems again to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 20. After miraculously providing the bread and the wine, the Savior gave the Nephites the same teaching of the symbolism of the emblems that he gave the disciples in Jerusalem. After the sacrament had been passed to the multitude, Christ declared that he had completed the commandments the Father had given him (see 3 Ne. 20:10). From the Book of Mormon we learn that the sacrament is a covenant-renewing process to be repeated over time and is to be administered by the priesthood to those accepting the covenant.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon provides considerable insight into how the priesthood functioned among the Nephites. From this information we can better understand the role of the priesthood among the Jews during the same time period. The Book of Mormon reveals how the Melchizedek Priesthood functioned in the Nephite church during the period between the Old and New Testaments, when the priesthood was not available in its fulness to the people of Judah. This aids us in understanding John the Baptist’s ministry. It also helps us to understand why the Savior taught some of the doctrines, and why he challenged the Jews over the doctrines they taught. Together, the Book of Mormon and the four Gospels provide a much clearer picture of the priesthood, and they enhance our understanding more fully than if we had only one record.

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Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 6:364.
2. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 21:317.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, "A More Determined Discipleship," *Ensign*, February 1979, 71.
4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 167.
5. *Ibid.*, 157.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 3:81. It appears that what we have here we had in the premortal life
7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 5:2.
8. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 181.
9. Bruce R. McConkie, "Aaronic Priesthood," *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 10.
10. For a list of some of the doctrines taught by John the Baptist, see Robert J. Matthews, *A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 47–48.
11. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, The Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 115.
12. See also the Joseph Smith Translation of Mark 14:20–25 for additional clarification of the New Testament text.

The Meaning of the Word GOSPEL

4

Ray L. Huntington

The word GOSPEL is understood by most Christian faiths as the "good news" concerning Jesus. This definition, taken from the Greek word, is technically correct. However, the Book of Mormon teaches that the word GOSPEL encompasses much more. In 3 Nephi 27 Christ defines the gospel using a six-part definition: (1) Christ's coming to mortality, (2) the Atonement, (3) repentance, (4) baptism, (5) the reception of the Holy Ghost, and (6) enduring to the end. By using this definition, we discover that the Gospels truly contain the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The King James Bible prefaces the title pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with the words, "The Gospel According To." Hence, when speaking of the first four books of the New Testament, it is common for many members of the Church to refer to them by their abbreviated title – "the Gospels."¹

The word *gospel* comes from the Old English word *godspel*, which means "god-story."² The English translators of the King James Bible used the word *godspel* as the translation for two Greek words found in the New Testament – *euangélion*, which means "good news," and *euangelízomai*, which means "to proclaim the good news."³ The word *euangelízomai* was used in the Greek language to denote the delivering of wonderful news, such as the announcement of a military victory or tidings of some other joyous occasion.⁴ Thus, in the King James New Testament, the book of Matthew states, "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are

raised up, and the poor have the gospel (or “the proclamation of good news,” from the word *euangelízomai*) preached to them” (Matt. 11:5). Further, the book of Mark records, “And the gospel (or the “good news,” from the word *euangélion*) must first be published among all nations” (Mark 13:10). Within the texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the word gospel appears fourteen times – five times in the text of Matthew, six times in Mark, and three times in Luke. Furthermore, the word gospel is not used in the text of John. Interestingly, despite its use in the titles and texts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (title only), the New Testament does not specifically indicate what the gospel or good news embodies.

The Christian world in general, however, readily accepts the definition of the gospel as the good news about Jesus,⁵ while others define Jesus’ offer of salvation through his death on the cross as the good news. Although both definitions are technically correct, they fail to include several important facets of the good news, which the Lord has revealed to his children through additional scripture. For example, the Doctrine and Covenants informs us that the gospel is the glad tidings that Jesus came into the world and was crucified for our sins, and that through Him all mankind may be saved (see D&C 76:40–42).

The Gospel

While the writings of the New Testament do not specifically define what the good news incorporates, the Book of Mormon provides a precise explanation of what is meant by the word *gospel*. In a six-part definition found in 3 Nephi 27, the Savior carefully explained to the Nephites what the gospel or good news encompasses.⁶ The Savior’s definition of the gospel is specific and deals primarily with his birth, his Atonement, repentance, baptism, the reception of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.

In 3 Nephi the Savior stated, “Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you – that I came into the world to do the will of the Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Ne. 27:13). The first part of the Savior’s definition of the gospel focuses on his entrance into mortality – a merging of the mortal and the divine – in order to carry out the will of his Father. The importance of Jesus’ physical birth into mortality

cannot be overemphasized. Regarding the significance of Jesus' mortal birth, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin has taught, "Only Jesus, because he is the Only Begotten Son, could make the infinite and eternal atonement so we can be at one with our Heavenly Father. When Jesus was born into mortality, his parents were God the Eternal Father (see 1 Ne. 11:21) and Mary, whom Nephi saw in a heavenly vision as 'a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins' (v. 15). He is God's Only Begotten Son, the only one who ever has or ever will be born on earth of such parentage."⁷ Christ inherited his mortal nature from his mother, which Elder McConkie states gave him "the power of mortality, which is the power to die, . . . to separate body and spirit."⁸ Moreover, he received his divine nature from his Father, which Elder McConkie has taught gave Christ "the power of immortality, which is the power to live forever; or, having chosen to die, . . . to rise again in immortality."⁹

Elder McConkie continues to explain in more detail that, "It was because of . . . this intermixture of the divine and the mortal in one person, that our Lord was able to work out the infinite and eternal atonement. . . . He had power to live or to die, as he chose, and having laid down his life, he had power to take it again, and then, in a way incomprehensible to us, to pass on the effects of that resurrection to all men so that all shall rise from the tomb."¹⁰

Without the mortal capacity to lay down his life, Jesus could not have performed the "infinite and eternal atonement."¹¹ No wonder the announcement of Christ's mortal birth by heavenly beings included words of jubilation, such as "glad tidings," "good tidings," and "great joy!" For example, the angel who announced the coming birth of Jesus to King Benjamin introduced his remarks by stating, "I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy" (Mosiah 3:3), and the angel who heralded Jesus' birth to the shepherds declared, "I bring you good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10). Finally, Samuel the Lamanite informs us that the angel's proclamation of Christ's future birth brought glad tidings to his soul (see Hel. 13:6-7).

In conjunction with his physical birth to Mary, Jesus made it clear that he came into the world, not to seek his own will, "but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). Isaiah recorded that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him" (Isa. 53:10). In other words, it was because of the Father's will that Jesus sub-

jected himself to the exquisite pain and anguish of both Gethsemane and Golgotha in order to bring about the Atonement. Therefore, Jesus came into mortality to perform the Atonement. In so doing, Jesus let his will be “swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7).

Part two of the definition of the gospel focuses specifically on the infinite Atonement wrought by Jesus. In 3 Nephi 27:14, the Savior declared, “And 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” (3 Ne. 27:14). Jesus entered mortality in order to “give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Further, the Book of Mormon makes it clear that without the Savior’s infinite Atonement, all mankind “must unavoidably perish” (Mosiah 13:28). Elder Richard G. Scott has stated, “Each of us has made mistakes, large or small, which if unresolved will keep us from the presence of God. For this reason, the atonement of Jesus Christ is the single most significant event that ever has or ever will occur.”¹²

Consequently, all men and women must come to the Savior, since it is only through Christ and his atoning sacrifice that redemption will come. Thus, there are no quick fixes or alternate plans to which a person may turn for salvation. Indeed, salvation is centered in Christ because of his atoning sacrifice. King Benjamin affirmed this important doctrine when he taught, “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” (Mosiah 3:17).

If there was ever a declaration of good news, it could not surpass the glorious announcement that Christ has made it possible for us to return to God’s presence through his atoning sacrifice. Hence, “the more we know of Jesus’ Atonement, the more we will humbly and gladly glorify Him, His atonement, and His character.”¹³

The third and fourth parts of the Savior’s definition of the gospel are closely linked with the reality of the Atonement. These include the marvelous gifts of repentance and baptism. In 3 Nephi

27:16 the Savior declared, "And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world."

As imperfect mortals, we cannot live in complete harmony with all of God's laws and commandments. "All have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) and have found themselves "in a lost and in a fallen state" (1 Ne. 10:6). What a terrible predicament this would be were it not for the blessings of repentance and baptism. Amulek, Alma's faithful missionary companion, taught that God cannot save individuals "in their sins," since "no unclean thing can enter the kingdom of heaven" (Alma 11:37). Thus, the gifts of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins are an important and wonderful part of the good news. In order to impress upon his sons the importance and necessity of repentance, Helaman taught that Christ "hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls" (Hel. 5:11).

Therefore, "full repentance is absolutely essential for the Atonement to work its complete miracle in [our] live[s]." ¹⁴ Through baptism and our continued efforts to repent of our sins and shortcomings, we can experience the joyous blessings of the Atonement. The prophet Alma reminded us that the Savior's "arms of mercy are extended" (Alma 5:33) toward all men and women through the gift of repentance. Jacob, Lehi's son, rejoiced in the good news of repentance and baptism through the Atonement when he proclaimed:

O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, . . . O how great the holiness of our god! . . . And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, . . . or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned" (2 Ne. 9:19-21, 23-24).

Part five of the Savior's definition of the gospel is receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. In 3 Nephi 27:20, the Savior taught that all mankind must repent and be baptized in order that they "may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost." Receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is preceded by faith, repentance, and baptism. Without the constant guidance and companionship of the Holy Ghost, it would be virtually impossible to remain in the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life. Indeed, the Holy Ghost can help each of us "identify and withstand the deception of Satan,"¹⁵ in order to live in greater harmony with the Lord's commandments.

The scriptures attest to the wonderful blessings made available to those who receive the Holy Ghost. The following are just a few of those blessings mentioned in the Book of Mormon: (1) the mysteries of God shall be unfolded by the power of the Holy Ghost (see 1 Ne. 10:19); (2) the Savior manifests himself to believers by the power of the Holy Ghost (see 2 Ne. 26:13); (3) following repentance and baptism comes a remission of sins by the power of the Holy Ghost (see 2 Ne. 31:17); (4) the Holy Ghost bears record of both the Father and the Son (see 2 Ne. 31:18; 3 Ne. 11:32, 36); (5) when we speak or teach by the power of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost carries the message to the hearts of the listeners (see 2 Ne. 33:1); (6) the Holy Ghost bears record of the Messiah (see 1 Ne. 12:18); (7) the Holy Ghost will manifest the word of God to the faithful (see Moro. 8:9); (8) by the power of the Holy Ghost we can know the truth of all things (see Moro. 10:4-5).

The sixth and final part of the gospel is the Savior's charge to endure to the end. In 3 Nephi 27:16-17, the Savior taught, "And if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father."

Enduring to the end is one of the dominant themes found throughout the scriptures. If we enter the straight and narrow path through baptism, and strive to "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, . . . feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end" (2 Ne. 31:20), we shall inherit eternal life. Certainly, the promise and attainment of eternal life through the Savior's atonement and our continued striving to be obedient to

the Lord's commandments constitutes the good news for each of us. What other announcement could be as joyous as this?

Good News

In its broader definition, we often use the term *gospel* to refer to all aspects of the Lord's true church, such as tithing, the word of wisdom, missionary work, priesthood ordinances, and temple marriage. However, the Savior's six-part definition of the gospel encompasses the first principles and ordinances and is much more exclusive. For example, President Harold B. Lee made reference to the more restrictive use of the word *gospel* when he said, "So often I hear my brethren saying something that I wish we would not say quite that way – that the gospel is a way of life. It is not a way of life – it is *the* way to eternal life."¹⁶ Indeed, according to 3 Nephi 27, the way to eternal life consists of believing that Jesus is the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh, whose infinite Atonement has made possible repentance, baptism, reception of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end. Truly, this is the gospel and the good news of our salvation.

Based on the six-part description of the good news in 3 Nephi 27, do the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John contain the gospel as defined by the Savior? A careful examination of these New Testament texts reveals that each of these four books contains the six points of the Savior's gospel. Therefore, it is appropriate and doctrinally correct to refer to them as the *Gospels* of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In support of this, the following list contains examples of each of the six definitions of the gospel as found in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

1. The Coming of the Savior

Matt. 1:18–25

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise . . ."

Luke 2:6–21

"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger . . ."

John 1:14 (JST)

“And the same word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Matt. 26:39

“Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

Mark 14:36

“And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

Luke 22:42

“Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

John 6:38

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

2. Jesus Was Lifted Up Upon the Cross – the Atonement

The following references contain the account of Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross at Golgotha.

Matt. 26:36–42; 27:26–50

Mark 14:32–42; 15:15–37

Luke 22:39–46; 23:33–46

John 18:1; 19:16–30

3. Jesus Commanded All Mankind to Repent

Matt. 4:17

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Mark 6:7–12

“And they went out, and preached that men should repent.”

Luke 5:32

"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

John 5:14

"Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

4. Jesus Commanded All Men to be Baptized

Matt. 3:11

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."

Mark 16:16

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

Luke 3:16

"John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

John 3:5

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

5. Receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost

Matt. 28:19

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Mark 13:11

"But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premedi-

tate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost."

Luke 12:12

"For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."

John 14:26

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

6. Endure to the End

Matt. 24:13

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

Mark 13:13

"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

Luke 8:13

"They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away."¹⁷

John 17:4

"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."¹⁸

In addition to the New Testament, the Book of Mormon provides us with important information regarding the Savior's specific meaning of the word gospel. Furthermore, the doctrines taught in 3 Nephi 27 allow us to see that the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John truly contain all of the elements of the "good news," and thereby qualify to be referred to as "the Gospels."

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Notes

1. In the Joseph Smith Translation manuscripts, the Gospels of Matthew and John are titled "Testimonies."
2. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., "Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 559.
3. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1985), 267.
4. Ibid.
5. American Bible Society, *Holy Bible – Contemporary English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1995), 1136.
6. 2 Nephi 31:2–32:6 and 3 Nephi 11:31–41 also define what the gospel encompasses. However, these passages of scriptures do not use the word "gospel" but rather use the word "doctrine." It would appear that the Savior is using these words interchangeably, since the definition of the gospel in 3 Nephi 27 and these two references are quite similar.
7. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Our Lord and Savior," *Ensign*, November 1993, 6.
8. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 471.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Wirthlin, "Our Lord and Savior," 6.
12. Richard G. Scott, "Finding Forgiveness," *Ensign*, May 1995, 75.
13. Neal A. Maxwell, "Enduring Well," *Ensign*, April 1997, 10.
14. Scott, "Finding Forgiveness," 75.
15. H. David Burton, "Bond With Righteous Heroes," *Ensign*, May 1993, 47.

16. Harold B. Lee, "The Gospel, a Solid Wall of Truth," *Improvement Era*, June 1959, 452.

17. This verse is taken from Luke's account of the parable of the sower (see Luke 8:4-15). In verse 13, those whose testimonies are not sufficiently rooted in the good soil of faith and works will not endure to the end. Hence, a strong testimony is vital if we are going to strive to keep all of God's commandments and endure to the end of our mortal probation.

18. Russell M. Nelson used this passage of scripture in his April 1997 conference address to illustrate the importance of enduring to the end. Through His willingness to finish all of the work His Father gave him to do, Jesus becomes our great example of one who endured to the end.

A Scriptural Comparison

5

Concerning Anger:

3 Nephi 12:22 and Matthew 5:22

Daniel K Judd

In its scriptural teachings about anger, the Restoration clarifies the conflict about the morality of anger. Christ declares in the Sermon on the Mount that "whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (KJV Matt. 5:22). In the Book of Mormon, however, Christ teaches that "whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment" (3 Ne. 12:22). "Without a cause" appears neither in the Book of Mormon sermon nor in most biblical translations, and Joseph Smith eliminated the phrase in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Anger is generally selfish, and the Book of Mormon attributes contention to the devil. Some misunderstand Christ's emotion as he cleansed the temple, but Christ's motive is not the anger of the natural man. The Book of Mormon teaches us how the Savior can help us eliminate selfish anger from our lives, and it shows us that even "with a cause," our anger is most often destructive.

The Book of Mormon restores precious doctrines that have been lost from the Bible and clarifies others that have been distorted. An angel from the Lord taught the prophet Nephi that many parts of the gospel of Christ had been taken away as a means of deceiving the people and causing them to stumble. He said, "For behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. And all this have

they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men. Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book [the Bible], which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men . . . an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Ne. 13:26–27, 29).

It was then revealed to Nephi that the major means of restoration of these plain and precious things would be through "other books" of scripture:

And after it [the Bible] had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved (1 Ne. 13:39–40).

While the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ" (Title Page), its teachings also provide additional doctrinal clarity. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has stated, "In addition to the . . . confirmation of the Christocentricity of the universe, one sees numerous examples of elaboration and clarification of other basic and important truths in the Book of Mormon and the other books of scripture. . . . These precious and plain truths are not mere footnotes. Instead, they are bolstering and guiding principles that can do so much to keep us mortals walking steadily on the strait and narrow path and from stumbling needlessly."¹

The intent of this chapter is to discuss one of the clarifications provided by the Book of Mormon concerning a part of the human experience with which we are all familiar – the emotion of anger. Anger is one of humankind's most destructive and most common emotional disturbances, as well as one of the central charac-

teristics of most diagnosed emotional disorders.² The emotion of anger is at the center of many of the problems faced in marriages, families, and communities throughout the world. In the United States, for instance, since 1960 violent crime has increased 560 percent and divorce rates have quadrupled,³ which only mirrors what is happening in most countries and communities throughout the world. The expression of anger and the experience of contention, which were once condemned by society, are now becoming accepted and even encouraged by many as acceptable styles of expression and interaction. Elder Russell M. Nelson has stated:

My concern is that contention is becoming accepted as a way of life. From what we see and hear in the media, the classroom, and the workplace, all are now infected to some degree with contention. How easy it is, yet how wrong it is, to allow habits of contention to pervade matters of spiritual significance, because contention is forbidden by divine decree: "The Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that *they should not contend one with another*" (2 Ne. 26:32; emphasis added).⁴

The Morality of an Emotion

The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that we will be judged according to the desires of our hearts and by our thoughts, words, and deeds (see Mosiah 4:30; Alma 12:14; 41:3). But the question as to whether there is a morality (right and wrong) to our specific emotions, as well as our thoughts and actions, has long been an area of controversy.

One of the most significant differences between the text of the Sermon on the Mount found in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible and the similar account in the Book of Mormon concerns the Savior's teachings about anger. Note the textual differences in the following comparison:

Matt. 5:21-22 (emphasis added)

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

But I say unto you, *That whosoever is angry with his brother WITHOUT A CAUSE shall be in danger of the judgment:* and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of hell fire.

3 Ne. 12:21-22 (emphasis added)

Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, and it is also written before you, that thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment of God;

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

From this comparison one can see that the major difference between the King James Version of the Bible and the Book of Mormon is that the latter does not contain the phrase "without a cause." The implication of this difference is significant, as the biblical translation appears to provide justification for our anger, and the Book of Mormon does not.

It is interesting to note that while the King James Version contains the phrase "without a cause," most biblical translations do not. One biblical scholar has written that while there is not a "unanimous consensus" among the early manuscripts, many of the early Christian theologians such as Jerome, Tertullian, and Origen mention that the phrase "without a cause" was not found in the oldest manuscripts familiar to them.⁵ Under inspiration, the Prophet Joseph Smith deleted the phrase "without a cause" in the Joseph Smith Translation:

Joseph Smith Translation (JST)

But I say unto you that *whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of his judgment;* and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, or Rabcha, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Note the following translations of Matt. 5:22:

Revised Standard Version (RSV)⁶

But I say to you that every one *who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement*; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)⁷

But I say to you that *everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court*; and whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire.

New International Version (NIV)⁸

But I tell you that *anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment*. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Revised English Bible (REB)⁹

But what I tell you is this: *Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to justice*. Whoever calls his brother "good for nothing" deserves the sentence of the court; whoever calls him "fool" deserves hell-fire.

New American Bible (NAB)¹⁰

But I say to you, *whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment*, and whoever says to his brother, "Raca," will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, "You fool," will be liable to fiery Gehenna.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)¹¹

But I say to you that *if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment*; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," You will be liable to the hell of fire.

Of these differing Bible translations, only the King James Version contains wording that justifies anger. Even the *Textus Receptus*, the Greek manuscript on which the KJV is based, does not have the Greek words for “without a cause.”¹² The KJV translators chose to follow a reading that is apparently a late scribal addition, not found in the earliest manuscripts or the writings of the earliest Christians.

In addition to the Savior’s counsel against anger in 3 Nephi 12:22, he also identifies the source of contention: “For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Ne. 11:29–30).

The Anger of the Lord

While it is clear that the Book of Mormon contains strong teachings against anger, how are we to understand the anger of moral men such as Moroni (Alma 59:13) or even the anger of God himself (Hel. 13:11)? One is led to ask, “Is there such an experience as righteous anger?” One might also question, “What of the incidences in the scriptures where the Savior was angry – aren’t we to follow his example?”

An analysis of the Bible shows that the Old Testament contains 375 instances in which God is described as being angry.¹³ The New Testament has one reference where the word anger is used in connection with Jesus Christ.

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they [the Pharisees] watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with *anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts*, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him (Mark 3:1–6; emphasis added).¹⁴

From the above text, it is apparent that the Savior's anger was a selfless concern not only for the man with the withered hand but also for the hard-heartedness of the Pharisees. One of the things we can learn from this account is that the Savior's anger is fundamentally different than the anger of the natural man. Most everything the natural man does is calculated in some way to "serve the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25), while the Book of Mormon teaches us that everything the Savior does is designed for the welfare and happiness of others: "He doeth not *anything* save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation" (2 Ne. 26:24; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon also teaches us that the Savior's anger is a representation of his love for us. Justice is as much a quality of God's love as mercy:

Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, *doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people*; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One — yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

And thus we see that *except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him* (Hel. 12:2-3; emphasis added).

God wants nothing more than for us to remember him and keep his commandments, for in doing so we are in a covenant relationship with him and will have the blessings of heaven and earth. God's anger is much like his jealousy: both are expressions of his love as he seeks to assist us in becoming like him. God's jealousy of our worship of other gods isn't narcissistic in any way, but it is a plea that we remain free from the damning consequences of worshiping them. He declares: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under

the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: *for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:4-6; emphasis added).

Anger is indeed a characteristic of God's perfection, but it is critical we come to a *correct* understanding of his selfless nature.

The Cleansing of the Temple

Just as some of the people described in the Book of Mormon sought "to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written" in the scriptures (see Jacob 2:23), others today use various events in the Savior's life as justification for their anger. It has been my experience, both professionally and ecclesiastically, that the most common justification Christians (including Latter-day Saints) give for their own selfish anger is the Savior's cleansing of the temple.

Most Bible scholars agree that the Savior cleansed the temple twice. The first cleansing is mentioned only by John; the second cleansing is described by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. As one reads the following accounts of the cleansings, one should notice that the words *anger* or *wrath* do not appear. Could it be possible that the Savior did what needed to be done without being angry as many typically suppose? Note the following temple cleansing accounts from the Gospels:

Matthew's Account

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:12-13). Matthew then describes what the Savior did immediately following the cleansing of the temple: "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; *and he healed them*" (Matt. 21:14; emphasis added). It is highly unlikely that the Savior could have healed the afflicted had he just been through an angry, violent experience.

Brigham Young taught, “Do not be angry. . . . Do not get so angry you cannot pray: do not allow yourselves to become so angry that you cannot feed an enemy – even your worst enemy, if an opportunity should present itself.”¹⁵

Mark's Account

“And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:15–17). Sometimes we entangle ourselves in a false dichotomy; we believe that our choice is between angrily doing what needs to be done and passively allowing to take place what shouldn't happen. We fail to recognize that we can confront, chastize, and reprove without being contentious.

Luke's Account

Luke's account is the most concise of the four. He simply writes, “And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Luke 19:45–46).

John's Account

“And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise” (John 2:13–16).

Although the Savior may very well have used physical force to cleanse the temple, it wasn't the selfish tirade that many of us

have experienced. Compare the Savior's actions in the temple with those of an individual described by President David O. McKay: "I learned through a letter of a condition which I think, so far as members of the Church are concerned, is absolutely inexcusable. A husband and wife quarreling—the husband demeaning himself to such an extent as to curse his wife, and *in a mad fit of anger overturning a table* spread with dishes—a creature in the form of a man harboring the nature of an animal! A man in such a mental state that the anger itself does him more harm than the condition which aroused his anger, and in reality, brothers and sisters, he suffers more from the vexation than he does from the acts that aroused that vexation."¹⁶ Such is not the personality of the Savior, nor should it be of any of those who follow him.

In the Lectures on Faith we learn that we must come to a "*correct* idea of [God's] character, perfections, and attributes" if we are to be able to truly exercise faith in him.¹⁷ Selfish anger is not and never has been an attribute of God. Perhaps the reason for emphasizing the word "*correct*" in the above statement is that the adversary is the master of counterfeit and will do his best work to deceive us. Justice can easily become distorted into selfish vengeance, just as mercy can become distorted into indulgence. Elder Boyd K. Packer warned, "A virtue when pressed to the extreme may turn into a vice."¹⁸

Justice Misinterpreted

The following story illustrates how God's justice is often interpreted as anger or vengeance. Several years ago a member of a ward of which I was the bishop asked if I would interview him for a temple recommend. I was pleased when he told me that he thought it was time he got his life in order by returning to the temple after an absence of several years. He also shared with me the fact that his niece was being married in the temple in three weeks and he would like to be there with her and her family. Among the questions I asked him was a query about tithing. He responded by explaining that because of some financial problems he had not been paying tithing but had managed to give a few dollars to a local charity. As we finished the interview I told him that I wouldn't be able to give him his recommend. I then explained that while I couldn't give him his recommend, I would be

happy to do all that I could to assist him to become worthy to receive one at a later time. My heart ached for him, but I felt that issuing him a temple recommend would only contribute to his problems. He became enraged and told me that I was a terrible bishop and that I was mean and insensitive and I was too young and immature to make such judgments.

After dealing with his numerous protestations, I suggested he return home, get his financial records together, and invite his wife to come with him to visit with me about their finances. I also volunteered the services of my able counselor who was adept with numbers and budgets. After calming down, he accepted my invitation and went home to do as I had suggested. Later on that night the four of us were able to make good progress toward preparing both him and his wife to re-enter the temple. What a joyous occasion it was several months later, when I was able to issue temple recommends to him and his wife. He missed his niece's wedding, but his faith in Christ was greatly increased.

This individual had initially interpreted my judgment of him as mean, insensitive, and punishing. On the other hand, if I had succumbed to his demands and issued him a recommend inappropriately, he would have interpreted my indulgence as mercy. It is so easy to misunderstand the doctrine of Christ and accept Satan's counterfeit in its place.

Notice the similarities between my story and the counsel the prophet Lehi gives to Laman, Lemuel, and others concerning how Nephi had treated them: "And ye have murmured because he hath been plain unto you. Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him; and *that which ye call anger was the truth*, according to that which is in God, which he could not restrain, manifesting boldly concerning your iniquities" (2 Ne. 1:26; emphasis added). This verse illustrates that it is possible for us to misinterpret the selfless *justice* of God as selfish anger and vengeance. This may be one of the reasons some people perceive Jehovah to be a merciless and vengeful ruler and not a kind and loving God, for "the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center" (1 Ne. 16:2). Not once had I raised my voice, nor had I even felt any feelings of animosity toward my ward member. But he was initially convinced I was an unjust judge.

Another segment of scripture that is often taken out of context to serve as justification for anger is found in the Doctrine and Covenants wherein the Lord describes that at times leadership requires “reproving betimes with sharpness” (D&C 121:43). Note the verses which precede this portion of scripture: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by *persuasion*, by *long-suffering*, by *gentleness* and *meekness*, and by *love unfeigned*; by *kindness*, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; emphasis added). We are instructed to reprove another only “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov’d, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43). The only context and grounding from which appropriate reproof can come is the genuine love and gentleness that these verses describe.¹⁹

In the New Testament, we read the Savior’s invitation to “come follow me” (Luke 18:22). If following the Savior means that we follow his example, shouldn’t we also seek to develop God-like anger? The answer to this question is both yes and no. *Yes*, because there is such a quality as selfless, righteous anger; and *no*, because anger can turn selfless to selfish in an instant and is incredibly easy to distort.

Philosophies of the World

The majority of psychotherapeutic philosophies concerning anger can be divided into two distinct camps – those who believe that anger is inevitable but in need of rational control and those who believe that anger should be experienced and expressed (vented). It is interesting to note that these two competing philosophies have a scriptural connection. When the apostle Paul was first in the city of Athens, awaiting the arrival of his missionary companions, he encountered two different groups of philosophers – the stoics and the epicureans (see Acts 17:18). The stoics believed that happiness came through the control of passion and indifference to external events; the epicureans believed that happiness was to be found in the experience of passion and sensation. The gospel of Jesus Christ has some things in common with these two philosophies – “Bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled

with love" (Alma 38:12) and "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25) – but there are ever-present counterfeits of self-righteousness and lustful expression or consumption (see Morm. 9:28). C. Terry Warner, professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University, illustrates the first of these counterfeit philosophies in a story about a man he calls Phillip:

I [Phillip] was riding home on the train from work this one night, and I read a magazine article about being a loving parent. It inspired me. I made a resolution. After an orderly dinner, with no squabbling and no stern looks from me, I would gather our two little children around the fireplace and read them a story. I had gone too many years preoccupied with my work without tucking them in and kissing them and telling them I loved them. . . .

When I finally got home, I gathered up the paper on our doorstep and went through the door determined to be cheerful and kind. But dinner wasn't on the table. Marsha wasn't even getting it ready. . . . I should have known better than to expect she'd have things under control.

For a moment I felt I ought to help her out; I felt she must be in need of me. But then I just got bitter, thinking how many times she had done this to me. And here, on the night when I wanted things to be right, she did it again.

I felt like letting out a bellow. How could I ever be the kind of father I'm supposed to be when we were behind schedule and disorderly besides? It wasn't fair, and, most important, it wasn't right, either.

But I didn't let out a bellow. I never do. I did what I always do. I hung up my coat (so there would be at least one thing put away in the house) and went to work cleaning up the mess. First, I put the children in the tub—an extra touch that Marsha obviously hadn't thought about—and got them properly cleaned. Then I did the dishes and put away clothes and vacuumed everywhere.

Marsha said, "Please, stop, will you?" I'm sure she felt humiliated to have someone else go to work when she had obviously been wasting time. People who don't act responsibly are going to feel humiliated by people who do. That's a problem they create for themselves.

But I didn't say anything back. Maybe I should have given her "what for?" or not helped at all. But I wasn't going to stoop to her level. The dinner needed fixing and the house had to get cleaned up, and so I just kept working away. And I tried not to have an angry

expression or anything, even though it was hard. I'd like to think I'm above pouting and tantrums and that sort of thing.

It took till ten o'clock. When we went to bed, Marsha was still upset. After all these years I know her well enough to say no matter how hard I had worked, she still wouldn't have appreciated it. I didn't know she was going to be like that when I married her.²⁰

For the most part, Phillip was "doing" all the right things; he was in complete "control" of his anger. But as is evident from reading the story, Phillip's problems were not with his outward behavior. The Savior described individuals whose attitudes were similar to Phillip's: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed *appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness*. Even so ye also *outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*" (Matt. 23:27-28; emphasis added). Phillip had deceived himself into believing that his actions were virtuous examples of righteousness, but nothing could be farther from the truth. It has been my experience that such self-righteous "control" of anger is one of the great deceptions of our day. Self-righteous Latter-day Saints are no better than the Pharisees of old; in fact, they have the greater condemnation because they know better (see D&C 82:3).

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the best way to deal with anger is to express or vent it. These individuals, whether they know it or not, are coming from a perspective initiated by the adversary and made famous by Sigmund Freud.²¹ The words of popular author and lecturer John Bradshaw are representative of this perspective: "The reason we have so much abuse in our families is that we do not allow anger in our families. If rage can come out, it can spend itself and be done with. . . . It's not the hatred expressed that's the problem; it's the hatred swallowed."²²

Bradshaw and others coming from this Freudian perspective would have "Phillip," the fellow in Professor Warner's story, give up the stoic notion of "control" and adopt a more epicurean perspective and express, or vent, his anger. Individuals who vent their anger in this way often express the idea that they are being honest about their feelings. The trouble with this justification is that it is possible to be honest about a lie. In other words, our "honesty" may be real but not genuine, like a counterfeit coin.

John the Revelator taught us that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). Our deception may be that we have come to believe our own lie, that our anger is justified and that it is actually caused by someone or something outside of our control. The Book of Mormon counters this philosophy by teaching that men and women are moral agents and are free “to act for themselves and *not to be acted upon*” by their environment (2 Ne. 2:26; emphasis added).

If neither the control nor expression of anger is the answer, what are we to do? Again, the Book of Mormon provides some meaningful answers. In 4 Nephi we read, “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, *because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people*” (4 Ne. 1:15; emphasis added). From this verse we learn that it is the love of God that supplants selfish anger. But two questions quickly follow: What is “perfect love,” and how do we obtain it? The prophet Mormon, using the word *charity*, described love: “And charity *suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*” (Moro. 7:45; emphasis added). From this description it appears that the love of God is more than an act or an emotion; it is a state of being. We can do loving things and even feel loving feelings and yet not be a loving person. However, we cannot be a loving person without doing loving things. Perhaps this is what Mormon was describing when he wrote, “For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water” (Moro. 7:11).

Phillip, in the example related earlier, was doing a lot of “loving” things like cleaning up the house and bathing the kids, but his heart wasn’t right, and his wife sensed it. He was a bitter fountain bringing forth bitter water. While there were things Phillip could have done that evening to correct what was happening, what he really needed was a power much greater than his own. C. S. Lewis wrote:

When I come to my evening prayers and try to reckon up the sins of the day, nine times out of ten the most obvious one is some sin against charity; I have sulked or snapped or sneered or snubbed or

stormed. And the excuse that immediately springs to my mind is that the provocation was so sudden and unexpected: I was caught off my guard, I had not time to collect myself. . . . Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is. Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth. If there are rats in the cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man: it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am. . . . Now that cellar is out of reach of my conscious will. I can to some extent control my acts: I have no direct control over my temperament. And if (as I said before) what we are matters even more than what we do—if, indeed, what we do matters chiefly as evidence of what we are—then it follows that the change which I most need to undergo is a change that my own direct, voluntary efforts cannot bring about. And this applies to my good actions too. How many of them were done for the right motive? . . . But I cannot, by direct moral effort, give myself new motives. After the first few steps in the Christian life we realise that everything which really needs to be done in our souls can be done only by God.²³

Even though there is much that we can do (and not do) to eliminate selfish anger from our lives, if we don't look to the Savior and his Atonement, we will fail. On the other hand, if we will have faith in Christ, repent of our sins, keep our covenants, and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost, we will have a change of heart and be filled with the gift of love. Mormon wrote: "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" (Moro. 8:26). Mormon also invites us to "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ" (Moro. 7:48).

The Lord asks us to repent of unrighteous feelings as well as ungodly thoughts and actions, and by doing so we are "born of God" (Mosiah 27:28). The prophet Nephi taught us of his experiences with anger in the following verses:

And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I *angry because of mine enemy*? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. *Do not anger again because of mine enemies. . . . O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? . . . O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh* (2 Ne. 4:27–29, 31, 34; emphasis added).

Nephi came to understand that he could no longer use the sins of others as justification for his own. He also recognized that he couldn't be free of his own sins by trusting in himself nor in the theories of man, but that he must seek to have his anger replaced by love through the Atonement of Christ. Recently, a friend shared his story with me:

I had grown up in the Church, served a successful mission, and believed in the gospel. But somehow I never felt the happiness I had always sought. I married but soon found my unhappiness to go in cycles as I would make the effort to pray and be obedient but then would quit seeking divine help. Too many times I tried to rely on my own strength and knowledge to work out life's problems. I found myself during these times becoming intolerant of the mistakes of others and angry when my agenda was not met. At times I would attempt to control my family by silence and withholding affection. Eventually this pattern of living and contention led to physical confrontations with my wife. Sometimes I would become angry without warning to insignificant provocations. I would then feel awful and go through the repentance process and resolve to do better. But why did it not stick? Gradually the same patterns came back. My wife and I went to many counselors, seeking help with our marriage relationship. We were taught to communicate more effectively, we found out why we behaved in certain ways because of our gender, and we learned skills to cope with stress and outside influences. "Change your behavior," I was told time after time. But nothing seemed to change; our relationship became worse and ended in divorce. The pain was immense. I didn't understand what to do, or how to change.

Lucky for me, a loving bishop took me under his wing. I truly felt his love for me, which softened my heart to his counsel. He pointed me to the Atonement and helped me understand that only Jesus Christ could bring about the change I searched for. I believed

his words and began searching and learning about the Atonement. Most of my adult life I had believed in Christ, but I never believed that his promises were for me. As I began understanding what the Atonement was all about, my heart changed. I no longer had desires to choose evil but to choose good in my life. I found myself pouring out my soul to my God in prayer many times throughout the day, asking that my faith in Christ would increase and that my heart would be filled with love. I found that the more I sought after him, the more I could feel his love and assurance.

Day by day my faith increases. I have hope in those wonderful promises that I see all through the scriptures. I have found great peace because of the love I feel for my Father in Heaven. The best part of all of this is the desires I have to love those around me. There is peace in my home. My relationship with my children has reached new levels, and I look for opportunities to serve and help others.

Summary

Angry feelings are most often evidence of our inability to keep the greatest of all the commandments – to love God and to love our fellowman (see Matt. 22:36–40). Angry feelings also place us in jeopardy of the judgment of man as well as of God. While the Bible seemingly provides justification for angry feelings, the Book of Mormon does not. The Book of Mormon teaches us that selfish feelings of anger and acts of contention are tools of the adversary.

Selfless anger is an attribute of God’s personality and is an expression of his love. But selfish anger is a characteristic of the natural man and an expression of his selfishness. The Book of Mormon teaches us the only way we can appropriately address our anger is through the Atonement of Christ. King Benjamin taught: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

How very blessed we are to have the Book of Mormon to clarify and support the Bible in “the confounding of false doc-

trines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace" (2 Ne. 3:12).

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Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1983), 40.
2. Burton C. Kelly, "Let All . . . Anger . . . Be Put Away from You: The Case against Anger" (paper presented at the meeting of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, in Salt Lake City, Utah, 28 September 1978).
3. William J. Bennett, "Quantifying America's Decline," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 March 1993.
4. Russell M. Nelson, "The Canker of Contention," *Ensign*, May 1989, 68.
5. John W. Welch, *The Sermon at The Temple and the Sermon on The Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990), 162.
6. *Revised Standard Version*.
7. *New American Standard Bible*, Lockman Foundation, 1960.
8. *New International Version*, International Bible Society, 1973.
9. *Revised English Version*, Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1989.
10. *The New American Bible*, the Catholic Biblical Association of America, New York, 1970.
11. *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1989.
12. Richard D. Draper, Brigham Young University, a personal communication.

13. A computer search of the Old Testament revealed that the Hebrew word for anger ('*ap*) appears 455 times, out of which 375 times it refers to the anger of the Lord. There are 42 instances of the Lord's anger in the Book of Mormon (150 total instances of a form of the word "anger").
14. The Greek word for anger in this text is *orgē*, which indicates a more settled or abiding condition of mind. The other most common Greek word for anger is *thumós*, which indicates a more agitated condition or outburst. *Thumós* is generally translated in English as "wrath."
15. Brigham Young, sermon given September 13, 1857. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 5:228.
16. David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1958, 5; emphasis added.
17. *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 3.4.
18. Boyd K. Packer, "Covenants," *Ensign*, November 1990, 85.
19. Note the definition of the word sharpness: "keen edge or fine point." Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828). Instead of an angry outburst, perhaps sharpness could mean to be specific concerning the communication of our differences.
20. C. Terry Warner, "Bonds of Anguish, Bonds of Love," unpublished manuscript, 1992, 3:1–2.
21. See Moses 5:18–38; and Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 38–42, 128–60.
22. John Bradshaw, "Our Families, Ourselves," *Lear's Magazine*, November–December 1988, 75–76.
23. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 164–65.

Hell, Second Death, Lake of Fire and Brimstone, and Outer Darkness

6

Dennis L. Largey

The Bible teaches that there is a devil and a hell, but the place of hell in the plan of salvation is taught best by the Book of Mormon. Hell is a state of suffering, both temporary and permanent. Continuous suffering, however, is reserved only for sons of perdition – those who are still unclean after the final judgment. The Book of Mormon clarifies that the “lake of fire and brimstone” is a metaphor for the suffering of the wicked. It also teaches that the Atonement ransoms humankind from physical death through the resurrection and from spiritual death, or hell, through repentance.

As a young boy, I attended a two-week Christian camp. When the lights were out and we were on the verge of sleep, our camp counselor took advantage of the moment and endeavored to imprint his teachings upon the minds of his captive audience. One memorable night, he instructed us about the “pains of hell.” He asked us to imagine being stabbed and having that initial intense pain of the insertion of the knife last for twenty years. At the end of the twenty years, the knife would be withdrawn and again stabbed into us, with the resulting excruciating pain lasting another twenty years; this process would then be repeated for all eternity. That night not one boy was interested in going to hell!

Christians have debated for centuries the nature of the “hell fire” of which Jesus spoke (Matt. 5:22), and the “lake which

burneth with fire and brimstone” of which the apostle John wrote (Rev. 21:8). Whether Christians have believed hell to be literal or figurative, the New Testament metaphor of an unquenchable “lake of fire” has conjured up for believers in the Bible harsh images of souls consigned to never-ending punishment as recompense for their evil deeds done while on earth.

What is the Book of Mormon’s contribution to our understanding of the New Testament’s teachings concerning hell, or that “lake of fire” John calls the “second death” (Rev. 20:14), or the “outer darkness” (Matt. 22:13) that awaits the wicked? Who will partake of it, and what is the nature of the eternal torment? This analysis will first briefly review what we know from the teachings of the Restoration about hell, second death, the lake of fire and brimstone, and outer darkness. Following this introduction will be a discussion of the usage of these terms—first in the New Testament, then in the Book of Mormon.

Introduction

Latter-day Saints understand hell to be a literal place and/or state—either the temporary hell in the spirit world where the unjust suffer in a state of torment until they are resurrected to a telestial glory (D&C 76:81–85, 98–112), or the permanent hell where the wicked (the sons of perdition) continue to suffer eternally after the resurrection (D&C 76:37, 45–48).¹ The “pains of hell” can also be experienced in mortality (Jacob 3:11). These pains are similar to the state of suffering experienced by the ungodly who after mortality are assigned to hell.

The terms “spiritual death” or “second death,” “lake of fire and brimstone,” and “outer darkness” are all synonymous with hell, and all are descriptive of both the temporary and the permanent hell. Hell is outer darkness; it is the lake of fire; and it is the second death. Those consigned to hell or outer darkness are partakers of the second death, and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone. For most, outer darkness, the lake of fire, and the second death have an end, but for the sons of perdition these states continue eternally. Often in the scriptures it is difficult to discern which hell—temporary or permanent—is being spoken of, since many references to hell in the scriptures are used in a nonspecific manner to simply designate a place or state of suffering for the

wicked. It is, therefore, important to examine carefully the context of each reference.

Hell

The word *hell* is mentioned twenty-three times in the New Testament: fifteen times in the Gospels, twice in the book of Acts, once each in James and 2 Peter, and four times in the book of Revelation. As used in the New Testament, *hell* is an English word which is translated from two Greek words: *hádēs* (used ten times) and *géenna* (twelve times). In each New Testament passage that speaks of hell (the word *hádēs* is neutral – neither a place of punishment nor reward but the place of departed spirits) the context associates it with suffering and punishment.²

Jesus warned that those who mocked their brothers by saying “Thou fool” were in danger of “hell fire” (Matt. 5:22), as were those who failed to “cast” away their sins (JS-M 5:34; cf. Matt. 5:30). Jesus proclaimed to Peter that the “gates of hell” would not prevail against the rock upon which He would build the Church (Matt. 16:18). The city of Capernaum was upbraided for its lack of faith in view of the miracles Jesus performed there. Jesus declared that this exalted city would be “brought down to hell” (Matt. 11:23). He stated that converts made by the Pharisees became “twofold more the child of hell” than their teachers (Matt. 23:15). He called the Pharisees and scribes “vipers” and questioned, “How can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matt. 23:33). Jesus’ disciples were told not to fear those who could kill the body but to “fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the tormented rich man “in hell . . . lift[ed] up his eyes” and saw Abraham and Lazarus across an impassable gulf (Luke 16:23).

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter spoke of the promise David had received that his soul would not be left in hell (Acts 2:27). In Peter’s second general epistle to the Church, he taught concerning the angels who had sinned, saying that God “cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness” (2 Pet. 2:4). The apostle James taught that “the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell” (James 3:6). John the Revelator heard Christ proclaim that he possessed the “keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18).

He also saw a pale horse with a rider whose name was "Death, and Hell followed with him" (Rev. 6:8). Finally, John saw that death and hell delivered up the dead to be judged according to their works, and "death and hell were cast into [a] lake of fire" (Rev. 20:13-14).

The New Testament testifies that there is an actual place identified as hell into which people can be cast, as in the case of the wicked, and from which they can lift up their eyes, as in the case of the rich man, and from which they can be delivered, as in the case of King David. Consistently, hell is associated with fire.

Brigham Young University Professor Larry E. Dahl reported:

The word *hell* appears sixty-two times in the text of the Book of Mormon. Thirty-three times it stands alone, without modifiers or explanation of what it means, as in "And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell" (Alma 30:60). Twenty-nine times the word *hell* is used with descriptive modifiers, for example, "depths of hell" (1 Ne. 12:16), "hell which hath no end" (1 Ne. 14:3-4), "awful hell" (1 Ne. 15:29, 35; Alma 19:29; 54:7), "sleep of hell" (2 Ne. 1:13), "gates of hell" (2 Ne. 4:32; 3 Ne. 11:39-40; 18:13), "pains of hell" (Jacob 3:11-12; Alma 14:6; 26:13; 36:13), "chains of hell" (Alma 5:7, 9-10; 12:11; 13:30; 26:14), "child of hell" (Alma 11:23; 54:11), "powers of hell" (Alma 48:17), "everlasting hell" (Hel. 6:28), "hell fire" (3 Ne. 12:22; Morm. 8:17), and "endless hell" (Moro. 8:13).³

The phrases "depths of hell," "awful hell," "sleep of hell," "pains of hell," "chains of hell," "everlasting hell," and "endless hell" are all unique to the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon provides another testament of the reality of a designated place called hell, where the wicked are consigned. Additionally it provides helpful commentary on New Testament passages concerning hell. For example, John saw the judgment in vision and wrote that "death and hell delivered up the dead . . . and they were judged every man according to their works" (Rev. 20:13). John's announcement of "death and hell" releasing their dead for judgment is augmented by the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, who taught the same doctrine but provided significantly more detail. Jacob identified "death and hell" as temporal and spiritual death. Because of the resurrection, the body and spirit of the wicked are restored—the body from the

grave and the spirit from hell to be judged. The wicked, or in this particular context, the sons of perdition who are “filthy still” after judgment and resurrection, are assigned to “everlasting” punishment (see 2 Ne. 9:10–12, 15–16).

In harmony with this doctrinal truth that death and hell will deliver up the spirits and bodies of their captives, King David received the promise that his soul would not be left in hell (see Ps. 16:8–11) – meaning to be left with those who would partake of that permanent hell reserved only for those who, as Jacob stated, are “filthy still.”

The Book of Mormon teaches that only through the Atonement of Christ can one escape the “damnation of hell.” Jacob testified that without the “infinite atonement” all mankind would be forever subject to the “awful monster, death and hell,” and thus would become like the devil and his angels (2 Ne. 9:7–10, 19, 26). The Book of Mormon also teaches that by coming unto Christ, one can escape the “pains of hell” experienced in this life. For example, Alma the Younger was delivered from the intensity of his hellish pain when he cried to the Lord for mercy. “Yea,” Alma wrote, “I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell” (Alma 36:13). In this state of torment Alma remembered his father’s teachings about Jesus Christ and his redemptive mission. He cried: “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.” This desperate cry for forgiveness through Christ brought deliverance from the “pains of hell” Alma had experienced because of his sins (Alma 36:16–20).

In Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus contrasted the afterlife state of the lowly Lazarus with that of the self-absorbed rich man. Death brought a reversal of their conditions wherein the rich man in hell became a beggar, longing for a drop of water from the finger of Lazarus, who was now in heaven, or “Abraham’s bosom.” In the parable Abraham explained the impossibility of receiving his request, because “between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence” (Luke 16:19–26).

Nephi’s commentary to his brothers concerning his father’s dream of the tree of life adds interesting insight into the possible

meaning of the “great gulf” Jesus referred to: “And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God. And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked. And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end” (1 Ne. 15:28–30). Nephi’s words can thus be applied to Jesus’ parable: the reason the rich man could not cross the great gulf to Abraham’s bosom, or the reason the wicked could not join the Saints of God at the tree of life, is because the justice of God does not permit it. Each person must reap the harvest of the seeds sown in this life. The righteousness of some (Abraham or Lazarus) cannot erase the consequences of another’s sins (the rich man). The sinner must deal with the self-created gulf on his own, with the help of the Savior and his Atonement.

Additional doctrinal truth concerning the “great gulf” can be found in the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 138:18–37). Through his Atonement, Resurrection, and ministry in the spirit world, Christ provided a bridge by which repentant souls could cross the gulf from hell to spiritual freedom.

The Second Death

The New Testament contains four references to the second death, all located in the Revelation of John. To the Church in Smyrna the Apostle John wrote: “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:11). Concerning the first resurrection John observed: “Blessed and holy is he that hath 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” (Rev. 20:6). John did not define the second death other than to make it synonymous with the lake of fire and brimstone that awaits the wicked. He wrote: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8; cf. Rev. 20:14). While John

could be referring to the sons of perdition in this passage, the specific sins he identified are characteristic of those who will suffer in hell but, after experiencing “their part” in the lake of fire, will be released from their torment and be resurrected to a celestial glory (see D&C 76:103–12).

The term second death refers to spiritual death or separation from God. The Book of Mormon contains six references to the second death: one reference by Jacob (Jacob 3:11), three by Alma (Alma 12:16, 32; 13:30), and two by Samuel the Lamanite (Hel. 14:18–19). John’s references to the second death testify of its existence but do not offer any explanatory information that instructs those readers who do not already understand the doctrine. In contrast, Book of Mormon references to the second death are embedded in sermons that teach it in context with other essential elements of the plan of salvation.

For example, Samuel the Lamanite taught:

For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord. Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord. Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness. Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death (Hel. 14:15–19).

Thus, the second death is taught in conjunction with the “first death,” which came as a consequence of the Fall of Adam and Eve, and also with the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which redeems all of humankind from the first death through resurrection and the second death through repentance. The second death is a second separation from God, not because of Adam’s transgression (the

first death) but because of one's own failure to repent of personal sin. Samuel also confirms the relationship John spoke of between the second death and the wicked being cast into fire, but he adds this explanatory clause: "For they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness."

Alma the Younger contributed even more insight on the second death when he gave the wicked people of Ammonihah a detailed description of the fate of those who harden their hearts against the word of God:

Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned. . . . And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; 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. Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever; 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. 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 (Alma 12:13, 16-18).

Here, like John and Samuel, Alma equated the second death with the lake of fire and brimstone. In addition, Alma defined the second death as dying "as to things pertaining unto righteousness." These individuals are "chained down to an everlasting destruction" and are subject to the will of Satan. Later in the same discourse Alma blended the doctrines of the Fall, agency, and the second death together as an admonition to keep the commandments of God (see Alma 12:31-37). Again, the doctrine of the second death is woven together with other essential parts of the plan of salvation, offering the reader the "big picture" concerning God's judgments.

Lake of Fire and Brimstone

In the Bible, the phrases "lake of fire" and "lake of fire and brimstone," describing the fate of the wicked, are unique to the

book of Revelation. There are three references that connect the judgment with a “lake of fire and brimstone,” and two references to a “lake of fire.” However, the use of the word “fire” in connection with judgment and the torment of the wicked is widespread throughout the Gospels. For example: “everlasting fire” (Matt. 18:8), “hell fire” (Matt. 5:22), “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12), “the tares are gathered and burned in the fire” (Matt. 13:40), “cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:42), “the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:45), “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48), and “cast into the fire” (Luke 3:9).

The apostle John saw the final judgment and wrote of the destiny of the wicked: “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. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire [i.e., overcome or defeated by Christ’s Atonement]. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:13–15).

John identified specific sins that would lead to the lake of fire and brimstone: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8; see also 19:20).

Some Christians have believed the lake of fire John spoke of to be a literal lake. St. Augustine wrote: “Hell, which also is called a lake of fire and brimstone, will be material fire, and will torment the bodies of the damned, whether men or devils—the solid bodies of the one, aerial bodies of the others; or if only men have bodies as well as souls, yet the evil spirits, though without bodies, shall be so connected with the bodily fires as to receive pain without imparting life. One fire certainly shall be the lot of both.”⁴

In the Book of Mormon the phrase “lake of fire and brimstone” is used as a metaphor for the suffering that awaits the wicked. There are ten references to the “lake of fire and brimstone” in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon also makes reference to “everlasting fire” (2 Ne. 9:16), “unquenchable fire” (Mosiah 2:38), and “hell fire” (3 Ne. 12:22).

The Book of Mormon presents several significant insights concerning the “lake of fire and brimstone” of which John spoke. Jacob taught that the lake of fire is not a literal fire but a figurative representation of torment: “And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment *is as* a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end” (2 Ne. 9:16; emphasis added).

Note the Book of Mormon’s addition of the words *is as*. Clearly fire is used as a metaphor for suffering — not a literal fire but a state of misery. King Benjamin and Alma also use the word *as* to preface their reference to a lake of fire and brimstone (see Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17). King Benjamin defined the cause of this great torment: “Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever. And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment” (Mosiah 2:38–39).

King Benjamin also taught that the fiery suffering was a state of misery one encounters when viewing one’s sinfulness: “They shall be judged, every man according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil. And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls. Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy could have claim on them no more forever. And *their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone*, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever” (Mosiah 3:24–27; emphasis added).

Outer Darkness

There are three references to “outer darkness” in the New Testament, all contained in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus “marvelled” at the faith of a centurion he met in Capernaum and proclaimed that many would “come from the east and west, and [would] sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom [i.e., covenant breakers] shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11-12). Jesus also referred to outer darkness in two parables he gave during the last week of his life. In the parable of the wedding of the king’s son, the king discovered that a guest was not properly attired in the required wedding garment, i.e., righteousness. After inspecting the intruder, the king instructed his servants, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13). In the parable of the talents, the returning lord instructed that the wicked and slothful servant who hid his talent in the earth be cast “into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30). In each of the New Testament references to outer darkness, Christ declared the punishment that awaits faithless and wicked people.

The Book of Mormon contains one reference to outer darkness. It occurs in a doctrinal discussion Alma conducted with his son Corianton. The prophet Alma described the disposition of those in outer darkness: “And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil – for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house – and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil” (Alma 40:13; cf. 34:34-35; note Alma’s repetitive use of the word “state” in Alma 40:11-12; see also D&C 101:90-91; 133:70-73).

In this context, outer darkness is the spirit prison, or that part of the spirit world that the wicked inhabit prior to their resurrection.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon text confirms the truth of New Testament teachings on hell, second death, lake of fire and brimstone, and outer darkness. It also adds insight that, when blended with other essential doctrines, offers a more complete understanding of the plan of salvation. The Book of Mormon discusses with great clarity the ultimate punishment reserved exclusively for the sons of perdition, or those who are “filthy still” (2 Ne. 9:16) after the final judgment. The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrinal truth that hell will end for the majority of those who suffer in the spirit prison prior to being resurrected and entering the telestial kingdom; however, this truth is clearly taught in the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 76:36–38, 106).

The Book of Mormon provides another testament concerning the existence of hell, and explains how one can escape the “chains of hell” in this life, and an everlasting hell in the next life, through application of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It even warns its readers to beware of the devil’s temptation to disbelieve the doctrine of a personal devil and that there is an actual place and/or state called hell. In revealing Satan’s tactics, Nephi wrote: “And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none — and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance. Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment” (2 Ne. 28:22–23).

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Notes

1. See also Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 758.

2. For a discussion of the New Testament words that translate *hell*, see *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), s.v. "hell."
3. Larry E. Dahl, "The Concept of Hell," in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 42–43.
4. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), 781.

The Second Coming of Jesus

7

W. Jeffrey Marsh

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is clarified by the Book of Mormon. It is a great testament of Jesus' return. It contains prophecies about the last days, and it presents a history that in many ways is similar to our own. Its writers saw our time and wrote for our needs as they preserved the record of a people who experienced the coming of Christ. The Book of Mormon makes clear that with an understanding of the Second Coming and a knowledge of how to prepare for it, we can look forward to the event with anticipation and hope.

The Book of Mormon makes a profound contribution to our understanding of gospel doctrine. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted, "Almost all of the doctrines of the gospel are taught in the Book of Mormon with much greater clarity and perfection than those same doctrines are revealed in the Bible. Anyone who will place in parallel columns the teachings of these two great books on such subjects as the atonement, plan of salvation, gathering of Israel, baptism, gifts of the Spirit, miracles, revelation, faith, charity, (or any of a hundred other subjects), will find conclusive proof of the superiority of Book of Mormon teachings."¹

This is certainly true regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth in the latter days. The Book of Mormon clarifies the doctrine of the Second Coming in at least four ways: first, it contains specific prophecies about the last days preceding the Second Coming; second, recorded history in the Nephite record is a type of our day – our modern history echoes Book of Mormon history; third, the prophet-writers of the Book of Mormon saw our day in vision and spoke about modern events; and fourth, the

Book of Mormon contains a record of a people who experienced a prophesied coming of the risen Christ. Their experience is in many ways a shadow of things to come.

Thus, the Book of Mormon not only stands next to the Gospels as “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” but it stands also as a testament of his Second Coming.

With so much valuable information about the Second Coming and instructions about how to prepare for that great event, the Book of Mormon truly is a priceless possession in the hands of Latter-day Saints. It is “one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. . . . [It was] prepared by the hand of the Lord over a period of more than a thousand years, then hidden up by Him so that it would be preserved in its purity for our generation.”²

Prophecies of the Last Days

From the opening pages to Moroni’s closing testimony, the Book of Mormon plainly describes events of the latter days. The following are only a few of the many signs of the Second Coming depicted in this sacred record:

The Restoration of the Gospel

In 1 Nephi 14, Nephi is shown a vision of the growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the opposition God’s restored kingdom would face in the latter days. He is shown the restoration of the gospel to the earth (14:7, 10). He sees that in proportion to the growth of the Church, wickedness would spread across all nations (14:11), and that as a result, the members of the Church, though few in number, would be “upon all the face of the earth” (14:12). Nephi also saw that the wicked would come against the Saints (14:13), but that the power of God would descend upon the “covenant people of the Lord,” and they would be “armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (14:14). The wrath of God would then be poured out on the wicked, and nothing would prevent the Father from fulfilling his covenants “which he hath made to his people who are the house of Israel” (14:15–17). The restoration prophesied by Nephi has

already taken place. It is real, and its work is growing to fulfill its destiny.

The Ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith

The Book of Mormon contains a prophecy recorded by Joseph who was sold into Egypt. He foresaw that one of his descendants would be a “choice seer” (2 Ne. 3:6). This seer would be “esteemed highly,” because through him the Father would “do a work . . . of great worth” that would restore a “knowledge of the covenants” God made with the ancient prophets (3:7). This seer would be “like unto Moses” (3:9). He would gather Israel and bring forth another record, which would “grow together” with the Bible to establish peace and bear witness of Jesus Christ (3:11–12). Like Joseph sold into Egypt, this choice seer’s name would be Joseph, as would his father’s (3:15).

The Savior also prophesied about Joseph Smith, telling the Nephites about the “great and marvelous work” the latter-day prophet would do, and how he would suffer persecution but have power to bring forth the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 21:9–11).

Isaiah also foresaw the Prophet Joseph’s role in translating the Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 27:9, 15–20). Both Isaiah and Moroni described the calling of the three witnesses who, with Joseph Smith, would be privileged to see and bear witness of the angel Moroni and the Book of Mormon plates (see 2 Ne. 27:12–13; Ether 5:1–4).

Joseph Smith’s life, mission, and even his name were known long before he was born. Imagine how humbling it must have been for him to be reading these prophecies as he translated the Book of Mormon.

The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

2 Nephi 27 describes the events of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. It clarifies Isaiah 29, showing its fulfillment in the latter days. Isaiah saw that an apostasy from truth would cover the earth (2 Ne. 27:5), and that the Book of Mormon would contain the words of a fallen nation that would help end the long night of darkness (27:6, 29–30). He saw that a portion of the record would be sealed (27:7–8), that Joseph Smith would receive the record

(27:9), and that Martin Harris would deliver a copy of some of the words from the book to the learned professor Charles Anthon, who, when hearing that part of it was sealed, would say, "I cannot read a sealed book" (27:15–18; JS–H 1:63–65). Isaiah also understood that Joseph Smith would not be "learned" but would be given power from God to translate the record. The translation would be a miraculous event, part of the Lord's "marvelous work and a wonder" (2 Ne. 27:26). The speed with which the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the record was a miracle. The quantity of his work is impressive, but so also is the quality. It is obvious that the Book of Mormon came through, not from, Joseph Smith. The Savior, after the Book of Mormon was published, said that Joseph Smith "has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true" (D&C 17:6).

Isaiah also foresaw the blessings that would result from the Book of Mormon coming forth—"the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish" (2 Ne. 27:26), those ignorant of the truth would find it (27:29), righteousness would increase on the earth (27:30), the wicked would be reproved (27:31–32), the children of Israel would grow and prosper (27:33), the Savior would be honored again on the earth (27:34), those who "erred in spirit shall come to understanding," and our Father's children would again be able to "learn doctrine" – true doctrine (27:35).

The Restoration of Judah

Beginning in 2 Nephi, Nephi prophesies of the Jewish captivity in Babylon, the return of the Jews to the land of Israel, their rejection of the Christ during his earthly ministry, and the subsequent scattering of the Jews among all nations (2 Ne. 6:8–11; 10:3–6; 25:14–15). He then sees the latter-day restoration of the Jewish people to the Holy Land. The Book of Mormon prophesies that they will not be gathered to the "lands of their inheritance" until they "come to a knowledge of their Redeemer" (6:11), until "they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God" (9:2), until "they shall believe in me, that I am Christ" (10:7), and "worship the Father in [my] name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah" (25:16).

Over five hundred years after Nephi's prophecy, the Savior added that Judah would be gathered together "in mine own due time" (3 Ne. 20:29). "When the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them; and they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name. . . . Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance" (20:30-31, 33). This prophesied gathering to the land of Israel is yet to come. Until then, the Savior warned, "Ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn" (29:8). Truly there are some wonderful blessings awaiting all of God's children in these latter days.

The Promised Land

The Americas are a consecrated land that has been placed under an everlasting decree. That decree is recorded in the Book of Mormon: "Wherefore he that doth possess [this land] shall serve God or shall be swept off" (Ether 2:9-10). This promised land can only remain "free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations" on the condition of service to God (2:12). If the inhabitants of the promised land ever become "fully ripened in iniquity," they will be "swept off" (2 Ne. 28:16). The Book of Mormon solemnly tells of two previous nations that were swept off the face of the American continent in fulfillment of God's promise.

In addition to teaching about the promised land in general terms, Book of Mormon prophets were also shown specific historical events and the rise of modern nations in the land of promise (see 1 Ne. 13:1-19; 2 Ne. 1:6-11).

False Philosophies, False Prophets, and False Christs

Book of Mormon prophets saw that none would be able to stop their record from coming forth because it would be done by the power of God (see Morm. 8:25-26). They describe in detail many of the false ideas, foolish philosophies, and spiritual degeneracy that would abound in our day when their record would

appear (Morm. 8:26–41). They wrote the Book of Mormon to help confound false doctrines and stop contention (2 Ne. 3:12). The Book of Mormon “fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. . . . God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.”³

Besides identifying apostate doctrines, the Book of Mormon also depicts the character and nature of false prophets and false Christs (false ways to salvation). One of the prophecies of the last days is “false prophets [who] if possible . . . shall deceive the very elect” (JS-M 1:22). The types of apostates and dissidents in the Book of Mormon are similar to the those we have today. The Book of Mormon “exposes the enemies of Christ.”⁴ For example, Sherem was a member of the Church who denied Christ and taught that salvation could be found in the law of Moses, which he contended “is the right way” (Jacob 7:7; see 7:1–27). Nehor introduced priestcraft⁵ into the Church, teaching that “all mankind” would “be saved,” so there was no need to fear or repent (see Alma 1). Korihor ridiculed belief in Christ and his Atonement as a “foolish tradition” coming from the effects of a “frenzied mind” (Alma 30:13–14, 16). Korihor’s false doctrine was composed of most of the false philosophies we are challenged by today, including (but not limited to): contradicting faith with logic and common sense (he said no one could “know of anything which is to come”), 30:13, 28; ridicule of sacred things, 30:14; empiricism (If I can’t see it, I won’t believe it), 30:15; ridicule of those who are righteous, 30:16; humanism (all ethics are relative because there are no eternal standards), 30:17; rejection of the doctrines of life after death and accountability for deeds done in the flesh, 30:18; and complete denial of the signs that testify there is a God and Creator greater than ourselves, 30:43–46.

In the Book of Mormon we also find valuable lessons for dealing with persecution from apostates and anger from dissidents. We are taught not to become anti-anti-Mormon (see 1 Ne. 8:26–27, 33–34; Alma 1:21; 4 Ne. 1:34; Moro. 7:3–5). We also learn that often those who persecute the Saints are those who were once members of the Church (see Hel. 4:4). Like Amulon, Amlici, Sherem, and their modern counterparts, people who leave the

Church often cannot leave it alone: “After a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened” (Alma 24:30; see Mosiah 2:36–37; 16:5; 4 Ne. 1:38). We learn that charity, patience, and effective teaching that touches hearts enable people to change (see Hel. 5:17; 6:36–37).

As the world becomes more like it was in the days of Noah (JS–M 1:41), there will be an increased need to do good and resist evil. Reading the Book of Mormon, President Benson promised, can reveal false teachings and empower us to discern between Christ and anti-Christ (see Moro. 7:13–17): “It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path.”⁶

Missionary Work in the Latter-day Church

From the Book of Mormon we learn much about how to do missionary work (see, for example, how the sons of Mosiah—particularly Ammon—taught the gospel and won the hearts of the Lamanites in Alma 17–18). The prophet Zenos’s allegory alludes to the missionary work to be done preceding the Second Coming (Jacob 5:61, 71–72). His prophetic writings are now coming to pass as the gospel moves across the globe in preparation for the Lord’s return.

The Savior declared that “this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations” (JS–M 1:31). This is part of the covenant God made with Abraham, and Nephi foresaw that the Abrahamic covenant would “be fulfilled in the latter days.” As the Saints share the gospel, they bless “all the kindreds of the earth” just as Abraham was promised (1 Ne. 15:18; Abr. 2:11).

The Savior also said that his “elect [shall] be gathered from the four quarters of the earth” (JS–M 1:27). The Book of Mormon

is the instrument God prepared to gather out the righteous from all nations (Moses 7:62). It is the standard we are to use in proclaiming the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (3 Ne. 21:2-7).

At the time of his appearance in ancient America, the Savior prophesied that the Gentiles living in the latter days who will not believe in the Book of Mormon “shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant” (3 Ne. 21:11). Once it came off the press, nothing could stop the Book of Mormon from fulfilling God’s promise to gather the elect from all nations.

The Building of New Jerusalem

The Savior described how latter-day Israel will build a city “which shall be called the New Jerusalem” (3 Ne. 21:23). When it is built, “the power of heaven [shall] come down among them; and,” the Savior declared, “I also will be in the midst” (21:25). The Father will commence his work among “the tribes which have been lost” (21:26-27). They shall be gathered in from “all nations” and eventually be led “home to the land of their inheritance” (21:28-29).

Secret Combinations

“From the Book of Mormon we see the evils of secret combinations portrayed in graphic and chilling reality”⁷ (see Ether 8:11-18; Hel. 2:2-13). Moroni testified that he had been commanded to write about the destructive nature of secret combinations so “that evil may be done away.” And “that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually” (Ether 8:26).

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Lord never works in secret combinations (Ether 8:19) and that these evil combinations caused the destruction of the Nephite and Jaredite civilizations (8:21). Moroni warned that any nation that upholds “such secret combinations . . . until they shall spread over the nation, behold, [that nation] shall be destroyed” (8:22). Moroni’s heartfelt plea to us is that we will “suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you” and that “when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation”

(8:23–24). He solemnly declared that secret combinations are “built up by the devil,” and they seek to “overthrow the freedom of all” (8:25).

Wars and Rumors of War

One of the revealed signs of the Second Coming is that there would be numerous conflicts across the earth: “Behold, I speak these things unto you for the elect’s sake; and you also shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all I have told you must come to pass; but the end is not yet. Behold I speak for mine elect’s sake; for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (JS–M 1:23, 29).

Truly one of the most heart-rending signs of our time is war. Elder Marion G. Romney declared, “Latter-day Saints know that this earth will never again, during its telestial existence, be free from civil disturbance and war.”⁸ General Omar O. Bradley said, “We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. . . . Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”⁹

The Book of Mormon authors knew we would be living in just such a day. At one point in the narrative, Mormon suddenly stops writing about missionary work and states: “Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except that they preached the word, and the truth, according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation; and they preached after the holy order of God by which they were called. And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites” (Alma 43:2–3).

Given that the Latter-day Saints would be actively engaged in missionary work, why would a prophet-editor turn to an account of their wars? President Benson answered, “From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war.”¹⁰

Alma chapters 43–62 offer unique and helpful perspectives to questions such as these: How do we deal with serious political situations and war while trying to build up a Zion of peace and love? When should a nation go to war? What rights and freedoms are worth defending? Should a nation disarm during a time of peace? What kind of leaders should be chosen during times of

conflict? How can we be Christians and not lose the Spirit while defending our countries? What can we do to merit God's help in times of armed conflict?

Latter-day Saints must understand that there is no such thing as geographical safety. It matters more how we live than where. Just as God destroyed wicked people in the past, so will he destroy the wicked in the latter days. For that reason the Lord has called prophets to warn us, just as he did in the past. Those in the Book of Mormon who listened to the words of the prophets and kept the commandments were spared (see Alma 49:30; 50:20–22; 3 Ne. 9:12–13). The Book of Mormon is like a watchman on the tower, teaching us how to separate ourselves from spiritual Babylon so the Spirit can guide, protect, and shield us.

The Sign of the Son of Man

Referring to the last great sign to be seen by all in the heavens before the Second Coming, the Savior taught: "The powers of heaven shall be shaken, then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory (JS-M 1:36). In latter-day revelation the Savior reaffirmed that "all people shall see [the great sign in heaven] together" (D&C 88:93).

Although all people will see this sign the Prophet Joseph Smith said that when it is given, the world "will say it is a planet, a comet, etc. But the Son of man will come as the sign of the coming of the Son of Man, which will be as the light of the morning cometh out of the east."¹¹

At the coming of him who is called the "bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16), the earth will be flooded with light. Not coincidentally, the Book of Mormon describes a similar event that occurred at the birth of Christ. The night before he came to earth, darkness was banished as a sign of his appearing: "For behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came. . . . And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear" (3 Ne. 1:15, 17; see Hel. 14:3–4).

"As with other signs," one author wrote, "spiritually discerning people will recognize the great sign's true meaning and pre-

pare themselves to worship the Son of God"¹² (see D&C 45:39–40, 44).

The Cleansing of the Earth

At the Second Coming, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and this planet will be “cleansed from all sin” (JST Luke 17:39–40). When the Lord appears, his celestial glory will destroy the wicked (2 Thes. 2:8; D&C 5:19), and he will see to it that “his vineyard [is] no more corrupt” (Jacob 5:75). The earth will continue to exist, but the wicked will be destroyed from off of it (JS–M 1:31). The Book of Mormon speaks plainly of this event: “Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; . . . all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned. . . . Wherefore, he will preserve the righteous by his power, even if it so be that the fulness of his wrath must come, and the righteous be preserved, even unto the destruction of their enemies by fire. Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire” (1 Ne. 22:15, 17).

The Second Coming ushers in a great millennial day of peace that will last for a thousand years. The Book of Mormon shows what happened among the Nephites and Lamanites as a result of the Savior’s appearance to them: they experienced a mini-millennium that lasted about two hundred years. The socio-political changes were astounding: “The people were all converted unto the Lord . . . and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. . . . There was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Ne. 1:2, 15–17).

The Book of Mormon as a Type of Our Day

Truly the Book of Mormon is a great help for those who wish to study the signs of the Second Coming. But, as President Benson observed, the Book of Mormon does even more: "The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior's visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's Second Coming."¹³ Thus, the Book of Mormon is a type of our day — it both foretells and foreshadows modern events. In fact, the events recorded in the Book of Mormon so closely resemble those of our day that they provide for us "a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming."¹⁴

It would be wise, however, to add a note of caution. It is easy to tell by observation that there are parallels between the period before Christ's coming in America and our own time. But the Book of Mormon never tells us that the events leading to Christ's appearance to the Nephites and Lamanites will be repeated in the last days. President Benson's cautious and well-chosen phrase "many parallels" does not mean that *everything* will have its latter-day counterpart. We should be cautious about taking the parallels beyond what is stated. For example, it seems that the Nephite Church fell into apostasy as the rest of the society fell into chaos. We cannot say from this that the same will happen in the last days. In fact, modern revelation seems to say that the Church will be stronger than ever and prepared to meet Christ when he returns.

Still, there is much we can learn by careful observation. So much attention is given to a very small portion of the Book of Mormon's history. Although the book describes events from the time of the Tower of Babel (perhaps about 2200 B.C.) until about A.D. 421 (when the Nephite nation was destroyed), the major emphasis in the book is the 164 years preceding the Savior's appearance. So although the book covers over twenty-six hundred years of history, 6 percent of the time period covered gets 56 percent of the book's pages.¹⁵ President Benson summarized it this way: "A major portion of the book centers on the few decades just prior to Christ's coming to America. By careful study of that time period, we can determine why some were destroyed in the terrible judgments that preceded His coming and what brought others to

stand at the temple in the land of Bountiful and thrust their hands into the wounds of His hands and feet.”¹⁶

What happened in the Book of Mormon decades before, then during and after the Savior’s appearance? A brief summary can help us appreciate how events in our day really do resemble the decades prior to Christ’s visit as described in the Book of Mormon.

Beginning in the Book of Alma, we read about the rapid growth of the Church (Alma 1:26–33; 4:4–5). We see how iniquity hindered the progress of the Church (4:6–10) and how preaching the word of God “in pure testimony” pulled down pride and contention from the people (4:18–20 and 31:5). We are shown how missionaries effectively preached the gospel, even when sent to hostile nations (Alma 22–26). We are taught about how internal strife and political corruption in a nation can cause a government to be nearly overthrown (Alma 60–61; Hel. 6:37–40). We see prophets declaring the signs of the Savior’s imminent appearance (Hel. 14). Within a short time the signs were all fulfilled (3 Nephi 1), and then the Savior appeared (3 Nephi 11). After Jesus’ appearance, the Nephites and Lamanites experienced an era of peace for over two hundred years (4 Nephi). Are these not types and patterns of our day, the Second Coming, and the Millennium?

Another example of the Book of Mormon’s relevance to our time is its power to illustrate how quickly pride can lead even righteous people into forbidden paths. “More than anywhere else, we see in the Book of Mormon the dangers of materialism and setting our hearts on the things of the world.”¹⁷ As the time approached for both the Savior’s birth and his later appearance, wickedness began to increase: “And it came to pass that the people began to wax strong in wickedness and abominations; and they did not believe that there should be any more signs or wonders given; and Satan did go about, leading away the hearts of the people, tempting them and causing them that they should do great wickedness in the land” (3 Ne. 2:3). “Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this – Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world. And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity” (6:15–16).

Throughout the Book of Mormon, pride was always engendered by the riches of the earth (see Alma 4:8–10). Both Alma and Helaman warned about inequality and other effects of prosperity. In their day, members of the Church began to “set their hearts upon riches,” which resulted in contention, envyings, strife, malice, persecution of others, and even murder for more gain (Alma 4:8–9; Hel. 6:17).

Their warnings have been repeated by prophets in our day. Elder Boyd K. Packer noticed in the Book of Mormon that in periods of rapid Church growth, prosperity, acceptance by the world, and the appearance of dissenters, “the church began to fail in its progress” (Alma 4:10) and “dwindle [and] disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face” (Hel. 4:23).¹⁸

The disease that eventually destroyed the Nephites was a mix of pride, vanity, and hunger for power and money. In the closing chapters of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni wrote, “Behold, the pride of this nation . . . hath proven their destruction” (Moro. 8:27). The proud will likewise be destroyed at the Second Coming (3 Ne. 25:1). Can anyone doubt that the Book of Mormon’s warning about pride was meant for our day when prosperity is greater than it has ever been? No other book of scripture, President Benson declared, teaches us how to deal with the universal sin of pride as well as the Book of Mormon: “This sacred volume was written for us – for our day. Its scriptures are to be likened unto ourselves.”¹⁹

To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord admonished, “It must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give; but beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old” (D&C 38:39).

Book of Mormon Prophets Saw Our Day in Vision

The majority of the writers and editors of the Book of Mormon were prophets, seers, and revelators. Seers can know “of things which are to come” and can make known things “which otherwise could not be known” (Mosiah 8:17). Book of Mormon prophets saw our day: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Morm. 8:35).

There is no better evidence for this than the fact that the Book of Mormon addresses numerous specific issues that challenge our society (see Morm. 8:36–41). For example:

- Mormon notes the problems that result from educational systems that lack moral underpinnings. Education without morality has serious social consequences (Mosiah 24:4–8).
- Pahoran’s and Moroni’s letters to each other provide a description of the social upheaval that occurs when corruption in government erodes public trust (Alma 60–62).
- Mormon lamented that society in his day was saturated with wickedness, that they were “without Christ and God in the world.” The Spirit ceased to strive with them. They were “without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer” (Morm. 5:16–18). The Nephite society seemed to permit anything and soon lost everything.
- In a day of eroding family values, the Book of Mormon sounds a clarion call to strengthen the love in our homes. It illustrates many examples of kind and loving parents (1 Ne. 2:9–11; Alma 39). It teaches parents how to show love to their children (Mosiah 4:13–15). It admonishes husbands to love their wives (Jacob 2:35; 3:7; 3 Ne. 18:21). And it encourages families to gather together, face their homes and hearts toward the temple, and listen to the words of the living prophets (Mosiah 2:5–9).²⁰
- The Book of Mormon also teaches that private, personal behavior really does have an impact on society at large (see Alma 10:22–23). It points out that there is a difference between liberty and license (2 Ne. 2:27). And it is interesting to note that the words “free agency” do not appear in any of the standard works. In D&C 101:78 the term used is “moral agency,” implying we are free to make choices, but we are accountable to God and others for the choices we make.

The Appearance of the Son of God

Above all else, the Book of Mormon provides the most detailed account in any scripture of the appearance of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. His appearance was a real event at a specific

time in history that transcended all other events. But it is also a type of the Second Coming. The signs had all been given, “every whit” (3 Ne. 1:20), but some doubted and disbelieved what they had seen (see Hel. 4:23; 3 Ne. 2:1; 8:4).

Many of the signs preceding the Savior’s appearance in the Book of Mormon are also prophesied signs of his Second Coming. Compare the following events from their day with similar prophecies of the Second Coming to be fulfilled in the last days:

- The Lamanites “blossomed” and became righteous (3 Ne. 2:14–16; Hel. 6:1; cf. D&C 49:24).
- The righteous were gathered together (3 Ne. 3:22; cf. D&C 115:6).
- Many signs and wonders were shown (Hel. 14:6; cf. D&C 45:40).
- Physical disturbances increased; earthquakes and tempests caused the earth to shake and tremble (Hel. 14:20–24; 3 Ne. 8:6–18; cf. D&C 45:48).
- The sun, moon, and stars were darkened (3 Ne. 8:22; cf. D&C 34:9).
- The righteous were spared and the wicked were destroyed at his coming (3 Ne. 9:1–13; 10:12; cf. D&C 29:11).
- Those who were most prepared were those who sustained and followed the prophets (3 Ne. 10:12; cf. D&C 45:32; 124:45–46).
- When Christ spoke, his voice pierced the darkness and was heard everywhere at once, “I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. . . . The scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled” (3 Ne. 9:1, 15–16; cf. D&C 45:49).
- He came down from heaven and met his people at the temple (3 Ne. 11:1–11; cf. Mal. 3:1–5).
- He displayed the wounds in his hands and feet (3 Ne. 11:14; cf. D&C 45:51–52).
- His appearance began a resurrection of the righteous (3 Ne. 23:9–14; Hel. 14:25; cf. D&C 88:95–102).

- With great compassion and love, Jesus healed all who were lame, blind, maimed, or afflicted in any manner. He dried every tear and touched every heart (3 Nephi 17; cf. Rev. 21:4).

Has there ever been a moment like this in history? These events happened to them. They will happen again.

Anxiety or Anticipation

The scriptures refer to the Second Coming as a “great and dreadful day” (3 Ne. 25:5). How can it be both? President Benson said, “His coming will be both glorious and terrible, depending on the spiritual condition of those who remain.”²¹

The points of doctrine taught in the Book of Mormon enrich our understanding of the Second Coming and how to prepare for it. The Book of Mormon portrays that event as something to anticipate and look forward to with hope. It will prepare a people to meet the Lord when he returns. It reassures us that we can have faith in Christ, in his Church, in his timing, and in all the words of his anointed prophets: “And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day, but let it be sooner or later; in it I will rejoice. And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming” (Alma 13:25–26).

The Book of Mormon contains the words of just and holy prophets who told us about the prophecies of the last days, about events in their day that resemble ours, and about the time when they met the resurrected Lord. Truly it is a handbook for the Saints living in the latter days.

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Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 99.

2. Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 3.
3. Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1975, 94–95.
4. Ibid.
5. For a definition of “priestcraft” see 2 Ne. 26:29–30 and Alma 1:3–4.
6. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 6.
7. Ibid., 5.
8. “Peace in this World,” *Improvement Era*, June 1967, 77.
9. Quoted in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 349.
10. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 5.
11. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 287.
12. Hoyt W. Brewster, Jr., *Behold, I Come Quickly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 187.
13. Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 37.
14. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 5.
15. See E. Dale LeBaron, “The Book of Mormon: The Pattern in Preparing a People to Meet the Savior,” *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon, 1991 Sperry Symposium*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 72–73.
16. Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1986, 5.
17. Ibid., 6.
18. Boyd K. Packer’s remarks at the All-Church Coordinating Council Meeting, Salt Lake City, 8 September 1987.
19. Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1989, 3.
20. In contrast, note what happened to Lot, who “pitched his tent towards Sodom” and forsook the counsel of the Prophet Abraham (see Gen. 13:12; Genesis 19).

21. Benson, "Prepare Yourself for the Great Day of the Lord," *New Era*, May 1982, 49.

A Doctrinal Framework for the New Testament

8

Robert J. Matthews

While biblical revelation originally had the same doctrinal clarity and unity as modern revelation, many important passages regarding the plan of salvation have been lost or removed over time. Consequently, the Bible currently tells us WHAT things happened, but it rarely tells us WHY they happened. The doctrine of the Fall of Adam is one key doctrine that has been confused in the Bible. Without a full understanding of this doctrine, the necessity of Christ's mission is less clear. The Book of Mormon, however, contains the full doctrinal framework of the plan of salvation, with emphasis on the Fall, making several New Testament scriptures more clear.

The Book of Mormon is especially helpful in establishing a doctrinal framework in which to position the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—so that they will properly project the fundamental mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without clear teachings on the Fall and the Atonement, these New Testament books often fail to radiate their full and original meaning. The Book of Mormon, adding greatly to the message of the New Testament, is also a witness to its truth.

We are warned in 1 Ne. 13:20–34 that the Bible has suffered deletions and intentional editing by unholy hands, with the result that many plain and precious parts have been removed from the text of both the Old and the New Testaments. This condition is confirmed in Morm. 8:33 and in Moses 1:40–41, and it is further declared in the eighth article of faith. Such loss of sacred scripture

is not merely the result of the difficulties of translation, nor does it consist of the misplacing of a few words or phrases. The problem with the present text of the Bible involves many passages and consists of the depletion and dilution of fundamental doctrinal concepts that were literally removed from the manuscripts thousands of years ago. Thus all known manuscripts today lack these passages and hence do not contain the doctrinal clarity that was once the hallmark of the message. In consequence we not only lose the material, but as a result many passages that remain are deprived of their original vitality and doctrinal strength because the necessary background is gone. Although the Book of Mormon tells of alterations throughout the Bible, the emphasis in this discussion will be on the New Testament.

The Loss of Doctrinal Clarity

I have frequently noted that the Bible in its present form generally tells us *what* things occurred, but it falls to latter-day revelation to tell us *why* they occurred. Originally the books of the Bible contained the same clarity and unity that is characteristic of latter-day revelation, but now in many instances they do not. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained why this loss occurred: "From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled."¹ "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors."²

It is a cardinal principle that the most severe deletions from the Bible have been intentional. They were deliberately and cunningly devised so as to weaken the doctrine of Jesus Christ. An angel told Nephi: "And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men" (1 Ne. 13:27). The angel said that because of the loss of important material from the Bible, many who would willingly be humble believers are in an "awful state of blindness . . . because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel" that have been removed (1 Ne. 13:32; see also 2 Ne. 28:14).

Perhaps no doctrinal topic has been dealt a more debilitating and crippling blow than the doctrine of the Fall of Adam in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Without an understanding of the nature and power of the Fall and its effect upon all humankind (and even upon the whole earth), we cannot grasp the absolute necessity for the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus' miraculous divine birth and the infinite nature of his atoning sacrifice as a ransom and redemption for fallen man should be seen as God's special remedy for the Fall. As persons familiar with the Gospels are aware, these books do not in their present form offer a clear doctrinal platform on which to position the birth and ministry of Jesus the Messiah. Fortunately, the Book of Mormon, which is another testament of Jesus Christ, contains the doctrinal framework that, if applied, will enable readers of the New Testament to more completely perceive the testimony of Jesus Christ that is recorded there.

Items of doctrinal importance that are necessary to form a base structure include: (1) God has a purpose in man's creation; (2) Adam's fall brought physical and spiritual death to all the world; (3) because the Fall introduced death, the Redeemer needed to be the divinely begotten Son of God in the flesh so that he had power over death; (4) the shedding of Jesus' blood was in payment for the broken law of both Adam's and man's transgressions; and (5) a resurrection of the physical bodies of humankind is needed for future progress and happiness. These items are not absent from the New Testament, but it is my perception that they are more clearly defined in latter-day revelation than in the Bible. Since an understanding of these concepts is necessary in order to appreciate who Jesus is and what he has done for us, I am proposing that we would benefit more fully if we read the New Testament with these concepts in mind.

In 2 Ne. 29:8-14 the Lord states that he speaks "the same words to one nation like unto another," and that eventually each nation shall have the records of other nations in addition to their own records—for their edification and also as a witness of God's existence and truthfulness. Because the Book of Mormon has the same doctrines that the Bible once had, it is able to testify to the truth of the Bible, and also to supply many points of doctrine that are no longer clearly enunciated in the Bible. An angel explained to Nephi that "other books" would come forth by the power of

God, to convince the Gentiles, the Lamanites, and the Jews “that the records of the prophets [Old Testament] and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb [New Testament] are true” (1 Ne. 13:39). The angel further explained that these other books would “make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from” the Jewish records (1 Ne. 13:40). Surely these other books include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and any future records the Lord may choose to give to the Church.

Although the Book of Mormon does not specifically state that the doctrine of the Fall was one of the doctrines removed from the Bible, this conclusion can be made for two reasons. First, its importance is so fundamental to an understanding of the Atonement of Christ, and second, the Fall is not clearly elucidated in the present records of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Plan of Salvation

Prophets of the Book of Mormon speak of a plan that originated with God from the foundation of the world and has been revealed by him for the direction of humankind. This is called variously the plan of the great Creator (2 Ne. 9:6), the plan of redemption (Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:25, 30), the plan of salvation (Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14), the great plan of the Eternal God (Alma 34:9), the plan of restoration (Alma 41:2), the great plan of happiness (Alma 42:8), and the plan of mercy (Alma 42:15). The holy priesthood is also included in the plan (see Alma 13:1–16). There is only one plan, and it is in active operation whenever true prophets are on the earth. The plan sets forth the order of the kingdom of God. A knowledge of this plan gives direction and focus to the ministry of each of the prophets and to the ministry of Jesus Christ. The plan was made known “in plain terms” so that man can understand and not err (Alma 13:23). God has revealed the plan so that “the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” (Alma 13:2). The devil also has a cunning plan to destroy man, in opposition to the plan of God (2 Ne. 9:28; Alma 28:13).

Stated in the most elementary terms, the plan of salvation as taught in the Book of Mormon connects the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement, and the Judgment as four great phases in God’s

eternal purposes for man. It is upon this backdrop, plan, or context that Jesus is born to earth as the Son of God. Since Jesus is Jehovah, the creator of worlds, the great I AM, and God of the Old Testament prophets from Adam to Malachi, we understand that as he matured and ministered on earth he was fully aware of his own identity, knew what his mission was, and understood exactly what was needed to redeem the world.

The Book of Mormon provides pertinent doctrinal statements that lay a proper groundwork for recognizing the sacredness of Jesus Christ's mortal mission. It is our perspective that Jesus and the Twelve knew these very same doctrines and taught the gospel in that context, though many of these concepts have not survived in the biblical record. When once we know the plan of salvation, we see many evidences and traces of it in the biblical writings. Yet the phrase *plan of salvation* does not occur in the Bible, and it is nowhere clearly explained as a unified plan. As a consequence, it would be difficult to learn the plan from the Bible alone. We note these basic provisions of the plan as presented in the Book of Mormon:

- The Lord created the earth to be inhabited, and he created his children to possess it (see 1 Ne. 17:36).
- The devil rebelled against God in the premortal life and seeks the misery of humankind (see 2 Ne. 2:17–18).
- “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25).
- The Fall brought spiritual and physical death upon all humankind so extensively and severely that without an infinite atonement we would be helpless, and there would be no resurrection of the body. The spirits of all humans would become devils (see 2 Ne. 9:6–9).
- The Atonement of Jesus Christ provides the only escape from the awful monster, death and hell, brought on by the Fall (see 2 Ne. 9:10–13).
- Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, and he was literally in the flesh the Son of the Eternal Father. He alone of all humankind has this inheritance (see 1 Ne. 11:13–21; Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10).

- The effects of the Fall of Adam are so extensive and universal that no mortal or human being can pay the debt. Such payment can be made only by a God (see Alma 34:9–12).
- “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19).
- The Fall of Adam has brought two kinds of death upon all humankind, and the Atonement of Christ will rescue all from both deaths, which means it will bring them out of their graves and also bring them into the presence of God for judgment of their own sins (see Hel. 14:14–18).
- Little children are innocent before God, and if they die as children they are saved by the Atonement of Christ. The “curse of Adam” is taken away from them by Christ (see Moro. 8:8–24).
- The Messiah’s literal, physical resurrection from the dead will bring to pass the literal, physical resurrection from the dead for all, Jesus himself being the first (see 2 Ne. 2:8; Mosiah 15:20; 16:3–12).
- The physical resurrection is permanent, and resurrected beings never die again; their spirits and bodies are joined together, never to be divided or separated (see Alma 11:42–45).
- Man is absolutely in need of the Savior’s power of redemption; there is no other Savior than Jesus Christ, and there is no other way, nor name, nor any other conditions for salvation than those that are brought to pass by Jesus Christ (see 2 Ne. 25:20; 31:21; Mosiah 3:17; 4:8; 5:8; 16:13; Alma 38:9; Hel. 5:9).
- The same gospel and plan of salvation with all of its provisions was known and taught by all of the true prophets from the beginning (see Jacob 7:11; Mosiah 13:33–35).

These are only a portion of the many statements in the Book of Mormon that tell of the doctrinal framework and the plan that points to the reality of Christ’s earthly mission. With that direction, the testimonies of Christ given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and

John shine forth in their intended brilliance and full color. Using the Book of Mormon to understand the New Testament is like putting on prescription eyeglasses to improve and enlarge our vision. With my personal eyeglasses I have nearly 20/20 vision; without them I could not read this page, nor could I see anything clearly. The difference is focus. The Book of Mormon enables us to see the message of the New Testament in focus as it was originally intended.

Emphasis on the Fall

President Ezra Taft Benson explained why an emphasis on the Fall is necessary: "Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon all mankind. And no other book in the world explains this vital doctrine nearly as well as the Book of Mormon."³

Since the doctrine of the Fall is vital to an understanding and realization of why the mission of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary, it will be informative to examine to what extent the Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine of the Fall of Adam. This can be illustrated by citing the most notable references and also listing thirteen prophets in the Book of Mormon who teach the doctrine of the Fall and who explain its impact on the world. The same passages also declare that it is because of the Fall that we need the Redeemer. The list is arranged in the order of occurrence in the Book of Mormon:

- Lehi: 1 Ne. 10:6; 2 Ne. 2:4, 19, 25
- Jacob: 2 Ne. 9:4-10; Jacob 7:12
- Nephi: 2 Ne. 11:6. Furthermore, the teachings of Lehi and Jacob on the Fall are recorded and presented in the books of 1 and 2 Nephi, showing Nephi's approval.
- King Benjamin: Mosiah 3:11, 16, 19; 4:5, 7.
- Abinadi: Mosiah 16:3-4
- Alma: Alma 12:22; 42:6-7
- Ammon: Alma 18:36

- Aaron: Alma 22:13-14
- Amulek: Alma 34:9-12
- Samuel the Lamanite: Hel. 14:14-18
- Moroni: Morm. 9:12-13
- Brother of Jared: Ether 3:2, 13
- Mormon: Moro. 8:8, 24

It can hardly be overstated that the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon humankind is a central teaching of the Book of Mormon. The purpose of dwelling so much on the Fall is to illustrate that the Fall makes the Savior necessary. Without a knowledge of the heavy domination that the Fall has on the earth, we could never begin to know why we so desperately need Jesus. Those who do not have this doctrinal foundation often see Jesus as only a social reformer, not a divine Redeemer. For examples of the doctrinal view presented in the Book of Mormon, we find these expressions:

Nephi writes: "I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell" (2 Ne. 33:6). This redemption from hell was not because Nephi had committed any great sins in life for which he would have gone to hell, but because all – every man, woman, and child – by virtue of the Fall would go to an endless hell if it were not for the redemptive mission of Christ (see 2 Ne. 9:6-9).

Lehi says: "There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Ne. 2:8). This concept is not directed just to those who commit the great sins of mortality, but it applies to all human beings, children and everyone else. None could ever be saved in the presence of God if it were not for the ransom by the Messiah (compare 1 Ne. 10:6).

Aaron declares the same doctrine: "And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance" (Alma 22:14).

Jacob taught the forceful doctrine that the universal nature of the Fall made an infinite atonement necessary, and if there were not such an atonement, "this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more," and the spirits of

all people would become subject to the devil, and, even worse, “our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God . . . in misery” (2 Ne. 9:7–9). This condition applies to all humankind. Both the Fall and the Atonement are universal in their power.

Amulek clearly defines the Savior’s unique role as the literal Son of God, performing a sacrifice beyond what any human could do: “According to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost. . . . For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; For it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. . . . And that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:9, 10, 14). The reason only a God could atone for sin and conquer death is that all others, being dominated by death, are powerless to escape or to conquer it. Jesus was born as the Only Begotten of the Father in this mortal flesh so that he would have power over death.

And finally, Moroni explains: “Behold he [God] created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ; . . . and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man” (Morm. 9:12).

If these pointed and clarifying doctrines were in the New Testament, especially in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all readers would have a much better appreciation for *why* the world needs a Savior and why only Jesus Christ can be that Savior. Today we often find, even among sincere professing Christians, serious doubt about Jesus’ divinity, his miracles, his blood being a payment for sin, and the reality of his corporeal resurrection. Those who want to believe would have no cause to doubt if they saw Christ through the focus of the Book of Mormon, because it testifies of the truth of the New Testament. And those who do not want to believe will be left without excuse. Without this focus, the doctrines of the divine Sonship, the sacrifice of Jesus, his death, and his literal resurrection are seriously undermined and viciously robbed of their significance. Truly we can sense that it has been Satan’s cunning plan to dilute and even remove the doctrine of the Fall from the first four books of the New Testament and

hence weaken the message, thus denying readers for eighteen centuries the faith and knowledge they had a right to receive. Truly we can behold the wisdom and mercy of God in providing the means, through the Book of Mormon, to restore the mission of the Redeemer in its brightest light.

Having accepted the basic foundation and doctrinal framework of the Fall and the Atonement, we are better prepared to read the biblical record of Jesus in its true perspective. Such will increase our enthusiasm and understanding and enable us to see that only a God could do what needed to be done, and that only Jesus was that God.

It is true that Paul's writings help to achieve a proper perspective about the Fall of Adam (see Romans 4-5; 1 Corinthians 15). The Book of Mormon scriptures confirm and support Paul's words, yet they are also plainer and more extensive than Paul's writings, and they offer many concepts beyond what we can get from Paul, great as he and his writings are. The Book of Mormon is the Lord's prescribed instrument in the last days, precisely tooled and machined to testify of the truths in the New Testament, sharpen the focus, and thereby give us the divine dimension about Jesus that is so urgently needed.

A Key to New Testament Passages

With the doctrinal perspective of the Book of Mormon, we are able to observe greater depth in certain New Testament passages. This increased meaning is possible because we can see the doctrinal foundation out of which each passage was uttered.

John 3:16-17

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." The doctrine of the Fall is evident in this favorite passage, even though the words "Fall" and "Adam" are not mentioned. We ask, why would the world "perish" if it were not for the Son of God? The answer must be that the world is fallen through the transgression of Adam—so completely fallen that a merciful God sent his

Son to rescue and save it. The doctrinal framework out of which this popular passage was spoken becomes apparent when one knows the doctrine of the Fall, as Jesus surely did when he spoke these words.

Matthew 18:10–11

In this passage Jesus extolls the virtues and innocence of little children. As recorded in the King James Version, Jesus declares: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” This positive statement prompts the question, why were they *lost*? Once again, it is the doctrine of the Fall that explains why humankind is lost without a Redeemer. The JST adds a further clarification as to the particular status of children: Christ said that he came “to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them” (JST Matt. 18:11).

Luke 4:16–19

This passage deals with Jesus’ discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth, in which he proclaims his divinity and sacred mission by quoting from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah. Precisely stated among the dimensions of his ministry is “to preach deliverance to the captives.” We ask, why are the people captives, and to what have they been made captive? Again, the doctrine of the Fall supplies the answer. Jesus’ statement that he has come to free the captives from physical death and sin shows the doctrine of the Fall.

John 5:24–29

In this passage, Jesus declares his power over death and even claims the power to raise others from their graves: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall

hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

John 10:17-18

Jesus taught: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." As with the other passages we have cited, these questions arise: Why do men die, why should they rise from the grave, and why is Jesus able to bring them forth? In the New Testament, death is spoken of on almost every page, is everywhere acknowledged, and is accepted as a fact of life. The doctrine of the Fall explains why death is so universal. Furthermore, the doctrine of the Sonship of Jesus in the flesh gives us the insight as to why he alone has power over death. In the passages above, Christ says that he received that power from his Father (compare Hel. 5:11). That he received such power over death must be that he received it in his body by virtue of being the Father's own literal Son in the flesh.

The doctrine of Christ is in the New Testament, but it is often presented in an incomplete manner, rather than in a systematic doctrinal form as the eternal plan of happiness designed by the Father and revealed in great plainness to man on the earth. As a consequence of the weakened doctrinal pronouncement in the Gospels, made weak because of the mischief of evil men, many Christian philosophers today regard the divine Sonship of Jesus, his many miracles, and his bodily resurrection only as myths that grew out of the hopes and superstitions of Jesus' followers. However, the Lord knew this loss would occur and provided the remedy. With his prescriptive "eyeglasses," called the Book of Mormon, we can read the New Testament account of the Messiah

through the lenses of the eternal plan of salvation, giving us almost a 20/20 view of the original doctrines.

That Jesus showed the people the relationship between his divine mission and the Fall is strengthened by the fact that when Jesus opened the mission in the spirit world, he taught the spirits concerning the Fall and the Atonement (D&C 138:18–19). Knowing the importance of the plan of salvation, we would be surprised if it were any other way, whether it be among the Jews, the Nephites, or in the world of spirits.

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Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 9–11.
2. *Ibid.*, 327.
3. *Conference Report*, April 1987, 106.

The Sacrament: Building upon Christ's Rock

9

Monte S. Nyman

Although the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is an ordinance found in most Christian denominations, its function in the Bible is unclear because the three synoptic Gospels are not explicit on the manner of its administration, nor do they agree completely in the statements regarding it made by Christ. The Book of Mormon is thus an indispensable tool to better understand the reason for this ordinance. Specifically, the writings in 3 Nephi and Moroni delineate the use and purpose of the sacrament as well as how it was administered.

The sacrament of partaking of bread and wine in remembrance of Christ, also known as the Eucharist, is a familiar practice among most denominations of Christianity. Although it varies in the manner and frequency of its administration among the various congregations, they all trace its origin to Jesus' mortal ministry. A review of its origin, as recorded in the New Testament, is basic to an understanding of the sacred ordinance. Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his beloved twelve apostles at the end of his three-year ministry. At this Last Supper, he initiated the ordinance of the sacrament. All three of the synoptic Gospels bear record of this event, which occurred on the evening of the first day of unleavened bread.

Matthew 26:26-29	Mark 14:22-25	Luke 22:19-20, 16-18
And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.	And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.	And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.
And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;	And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.	Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.
For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.	And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.	For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.
But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.	Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.	And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

From these three accounts, the following observations and comments are drawn: (1) Jesus blessed the bread and gave thanks for the cup of the fruit of the vine before he gave it to his disciples. What he said in the blessing or in giving thanks is not stated. (2) All three of these accounts equate the partaking of the bread that Jesus broke and blessed with his body, and all equate his blood, which was to be shed, with the cup (of wine) that he gave them to drink. Luke's account says the body was "given for you," and they were to eat in remembrance of him. Matthew's account tells us that Jesus instructed all the disciples to drink of the wine. And Luke records that they were to divide it among themselves. (3) All three accounts speak of the blood of the new testament. Mark says the blood of the new testament was shed for many. Luke speaks of Christ's blood being "shed for you." Matthew is unique in speaking of Christ's blood being shed "for many for the remission of sins." (4) Matthew and Mark state that Jesus will not

drink again until he drinks it new in God's kingdom. Luke says Jesus will not drink "until the kingdom of God shall come."

The first observation, the words of the blessing or of thanksgiving not being recorded, may have been because the apostles did not realize the significance of the prayer. Another possibility is that they did record it and it was deleted by the loss of plain and precious parts, as indicated in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 13:24-29).

The second observation, the equating of the sacramental elements with the body and blood of Christ, is not as easily explained. Earlier teachings recorded in the Gospel of John also make reference to his personal body and equate it with bread. Following the miraculous feeding of about five thousand men, besides women and children, in Bethsaida (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-14), the Savior gave his "Bread of Life Sermon" at the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6). Therein, Jesus designated himself as "the true bread from heaven" (6:32-33) and promised that those who come to him will never hunger or thirst (6:35). Following the murmuring of his listeners over his declaration of being the bread of life, he repeated that he was the living bread:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed (John 6:51-55; see also John 4:10-14).

Latter-day revelation sheds much light on the above observation, verifying and clarifying the ordinance as well as refuting some of the traditions that have found their way into divergent Christian dogmas.

The correlation of the living bread with Christ's body and the wine with his blood has led some Christians to believe the doctrine of transubstantiation. This doctrine holds "that the substance of the bread and wine [literally] changes into the body and blood of

Christ, while the 'accidents' (color, shape, taste, etc.) of the first substance remains."¹

Another related doctrine, known as consubstantiation, somewhat softens the above dogma. The believers in this doctrine advocate that the elements of the sacrament "remain bread and wine, but the body of Christ is in and around them."² A third variation is that the partaking of the sacramental elements brings the "spiritual presence" of the Savior into the partakers' lives. Still other religions believe the sacramental elements were merely symbols "employed to call to mind his death" and resultant blessings.³

The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible add significantly to our understanding of the sacrament. My emphasis will be on the Book of Mormon, because the Savior taught the sacrament ordinances to the Nephites almost immediately after he came to them, not long after he had instituted the ordinances among his Jerusalem disciples. Therefore, we have a close parallel between the two experiences. Some consideration will be given to the other latter-day revelations, which substantiate the two experiences.

The Book of Mormon clarifies the real purpose and significance of partaking of the bread and wine. Although among the Nephites Jesus first gave the sacrament to the Twelve and then to the multitude, the only instructions he gave concerning the ordinance were regarding the multitude: "And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name. And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you. And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (3 Ne. 18:5-7). An analysis of these verses clarifies several New Testament concepts and gives additional instruction regarding this sacred ordinance and how it can help us build upon the rock of Christ.

The Blessing

Jesus first instructed his disciples that there was to be one ordained among them to whom he would give power to administer this ordinance (3 Ne. 18:5). This instruction does not mean that there was only one person who was authorized to break and bless the bread. From modern revelation, we learn that the requirements for salvation were the same in all dispensations (D&C 20:25-27). Therefore, the one ordained, to whom this power was given, was the presiding authority of the Church. Today, all power for performing the ordinances of the Church is vested in the president of the Church (46:29; 107:91-92; 132:6-7). On the local or ward level, the president delegates that power to a bishop (107:68-72). The bishop in every ward of the Church, or the presiding authority of each branch, is to supervise the administering of the sacrament. The same supervision of the sacrament was obviously followed among the Nephites. The presiding authority of the Nephites was probably Nephi, since he was the first to whom Jesus gave the power to baptize the people (3 Ne. 11:18-21); he was also the first to be baptized (19:11-12), and he was apparently the president of the Nephite Quorum of the Twelve. Moroni, speaking of the commandment given by Christ, recorded the manner of the elders and priests in administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the Church and testified that "the elder or priest did minister it" (Moro. 4:1). The eternal nature of the gospel again shows that a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood or an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood may actually administer the sacrament ordinances by blessing the bread and water (D&C 20:46, 76). Thus, the authority to administer was certainly given to the Jerusalem Church, even though the New Testament contains no record of it.

The New Testament states that Jesus "blessed" the bread and then "broke it," and that he gave thanks for the wine (Matt. 26:26-27). However, in Mormon's abridgment of 3 Nephi, the order is reversed, clarifying that Jesus first broke the bread and then blessed it (3 Ne. 18:3). This order is in harmony with the practice of the Church today and agrees with the JST correction at Matt. 26:26 (JST Matt. 26:22). Further, in the 3 Nephi account Jesus promises to give the one ordained to administer the sacrament power to "break bread and bless it" (3 Ne. 18:5), but it does not

say the wine was blessed. However, Moroni later recorded the prayers the elder or priest said as he administered “the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church . . . according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true” (Moro. 4:1). The word *commandment* strongly implies that the words of the prayers were given to them by Christ. Moroni continues his record, saying, “And they did kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ” (4:2). Based on the practice of the Church today, a valid interpretation of “kneel down with the church” is to kneel in behalf of the Church. As one having authority addresses the Father, he represents the entire congregation. The congregation mentally follows the prayer and sanctions it by saying “Amen” at the conclusion of the prayer. The words of the blessing on the bread recorded by Moroni are: “O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen” (4:3).

The prayer itself confirms that it represents all who partake of it and that it is in remembrance of Christ’s body (which was laid down and then resurrected). It then specifies our part of the covenant and God’s promised blessings to follow. There are three parts of our commitment: (1) to be willing to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, (2) to always remember him, and (3) to keep his commandments. If these three commitments are kept, God promises that the partakers will always have his Spirit to be with them (Moro. 4:3).

A comparison to the baptismal covenant recorded in Mosiah 18 shows that the commitments made at the sacrament ordinance are the same as the ones made in the waters of baptism when a person enters into the Church. To take upon us the name of Christ is to become a part of his family. It is “to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people.” It is to accept other members of the Church as brothers and sisters, to be “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [be] willing to mourn

with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

The second commitment, to always remember Christ, is to agree "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death" (Mosiah 18:9). To remember Christ means we are mindful of his example and will follow it seven days a week, not just on Sunday; we will exemplify in our lives the principles he taught; and we will pattern our lives after Christ's life in our social and occupational activities. We are his children and should be proud of his family name.

The third commitment is to "serve him and keep his commandments" (Mosiah 18:10). As our Father of eternal life through the Atonement,⁴ Christ is the head of the family. He will delegate our stewardship to us through revelation to his children and will give us rules to govern us as members of his household. In exchange for following these rules, Christ agrees to "pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon [us]" (18:10). Since all are born with the light of Christ, the members of his family are promised an additional source of light and truth—the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacrament, the covenant of baptism is reaffirmed by both man and God, but more should be remembered. The sacrament prayer states that we "eat [the bread] in remembrance" of Christ's body (Moro. 4:3; D&C 20:77). Through the breaking of the bread—symbolic of his body—we do so "in remembrance of" Christ (Luke 22:19), confirming the correct purpose of the sacrament.

But what are we to remember? We are to remember that through his Resurrection, we too may be resurrected. We should acknowledge his Resurrection and give thanks to our Father in Heaven for this blessing of his son. Furthermore, we might remember that the Lord has given us certain commandments to make our bodies fit tabernacles for the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:13-20; D&C 89). As we live in this mortal state of probation, we are preparing ourselves for our endless resurrected state (Alma 12:24). The type of resurrection we receive is commensurate with the degree of glory that we have prepared ourselves to receive (D&C 88:14-24). A reflection of our past week's activities in relation to the commandments given to keep our bodies as fit temples of God and to be worthy of his Spirit would be most appropriate as we partake of the bread. We should also make personal com-

mitments to do better in our areas of weakness and thank our Father for the blessings of the past week. Through partaking of the bread, we have an opportunity to periodically evaluate our progress toward immortality.

After instructing the disciples concerning the bread, Jesus gave them wine to drink and had them administer it to the multitude in the same manner as they had administered the bread (3 Ne. 18:8–9). He then informed the disciples that partaking of the wine was another witness to the Father that they would keep the commandments (18:10). However, the wine was to be partaken of “in remembrance of [Christ’s] blood, which [was] shed for [them]” (18:11).

Again, the Spirit was promised to those who would always remember him (3 Ne. 18:8–11). Moroni also recorded the exact prayer for administering the wine as he concluded the record of the Nephites: “The manner of administering the wine—Behold, they took the cup, and said: O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen” (Moro. 5:1–2).

It is essentially the same prayer as the one offered over the bread, with the wine being in remembrance of Christ’s blood, which was shed for them. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ bled “at every pore” to pay for the sins of all humankind (3 Ne. 11:11; D&C 19:18; see also Mosiah 3:7; Alma 7:13; Luke 22:44). Thus, the wine is equated with the Atonement. The prayer contains no mention of the participants’ covenant to take Jesus’ name or to keep the commandments. This exclusion may be because they have already so committed themselves by partaking of the bread; they are now to remember a different aspect of the Atonement—the blood of Christ that was shed in Gethsemane, a vicarious payment for their sins. Therefore, they reflect upon the great sacrifice he made, how their past sins contributed to his suffering, and how those sins have been forgiven. Their thoughts should thus be of worship for the willingness of their Savior to make the Atonement and pay for their sins. Perhaps they might extend those thoughts to thanksgiving for the guidance they received

during the week and to plea for the guidance of the Spirit during the coming week.

Partaking

Jesus concluded his instructions concerning the bread and wine by making the sacrament a commandment (3 Ne. 18:12). According to Moroni's later-recorded testimony of Christ's ministry, the Church "did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus" (Moro. 6:6). The account does not clarify the meaning of "oft." In this dispensation, we are given this sacred opportunity weekly. Jesus further attested that "if ye shall always do these things [the proper partaking of the sacrament] blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock" (3 Ne. 18:12). Just as proper baptism was the beginning of the building upon the rock, so was the covenant of the sacrament. While the ordinance of baptism was a one-time, long-term commitment, the sacrament serves as a weekly opportunity to keep a proper foundation, the rock of Christ, under our quest for eternal life and to build upon it. For those who fail to observe their sacrament covenants, their foundation becomes one of sand and leads to an entrance into the gates of hell (18:13).

The Savior instructed the Nephites regarding prayer after he spoke of the bread and wine, but then he returned to the subject of the sacrament. This time he commanded the disciples to "not suffer any one knowingly to partake of [his] flesh and blood unworthily" (3 Ne. 18:28). Those who partake unworthily do so to the damnation of their souls (18:29). Moroni also added a warning against partaking unworthily in his contribution to the Nephite record (Morm. 9:29). These same instructions were undoubtedly given to the people in Palestine, because Paul instructed the Corinthian Saints similarly and based his teachings on what Jesus had taught at the Last Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:23–29). Paul added that many among the Corinthians were weak, sick, or even asleep because they partook unworthily (11:30). Elder John Taylor said the same about some of the Latter-day Saints of his day.⁵ President Joseph Fielding Smith declared, "No member of the Church, who refuses to observe this sacred ordinance, can retain the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Ghost. It is as true today as it was in the days of Paul, that many members of the

Church are weak and sickly, in spirit and body, and many sleep, because they have failed to show their love for, and obedience to, the Lord Jesus Christ in the keeping of this commandment.”⁶ The partaking of the sacrament is a serious ordinance and should be done thoughtfully.

On the second day of his divine ministry among the descendants of Lehi, Jesus performed a miracle parallel to his Palestine ministry. He again gave the disciples the sacrament and commanded them to administer it to the multitude (3 Ne. 20:3–5). After they had all received the sacrament, it is recorded that “there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude” (20:6). Christ had miraculously provided bread and wine for the multitude similar to his miracle in Galilee, where he fed the “five thousand men, beside women and children” (Matt. 14:13–21) and later fed “four thousand men, beside women and children” (15:32–38). The Nephite record does not describe how he did it, as do the New Testament accounts, but he did miraculously provide (3 Ne. 20:7).

Following their partaking, Jesus said to the assembled people, “He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Ne. 20:8). The multitude experienced the promised fulfillment of the sacrament covenant – they were filled with the Spirit. The result was a united voice of praise and “glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard” (20:9). As we partake of the sacrament, we too should give praise and glory to our Lord for the Resurrection and the Atonement that he provided.

“My Blood of the New Testament”

There are two kinds of ordinances administered in the Church: those that are necessary for salvation and those that are available to bless the Saints but are not necessary to attain salvation. Blessing the little children (Mark 10:13–16; 3 Ne. 17:21) and administering to the sick (James 5:14–15), both of which Jesus performed, are not saving ordinances. Is the sacrament a saving ordinance or a nonsaving ordinance? The crucifixion of Christ fulfilled the law of Moses, and all things became new (3 Ne. 15:4–5). Those who kept the new commandments he had given

could attain eternal life through the blood he shed in Gethsemane. A new covenant was in effect, which was made through the ordinance of baptism (12:1-2). This covenant was necessary for salvation (Mark 16:15-16). According to the Savior's instructions, the sacrament was a commandment and was to be administered "unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name" (3 Ne. 18:5, 11-12). Therefore, the sacrament is a covenant ordinance, and, in a sense, a saving ordinance. It is partaken of as a renewal of our baptismal covenant. Blessings are promised conditionally upon our keeping the commandments agreed upon. Without those blessings we would not gain eternal life. The sacrament is thus a weekly reminder of our initial commitment to be a member of Christ's Church.

Matthew recorded that Jesus' blood of the New Testament was "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Although the disciples were baptized for a remission of sins, the remission of sins came from the baptism of the Holy Ghost (2 Ne. 31:17; Moro. 6:4). As a parallel ordinance, the partaking of the sacrament is a rededication of our covenants, although the ordinance alone does not bring about a remission of sins. Just as baptism brings a remission of sins, so the partaking of the sacrament enables us to have the Spirit with us always (Moro. 4:3; 5:2) in order that we might be forgiven of our sins through the Holy Ghost. As Nephi testified, "I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism – yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost" (2 Ne. 31:13). If sins are committed after baptism, and they always are, the forgiveness of sins must come from a cleansing by the Spirit – not from the sacrament ordinance itself.

Jesus desired to eat the Passover meal with his disciples because it would be his "last supper" with them until he ate and drank again in the kingdom of his father (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18, 30). The Book of Mormon does not mention that Jesus taught the Nephites of this future occasion. However, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith, when the Prophet set out to procure

wine for the administering of the sacrament, that he would partake again with them in the future. "For behold, I say unto you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory – remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of your sins. Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, that you shall not purchase wine neither strong drink of your enemies; wherefore, you shall partake of none except it is made new among you; yea, in this my Father's kingdom which shall be built up on the earth. Behold, this is wisdom in me; wherefore, marvel not, for the hour cometh that I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth" (D&C 27:2-5). The Lord then named several of the ancient prophets and apostles who would participate in that great and glorious sacrament meeting (27:5-14). This meeting will take place at Adam-ondi-Ahman.⁷

The New Testament records that Jesus instituted the sacrament among his disciples as an ordinance to help the people remember him until he came again. The New Testament implies an association with his Atonement and the remission of sins. However, it does not clearly give the way the sacrament was to be administered or the reasons and purpose for the ordinance. The Book of Mormon and other modern-day scriptures show how and why the ordinance was given. The significance and purposes of the sacrament are explained. The authority to bless and the prayers of blessings are revealed. New Testament teachings are verified and explained. The sacrament is indeed a saving ordinance for the membership of the Church, and through righteous participation in the ordinance, we may build upon the rock of Christ that becomes our foundation as we come out of the waters of baptism. Through building upon the rock of Christ, we can achieve eternal life.

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Notes

1. Jonathan Z. Smith and William Scott Green, eds., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 1099.
2. James L. Barker, *Apostasy From the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 715-16. The various Lutheran congregations believe in the doctrine of consubstantiation.
3. Brigham H. Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 273. John Calvin advocated the "spiritual presence" doctrine, and Ulrich Zwingli taught the "merely symbols" doctrine.
4. For the use of the term "father" applying to Christ, see the 30 June 1916 message of the First Presidency, "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition," in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:26-34.
5. In *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1880), 20:360.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 108.
7. See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 578-88.

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The Book of Mormon clarifies the doctrine of baptism taught in the New Testament. It teaches that baptism was required and practiced before Christ's ministry, and that after repentance and baptism by water comes a baptism by fire – a cleansing and sanctification by the Holy Ghost. From the Book of Mormon we also learn that Christ's baptism was part of his mission in mortality, and that it provided a model of humility and obedience. Through the baptismal covenant, Gentiles can become part of the house of Israel. It is the gateway to membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon also links baptism to the sacrament and teaches that little children do not need to be baptized.

The subject of baptism is a familiar one in the New Testament. This is especially true of the Gospel accounts, in which their first common topic is the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). However, the importance of baptism as an ordinance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and an understanding of why baptism is given such a place of importance are not generally as familiar. President Joseph F. Smith noted that “from remarks that sometimes fall from members of the Church one is led to believe that they regard the gospel of Jesus Christ simply from the standpoint of a code of morals; that if one lives an honest, upright life, that is all that the gospel requires of him; that it is not necessary to observe the rites, ceremonies and ordinances of the Church. . . . Such a position does not harmonize with the word of God given to this people nor with the teachings of Christ in his day.”¹ Since the time of President Smith’s observation nearly a century ago, this need to understand the importance of ordinances

as an integral part of the gospel, especially the ordinance of baptism, has continued. What is the place of the ordinance of baptism in the gospel as taught by Jesus in the Bible and by Jesus and his servants in the Book of Mormon? Further, what important understanding does the Book of Mormon provide in emphasizing and illustrating the gospel of Jesus Christ with regard to the ordinance of baptism?

Baptism and the Doctrine of Jesus Christ

The Savior emphasized the importance of baptism early in his mortal ministry. Indeed, his public ministry was preceded by his own submission to the ordinance of baptism under the hands of John the Baptist. Following the Savior's first cleansing of the temple during Passover, Nicodemus sought out the Lord, hoping that Jesus of Nazareth would explain his doctrine. During Jesus' evening conversation with Nicodemus, he made clear his doctrine that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Following his resurrection, the Lord again emphasized his doctrine concerning the relationship between baptism and salvation. He commissioned his disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Implied in this commission is the concept that those who truly believe the gospel as taught by the Lord's servants will be baptized. A declaration of belief in Christ alone is not sufficient to merit salvation. Clearly, it is also true that baptism alone is not sufficient to merit salvation. It has always been intended that baptism be placed in the doctrine of Jesus Christ alongside the principles of faith in Christ, repentance of sins, and the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Moses 6:52). In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Nephi identifies repentance and baptism as the gate by which an individual enters the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:17-18). Lest any individual err, the Lord Jesus Christ made clear his doctrine concerning the importance of the ordinance of baptism during his Nephite ministry following his resurrection: "Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine. And this is my doctrine,

and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; . . . and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned" (3 Ne. 11:31-34).

Further illustrating the importance of baptism and underscoring the eternal nature of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon testifies that baptism was required and practiced before the mortal ministry of the Savior. The doctrine of Christ was taught to the prophets Lehi and Nephi nearly six hundred years before the birth of Christ in Palestine. These two prophets testified that the Savior would be baptized during mortality (see 1 Ne. 10:7-10; 11:26-27). Lehi taught his children that a prophet would prepare the way of the Lord and that this prophet would "baptize the Messiah with water" (1 Ne. 10:9). As additional testimony, Nephi saw in vision that "the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized" of the prophet who would prepare the way before the Lord (1 Ne. 11:27).

These revelations were the basis for Nephi teaching his people that they should follow the future example of the Lamb of God and be baptized of water. Nephi wrote that the word of God the Father to him and the people of his day was: "Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son" (2 Ne. 31:11). Throughout the record of the Book of Mormon, many of God's servants taught the people concerning baptism as part of the doctrine of Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 9:23; Mosiah 18:8-16; Alma 5:62; 15:6-12; Hel. 5:19; 3 Ne. 7:24-25). The testimony of the Nephite record is that the doctrine of baptism was taught centuries before the appearance of the resurrected Lord in the Americas.

Further, in the beginning of the latter-day restoration of the gospel, the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery testified concerning the teachings of the Book of Mormon. Joseph and Oliver explained that this volume of scripture confirmed "that as many as would believe and be baptized in his [Jesus Christ's] holy name, and endure in faith to the end, should be saved — not only those who believed after he came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came, who believed in the words of the holy prophets, . . . as well as those who should come after" (D&C 20:25-27).

Repentance Precedes Baptism

The teachings of John the Baptist include his instructions to those who desired baptism. For example, the people were told to “bring forth . . . fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). When they asked John for more specific examples of what they could do to be worthy of baptism, he answered them, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise” (3:11). In imparting such instructions John may have referred to the Law of Moses in which the covenant people were commanded to provide for the poor among them (see Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; Deut. 15:7–8) and to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:10). Further, the publicans were given instructions that they should “exact no more than that which is appointed you,” referring to the taxes they demanded and collected (Luke 3:12–13). The Roman soldiers who came to hear John were told that they should “do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). Given that these particular sins were common practice among the publicans and Roman soldiers, the call to live justly and to be merciful was a call to repentance.² In response to John’s preaching, the people “were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:5–6). This reference to confessing sins further attests that John taught that baptism followed repentance.

The Book of Mormon confirms and clarifies the necessity of repentance in order to be worthy of being baptized. For example, the prophet Mormon wrote the words of Jesus to the latter-day Gentiles concerning those specific sins of which they needed to repent in order to come to Christ and be baptized: “Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins” (3 Ne. 30:2). Further emphasis on the importance of repentance before baptism is found in the admonition of Moroni: “See that ye are not baptized unworthily” (Morm. 9:29). One reads of this same concern when John the Baptist denounces the Pharisees and Sadducees as being unworthy of baptism: “But when he

saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:7-8). The Prophet Joseph Smith clarified in the revelatory translation of the Bible that John told the people, "I indeed baptize you with water, upon your repentance" (JST Matt. 3:38). Further, Moroni recorded that in the time following Christ's ministry in America, the people "were not baptized save they brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it. Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end" (Moro. 6:1-3).

Therefore, the Book of Mormon clarifies that the individual seeking baptism must repent and be willing to enter into a covenant with the Lord. Additionally, the ordinance of baptism is identified as "a witness" to the Lord that the individual has repented and desires to enter into a covenant to serve him and keep his commandments. The covenant nature of baptism will be discussed in the following section.

The Book of Mormon not only records that repentance was and is necessary prior to baptism but also that baptism is a natural desire for those who are repentant. Speaking of those faithful persons who lived in the time immediately prior to the Lord's appearance in America, Mormon wrote: "And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins. Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water" (3 Ne. 7:23-24). Moroni referred to baptism as "the first fruits of repentance" (Moro. 8:25), or the natural results of repentance. In other words, repentance is like a seed that brings forth baptism as its first fruit. It may be that those individuals who were drawn to listen to John the Baptist did so as a natural desire to receive baptism at his hands. For, as the Book of Mormon clarifies, those individuals who are repentant will show forth their desire to make a covenant with the Lord to keep his commandments by entering the waters of baptism.

It is noteworthy that the necessity of repentance prior to baptism became a point of contention in the beginnings of the latter-day Restoration. Following the completion of the translation of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church, Oliver Cowdery and several members of the Whitmer family felt that priestcraft would be the result of requiring works before baptism as stated in D&C 20:37. The Prophet Joseph Smith spent considerable time in bringing them to an understanding of the scriptures on this matter.³ Indeed, the instructions for the ordinance of baptism indicate that baptism is to be administered “unto all those who repent” (D&C 20:72).

The Covenant of Baptism

Implied but unclear in the Gospel accounts is that baptism is an ordinance by which an individual enters into a covenant with God. Joseph Smith’s translation of Matthew 3:8–11 clarifies that John the Baptist wrestled with the Pharisees and Sadducees concerning their personal need to receive him as the forerunner of the Messiah, preaching repentance and baptizing with water (JST Matt. 3:38–40). Apparently, they believed that they were acceptable before God by virtue of their birth as children of Abraham without repentance or entering into the waters of baptism. As heirs of the Abrahamic covenant by birth, they evidently recognized no further need to covenant with God. Latter-day revelation indicates that the Pharisees had a ritual they designated as baptism (JST Matt. 9:18–20). It is possible that this referred to the ritual immersion of the *mikvah* washings. However, it is not clear what the baptism of the Pharisees in New Testament times implied. Of course the baptism of the Pharisees was not a gospel ordinance of salvation by which they entered into a covenant with God through Jesus Christ. John taught of a baptism that followed repentance and a willingness to receive the Messiah, who John bore record was coming after him. Yet, as previously stated, the doctrine of baptism as a required means to enter into a covenant with God is not readily clear in the Gospels.

The Book of Mormon clarifies the covenant nature of baptism. This principle is illustrated in the account of the ministry of the prophet Alma. During the trial of the prophet Abinadi, Alma sat in judgment of him as one of King Noah’s priests. Alma’s heart

was pricked and he accepted the message of the brave prophet. Upon challenging the court of the wicked King Noah, Alma was forced to go into hiding to save his life. He resorted to a place called the waters of Mormon. Many others sought out Alma at the waters of Mormon, where he taught them the things he had heard Abinadi preach. Alma's instructions to those who were with him dealt with "repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord" (Mosiah 18:7). This group of people were "desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and [were] willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [were] willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

The invitation that Alma extended to this people to be baptized clarifies a purpose of the ordinance of baptism as a witness that those baptized enter into a covenant with the Lord: "Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments"? (Mosiah 18:10). Therefore, the Book of Mormon teaches that baptism is a means by which individuals covenant with the Lord that they are willing to take upon them his name and to serve him to the end. Further, the baptismal covenant includes promises to minister to the needy, whether that ministry be to lighten burdens, to mourn with mourners, or to comfort those in need. In essence, the covenant is that the individual will stand in the stead of Jesus Christ, representing him, and minister to others.

A further example of the covenant of baptism is the account of the people of King Limhi, who were contemporaries of Alma and his people. They also desired "to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts" (Mosiah 21:35). The importance of baptism is underscored by its covenant nature: that the Father would require baptism as necessary for salvation is due in part to the covenant that is established with God through the ordinance of baptism.

A covenant consists of promises exchanged. In the case of baptism, the baptized individuals promise or covenant to "take upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end" (D&C 20:37). God also promises or covenants to

pour his spirit out upon those who enter into the baptismal covenant. John the Baptist testified to his listeners, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11). The baptism of the Holy Ghost that God gives to those who are baptized by water is confirmed and clarified throughout the Book of Mormon.

The Holy Ghost is given as a gift from God. Christ promised that "after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized" (3 Ne. 12:1). Entering into the covenant of baptism prepares the repentant individual for the reception of this gift from God. Alma the Younger invited those of his day to "come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins" (Alma 7:14). The cleansing from sin that accompanies the ordinance of baptism is an initial and essential step in becoming spotless before God. Jesus indicates that this cleansing is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven, as has been previously discussed: "And no unclean thing can enter into [the Father's] kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end" (3 Ne. 27:19). Jesus then explains that baptism alone will not bring about the necessary cleansing. His commandment to the Nephites illustrates that baptism is part of the process of cleansing: "Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Ne. 27:20). Thus, baptism by water symbolizes and anticipates the cleansing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost.

Therefore, in its proper place and in the proper perspective as taught in the Book of Mormon, baptism is the witness to God that the individual desires to enter into a covenant with him and to be washed clean of sin: "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" (Moro. 8:26). As a blessing and gift from God, the baptism of the Holy Ghost follows baptism by water and sanctifies the individual, thus making the individual "without spot" and worthy of the kingdom of God.

The Baptism of Jesus Christ

The only baptism recorded in the Gospels in which the baptized individual is identified is that of the Savior, Jesus Christ. His baptism becomes the prototype, the supreme example for all Christians. Matthew relates: "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:13-14). The implication is that John was more in need of being baptized by Jesus than the Savior was in need of being baptized by John. Indeed, given the understanding that baptism is an ordinance that is for the remission of sins, why would the Son of God need to be baptized? In response to this question Jesus answered John: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

Nephi asked the following question concerning the Savior's baptism: "And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?" (2 Nephi 31:6). He then answered his own question: "Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments" (31:7). Nephi continued his explanation, implying that the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Son of God was a means by which God the Father testified of the righteousness of his son in submitting to the ordinance of baptism at the hands of John: "Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove" (31:8). Nephi further explained an additional purpose for the Savior to submit to the ordinance of baptism: "And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them. And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we

shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father? And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son. And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do" (31:9-12).

Therefore, Nephi's teachings in the Book of Mormon clearly explain that the Savior's baptism was an integral part of his mission as the Messiah. His life was the example given for all men to follow and thus to enter back into the presence of God. Those individuals who follow the example of Jesus Christ are promised that they, likewise, will receive a testimony from God the Father that they have done righteously. As previously discussed, the gift of the Holy Ghost is promised to all those who will humble themselves before the Father, as the Savior did, and are immersed in water by one with authority from the Lord. Nephi further clarified that in being baptized, Christ condescended from his godly state of perfection and a fulness of glory to a new state of being in mortality, thus fulfilling the will of the Father by providing the example for humankind to follow. This concept was explained to Nephi by an angel. Nephi recorded: "And the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God! And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove" (1 Ne. 11:26-27).

The Manner and Authority of Baptism

Specific instructions as to the actual manner of administering the ordinance of baptism are not contained in the Gospels. However, inferences can be made from the accounts of the ministry of John the Baptist. It is recorded that John "was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized" (John 3:23). Thus, one could surmise that much water was needed to administer baptism. Concerning the baptism of the Savior the Joseph Smith Translation affirms that "John went down into the water and baptized him" (JST Matt.

3:44). Further, Matthew states, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water" (Matt. 3:16). Therefore, the Gospels indicate that the individual administering the baptism enters the water and that the individual baptized is also in the water and comes out of the water following the baptism. However, today in Christianity there are different modes of administering baptism. Even among the Book of Mormon peoples there was some confusion concerning the manner of administering baptism. One of the first items the Savior addressed in his ministry among the Nephites was the manner in which baptism is to be administered:

And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you. Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ,⁴ I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name. . . . And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been (3 Ne. 11:22-28).

Thus the Book of Mormon leaves no room for error in the manner of administering baptism. How great is the goodness of God in giving those of the latter days instructions of such clarity! As a result there is unity in the kingdom of God on earth in which we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

The Gospels record John the Baptist's testimony that another had sent him to baptize (John 1:33). However, the Gospels provide no specific information concerning John's explanation, if he gave any, on who it was that sent him. Jesus taught that John's authority to baptize came from God. He testified of John, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Matt. 11:10). Thus, John was sent by God and authorized by him to be his messenger in calling the people to repentance and baptizing them. In addition to John the Baptist, the Gospels also record that the disciples of

Jesus baptized during the Savior's lifetime (John 4:1-2) and were commissioned to baptize all those who believed in him following his resurrection (Matt. 28:19). In contrast, the Savior rejected the baptism of the Pharisees. As revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith during his inspired translation of the book of Matthew, the Pharisees confronted the Lord: "Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seeing we keep the whole law? But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law. I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth you nothing. For when that which is new is come, the old is ready to be put away (JST Matt. 9:18-21).

In addition to whatever apostate implications accompanied the Pharisees' ritual of baptism, the issue at hand was one of authority. Did the authority rest with the Pharisaical tradition or with Jesus of Nazareth? President Joseph F. Smith addressed the topic of proper authority: "As to the question of authority, nearly everything depends upon it. No ordinance can be performed to the acceptance of God without divine authority. No matter how fervently men may believe or pray, unless they are endowed with divine authority they can only act in their own name, and not legally nor acceptably in the name of Jesus Christ, in whose name all these things must be done."⁵

The Book of Mormon affirms that authority is necessary to administer the ordinance of baptism. For example, as recorded in Mosiah: "And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people were desirous to be baptized; but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant. Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren, who had fled into the wilderness. They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts; nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter" (Mosiah 21:33-35). The account "given hereafter" is recorded concerning the uniting of Limhi's people with the main body of Nephites in Zarahemla. Alma the Elder had authority and responsibility over the Church of Christ in Zarahemla: "And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things, and had made an end of speaking to them, that king

Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized; and all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also. Therefore, Alma did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of Mormon; yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God; and this because of their belief on the words of Alma" (25:17-18).

The prerequisite that an individual have authority to baptize continued throughout the Book of Mormon both before and after the coming of the Savior to America. Previous to the Lord's ministry to the Nephites "there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins" (3 Ne. 7:25). As indicated above, the Book of Mormon also clarifies that authority to baptize is received by ordination from an individual who is in authority, such as the prophet Nephi. Moroni indicated that individuals were ordained by others having authority who "laid their hands upon them" (Moro. 3:2) and uttered appropriate words relating to the particular calling.

During the Lord's resurrected ministry he taught Nephi that authority to baptize was a power that comes from him: "And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven. And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize" (3 Ne. 11:21-22). It was during the translation of the Book of Mormon that the Prophet Joseph Smith learned that he needed authority from God in order to baptize: "We still continued the work of translation, when, in the ensuing month (May 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found mentioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying: *Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and*

this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness" (JS-H 1:68-69).

Through Repentance and Baptism, Gentiles Become Members of the House of Israel

John the Baptist alluded to the relationship between repentance and baptism, and being numbered among the seed of Abraham, when he chastened the Pharisees and Sadducees for believing that they were saved because of their relationship to Abraham: "Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Luke 3:7-8). Further, the Joseph Smith Translation of this passage reveals that John also chastened them for believing: "We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham" (JST Matt. 3:36). Joseph Smith taught that John was referring to the Gentiles as the stones mentioned: "Of these stony Gentiles—these dogs—to raise up children unto Abraham."⁶ In addition, he also taught that "the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham."⁷

The Book of Mormon explains a process by which the Gentile stones mentioned by John can be raised up by God as children unto Abraham. That process involves the ordinance of baptism. In addition, the Book of Mormon provides important insight into what John may have had reference to regarding stones becoming the children of Abraham. While in America the Savior referred to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, saying: "For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me and be baptized in my name and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel" (3 Ne. 21:6). As further clarification, Mormon was commanded to write these words of Jesus Christ in addition to those just cited: "Turn, all ye Gentiles,

from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, . . . and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel" (30:2). Therefore, the stones identified with the house of Israel or, as John taught, those stones who are raised up as children of Abraham, are Gentiles who repent and come unto Christ, being baptized in his name. As Nephi testified, "For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off" (2 Ne. 30:2).

Entering the Gate

No relationship between baptism and the sacrament is mentioned in the Gospel accounts. However, in the Book of Mormon Jesus Christ taught that the sacramental bread and wine were to be given "unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name" (3 Ne. 18:5). Similar to the baptismal covenants, the sacrament is a witness to the Father that the partaker is willing to remember Jesus Christ and to keep his commandments. Moreover, not only is the sacrament for baptized individuals, it is a commandment that those who are baptized be given the opportunity to partake of the sacrament. The Lord instructed his disciples in ancient America: "And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (18:11). Thus the sacrament was also identified with baptism in that the promise of the Spirit accompanies both ordinances. Indeed, Alma the Elder taught that the Lord would "pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon" those who were baptized (Mosiah 18:10).

Another area that is not mentioned in connection with baptism in the Gospels but is included in the Book of Mormon is that baptism is the means by which an individual becomes a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. This concept is illustrated and explained in the account of Alma the Elder and his followers who were baptized at the waters of Mormon: "He did baptize every

one that went forth to the place of Mormon; and they were in number about two hundred and four souls; yea, and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God. And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church" (Mosiah 18:16-17). Baptism is the means by which individuals are recipients of the blessings of coming into the fold of God with others who have also been baptized and have covenanted to "bear one another's burdens, . . . mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (18:8-9). Indeed, the Book of Mormon records: "After they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith" (Moro. 6:4). Therefore, baptism brings the additional blessing of being part of a covenant community, the Church of Jesus Christ. In addition to the blessing of the gift of the Holy Ghost to guide the baptized individual, there are also fellow Saints who desire to help one another keep the covenants they have made with God.

The Savior taught: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14). He clearly testified that good works were necessary parts of living the gospel he taught (see Matthew 5-7). Receiving the ordinance of baptism and being numbered in the Church of Jesus Christ does not guarantee that the recipient will enter into the kingdom of God. Not only are repentance and worthiness required prior to baptism, but the baptized individual needs to honor the covenant made in the waters of baptism to serve God and keep his commandments. In the true and proper perspective of the fulness of the gospel, as made known in the Book of Mormon, baptism is a beginning. Nephi explained:

For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which

leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive.

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen (2 Ne. 31:17-21).

More than five hundred years after Nephi lived, the Savior reemphasized to the people of ancient America that they must endure in faith following baptism: "And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world" (3 Ne. 27:16).

Questions concerning the necessity of baptism for little children, even for newborn infants, have been left unanswered by the Gospel writers. Indeed, those who oppose infant baptism point to the silence of the New Testament on the subject as indirect evidence that it was not practiced. However, the New Testament is also silent about postponing baptism until later years and maturity.⁸ The Savior taught that without baptism an individual is damned, but the Book of Mormon clarifies questions concerning infant baptism and the damnation of those who are not baptized. Mormon wrote to his son Moroni concerning the condemnation of unbaptized infants. He wrote that "little children need no repentance, neither baptism" (Moro. 8:11). A major clarification made by the Book of Mormon concerning the necessity of the ordinance of baptism is that those who are not "accountable and

capable of committing sin" (8:10) are saved through Jesus Christ's atonement and the power of his redemption. Moreover, not only is the baptism of little children unnecessary, but Mormon also wrote that the Holy Ghost had made manifest to him that "it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children" (8:9).

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon is a treasure of testimony and clarification concerning the teachings contained in the Gospels of the New Testament on the doctrine of baptism. From additional revelation in the Book of Mormon, the reader of the Gospels may come to a more complete understanding of this doctrine. In addition, the richness of the Book of Mormon accounts confirm that the Gospels' teachings concerning baptism are true. Likewise, the Book of Mormon clarifies other concepts important to understanding the place of baptism in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Notes

1. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 211-12.
2. Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 47-48.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:104-5.
4. D&C 20:73 clarifies that priesthood holders today are to use the words "Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ" in place of the Book of Mormon account that uses the words "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ."
5. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 102.

6. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 319.

7. *Ibid.*, 150.

8. W. F. Flemington, "Baptism," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:352.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

11

Rex C. Reeve Jr.

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the starting point for all who would be his true followers. How, then, does one develop faith and become a disciple of Christ? The Book of Mormon and modern revelation answer this important question by defining, clarifying, and supporting the teachings of the New Testament. Through a study of the Book of Mormon, individuals can learn how to develop their own personal faith.

Joseph Smith declared faith to be the foundational principle of the gospel when he wrote, "We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (A of F 4). This brief statement emphasizes the importance of faith in Jesus Christ and establishes it as the starting principle for all who would be true followers of Christ.

During his earthly ministry, as recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament, Christ recognized, measured, and rewarded the faith of his followers. He taught and demonstrated that the faithful would be rewarded with healings and forgiveness of sins, and eventually eternal life. Christ required his followers to demonstrate their faith in him by righteous living and service to others. The necessity and rewards of faith are clearly taught in the Gospels; however, these books do not give a clear definition of faith, nor do they give many specific steps to developing personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon provides support and doctrinal insights for the teachings of the Gospels regarding the role and necessity of faith in Jesus Christ. In the Book of Mormon, Christ recognized, measured, and rewarded the faith of his followers and required them to demonstrate their faith in him by righteous living and service to others. In addition, the Book of Mormon provides a simple definition of faith and specific instructions concerning how individuals can develop their own personal faith. The purpose of this article is to show how the Book of Mormon supports, clarifies, and defines New Testament teachings regarding faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith to be Healed and Forgiven

From the accounts given in the Gospels of the New Testament, it is clear that many of the healings and miracles Jesus performed were the result of the faith of those who were involved. For example: (1) When the woman who had been diseased with an issue of blood for twelve years touched the hem of the Savior's garment, she was immediately healed. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour" (Matt. 9:22). (2) When Jesus was visiting the region of Tyre and Sidon, a Phoenician woman requested that he bless her daughter who was possessed of a devil. The woman demonstrated great faith when she said, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. . . . But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour" (15:22, 24-28). (3) "And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (8:2-3). (4) Lastly, when Jesus was in Capernaum, a Roman centurion demonstrated his faith in seeking a blessing for his servant who

was sick with palsy. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. . . . And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour" (8:10, 13).

The Book of Mormon confirms and clarifies the testimony of the Gospels that the Savior does recognize, measure, and reward the faith of his followers. For instance: (1) After the family of Lehi obtained the plates of brass and were joined in the wilderness by Ishmael's family, Nephi said to his brothers, "Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him?" (1 Ne. 7:12). (2) As Lehi and company were preparing to continue their journey in the wilderness, to his great astonishment Lehi discovered at his tent door a brass ball of curious workmanship. The ball pointed the way they should travel in the wilderness. "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them" (16:28). (3) When Zeezrom lay sick with a burning fever, "Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ. And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk" (Alma 15:10-11). (4) Perhaps the capstone example of this principle occurred near the end of the first day of the Savior's visit to the American continent when he said, "I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you" (3 Ne. 17:8). The multitude went forth and all were healed. Christ also blessed the little children and prayed mightily to the Father in behalf of those assembled. As they arose from the earth Christ declared, "Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now my joy is full" (17:20). Faith in Jesus Christ provides the means to receive great blessings, particularly the healing of physical, emotional, psychological, and moral ailments that are part of this mortal experience.

The Gospels record that faith in Christ brings individuals a forgiveness of sins. The following are examples: (1) When Jesus entered Simon's house, a certain woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. "And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:48, 50). (2) "And, behold, they brought to him a

man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. . . . But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house" (Matt. 9:2, 6-7).

The Book of Mormon provides a powerful second witness that faith in Christ brings forgiveness of sin: (1) Nephi was told in a vision that the twelve ministers who will stand to judge his people "are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white [sins forgiven] in his blood" (1 Ne. 12:10). (2) After Enos prayed a long time, with great effort, he said, "And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed. . . . Wherefore, my guilt was swept away. . . . [And the Lord said,] wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole" (Enos 1:5-6, 8). (3) When Jesus was defining and explaining his gospel, he emphasized the importance of faith leading to forgiveness of sin when he said, "And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end" (3 Ne. 27:19).

Another clear teaching in the New Testament is that faith in Jesus Christ and belief on his name bring individuals the blessings of everlasting life: (1) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). (2) "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (3:14-16). (3) At the death of Lazarus, Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (11:25). (4) Near the conclusion of his Gospel, John summed up his main purpose in writing by saying, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (20:31).

The Book of Mormon again supports and clarifies the doctrine that salvation and everlasting life come through faith in Jesus Christ. For example, Benjamin taught, "And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name" (Mosiah 3:9). Furthermore, Nephi explained that the brazen serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness was symbolic of Christ being lifted up in completing the Atonement (Hel. 8:14), and in both cases those with faith to look would be saved: "And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal" (8:15). Mormon taught his son Moroni that, "By the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing. . . . And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith, they became the sons of God" (Moro. 7:25–26). Mormon also taught, "And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise" (7:41).

A Definition of Faith in Jesus Christ

The Gospels of the New Testament help to define faith, but any definition we develop will be incomplete without the information available from the writings of Paul, the Book of Mormon, and modern revelation. In writing to the Hebrews, Paul said, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

Alma, when teaching the Zoramites, said the following about faith: "And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (Alma 32:21).

Moroni added to our definition when he said, "And now I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; . . . for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6).

The *Lectures on Faith* give us two more clarifying points that add to our definition: "Let us here observe, that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. First, the idea that he actually exists. Secondly, a *correct* idea of his character, perfections, and attributes."¹ John wrote, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Given the foregoing statements, the following four elements comprise the definition of faith:

1. One comes to know the true Christ having never seen him.

Some might ask, "Is it even possible to know someone you have never seen?" I think most people would say, "Yes, you can know people you have never seen." Examples include a pen pal, a writer such as Shakespeare, a relative, or a prophet such as Joseph Smith or Moses. I feel like I know my great grandfather who died many years before I was born. I have heard stories of his faithful life, I have read his missionary journal, and I have developed a love for him that grows stronger as I learn more about him. I feel the same love and acquaintance with the Prophet Joseph Smith. I have never seen him, but I have read from those who did know him. I have read many of his writings and have felt the Holy Ghost testify to my soul that he is a true prophet. In those same ways a person can come to know Jesus Christ.

Another important consideration is that getting to know someone (whether we have seen the person or not) is a gradual process, starting from a casual acquaintance to a deep, personal relationship. At first we learn a few basic facts about the person such as the name, family situation, hometown, and so forth. As time passes it is possible to know what the person thinks and believes, and even what some of the person's deepest desires and concerns are.

In coming to know the true Christ, having never seen him, individuals must start by having in their mind and in their heart the idea that Christ actually does exist. The *Lectures on Faith* teach that "it was by reason of the knowledge of his existence that there was a foundation laid for the exercise of faith in him; . . . for faith could not center in a Being of whose existence we have no idea."²

At this point, individuals do not have a perfect knowledge of Christ but have been told that there is a Christ. Now they must decide what they will do with this new truth. Will they reject and ignore it, or will they nurture and expand it and seek to learn more? This is the first test of one's faith. Alma pleaded with those he had taught about the true Christ that they pass this first test and let this little seed of faith grow in their hearts. "Now, as I said concerning faith – that it was not a perfect knowledge – even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first. . . . But behold, if ye will exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" (Alma 32:26-27).

After a person desires to nurture and expand the seed of truth planted in the heart, the next step is to learn more truth about the true Christ. I stress the word *truth* because faith sufficient to lead to eternal life can only be based in truth – false ideas and teachings about Christ lead to fear and uncertainty. The test of one's faith, at this point, is how sincerely and diligently the person seeks more truth and discerns between truth and error. A person would continue progressing by learning the facts and details of Christ's earthly ministry – where he went, what he did, and what he said. The Gospels of the New Testament and the words of the prophets serve as a principal source. On this foundation one must add knowledge of the true characteristics of Christ.

Individuals must know that Christ existed, "that he was God before the world was created" and that he actually created the heavens and the earth. They must know that Christ is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness," and that he is "from everlasting to everlasting"; that he "changes not," he is the same "yesterday, today, and forever; and that his course is one eternal round, without variation." They must know that he is a God of truth and love, and cannot lie. He is no respecter of persons, and all who fear him and work righteousness are accepted of him.³ Learning these and other truths causes faith in Christ to increase.

For those seeking to know the true Christ, at some point the witness of the Holy Ghost is available to them. Nephi taught that those who entered in by the gate "have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son" (2 Ne. 31:18). Alma taught, "Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your

heart, . . . if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves – It must needs be that this is a good seed, . . . for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea it beginneth to be delicious to me” (Alma 32:28). This sure witness of the true Christ, born by the Holy Ghost, is the most important experience in coming to know Christ. This experience can be more powerful than actually seeing him.

If individuals set a goal to increase their faith in Christ, they are really determining to know him better even without seeing him. It is hard to know how to increase one’s faith directly, but there are ways to get to know him better. A person can read the words of those who knew Christ personally, learn more of his attributes, read the words that he spoke, and seek the witness of the Holy Ghost. No matter what age one is or what spiritual condition one is in, one can always find ways to increase knowledge and understanding of Christ. This is another test of one’s faith: to see if one will continue, over a lifetime, to seek to increase one’s knowledge of the true Christ.

2. As one comes to know the true Christ, having never seen him, one’s love for him increases.

Faith is built on the foundation of knowing Christ, as discussed above, but true faith includes feelings and actions. When Jesus was asked by the lawyer which was the first great commandment in the law, “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38). Mormon taught that “charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moro. 7:47).

As individuals come to know Christ and his attributes, their love for him increases. When they learn who he really is and what he did for us, what we could not do for ourselves, the Spirit causes their hearts to swell with gratitude, appreciation, and overwhelming feelings of love. Mormon pleaded with those reading the Book of Mormon, saying “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed

upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him" (Moro. 7:48).

President Benson taught that loving God requires total commitment. "To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is all-consuming and all-encompassing. It is no lukewarm endeavor. It is total commitment of our very being—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—to a love of the Lord."⁴ Alma told Helaman, "Let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever" (Alma 37:36). This seems to be another test of people's faith, to see if they will center their thoughts and affections on the Lord. Again, if individuals say they want to increase their faith, they are saying they want to increase their love for Christ.

3. As one's love for the Savior increases, one also experiences an increased desire and ability to be obedient to his commandments and do things his way.

In addition to teaching that an individual must have the idea that God exists and must gain a knowledge of his characteristics, the *Lectures on Faith* teach that the third requirement for exercising faith in God is "an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to [God's] will." The question was asked, "Would an idea of these three things lay a sure foundation for the exercise of faith in God, so as to obtain life and salvation? It would; for by the idea of these three things, faith could become perfect and fruitful, abounding in righteousness unto the praise and glory of God."⁵

The great plan of God included the creation of this earth, which provided a place where the spirit children of the Father could receive their physical bodies and test their obedience to his commandments. Abraham heard the Lord say, "We will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25). "And [the Lord] gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship" (D&C 20:19). Christ taught, "But if

thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17), and "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

The conscious choice to be obedient to the commandments of God and to reject the enticings of Satan is the highest expression of man's agency. Lehi taught his son Jacob, "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. . . . Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other" (2 Ne. 2:11, 16). Lehi concluded his teachings by saying, "Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh. . . . And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2:27).

President Benson gave three summary guidelines when he said, "*The great test of this life* is obedience to God. *The great task of this life* is to learn the will of the Lord and then do it. *The great commandment of this life* is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.'"⁶

To know and love Christ and to want to do things his way rather than some other way is the essence of faith in Jesus Christ. It would be inconsistent to say one has faith in Christ and then willingly disobey his commandments. The degree of individuals' faith in Christ is not measured by what they say about him but by their obedience to him. In simple terms, individuals know that their faith in Christ is increasing when what they want to do and what Christ would do are the same. Obedience or disobedience is another test of one's faith. Again, if individuals say they want to increase their faith in Christ, what they are really saying is they want to be more obedient to him. Anyone at any stage of life can find ways to improve obedience.

4. As faith in Christ increases, there follows an increased desire to serve others by helping them gain faith in Christ.

In the New Testament, Christ told Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Just before Christ ascended into heaven he appeared to the apostles at the sea of Galilee and asked Peter three times if he loved him. Each time Peter responded, "Thou knowest that I love thee," and each time

Jesus responded, "Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep. . . . Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

In the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the New Testament and in the Book of Mormon, Christ taught that his true followers are given the opportunity and the privilege of influencing others when he told them they were the salt of the earth, or a light to his people. Salt that does not influence others has lost its value and must be cast out. Concerning being a light, Christ said, "Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (3 Ne. 12:16; see also Matt. 5:16). When father Lehi tasted of the fruit of the tree which was more sweet than he had ever before tasted, he immediately desired that his family share it with him: "And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit" (1 Ne. 8:12). After their conversion, the four sons of Mosiah gave up the opportunity to become king over the Nephites in order to preach the gospel to the Lamanites. They had been guilty of serious sins and realized the terrible punishment they faced. Through sincere repentance they overcame their sins and desired to help others experience the peace and joy they had received: "Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble. And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them" (Mosiah 28:3-4).

The best example of this principle is probably Alma the Younger. After he was converted to the Lord, he began from that time forth to go throughout all the land preaching the word of God in much tribulation. Later in his life he told his son Helaman, "Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost (Alma 36:24).

To know, love, obey, and serve Christ by bringing others closer to him brings a fulness of faith. It would be inconsistent for individuals to say they have faith in Christ but then refuse to lift

and serve others. In fact, as a person's faith increases, there follows an overpowering desire to bless and lift all of the Lord's children. Again, one's degree of faith is not measured by what one says about Christ but by Christ-like actions toward others. Any person at any stage of life can find ways to serve others.

Conclusion

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel and is the starting point for all who would be true followers of Christ. The necessity and importance of faith in Jesus Christ has been clearly taught by true prophets—past and present. The Gospels of the New Testament and the Book of Mormon both teach that faith is rewarded with healings and other miracles, with forgiveness of sins, and with the blessings of eternal life. In addition, the Book of Mormon and modern revelation provide a simple definition of faith and specific instructions concerning how individuals can develop their own personal faith.

1. One comes to know the true Christ having never seen him.
2. As one comes to know the true Christ, having never seen him, one's love for him increases.
3. As one's love for the Savior increases, one also experiences an increased desire and ability to be obedient to his commandments and do things his way.
4. As faith in Christ increases, there follows an increased desire to serve others by helping them gain faith in Christ.

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Notes

1. *Lectures on Faith*, comp. N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 33; lecture 3, paragraphs 2-4.
2. *Ibid.*, 33; lecture 3, paragraph 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 35; lecture 3, paragraphs 12-18.

4. Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1988, 3.
5. *Lectures on Faith*, 33, 38; lecture 3, paragraph 5 and corresponding question and answer.
6. Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1988, 5–6.

*Gethsemane and Golgotha:
Why and What the Savior
Suffered*

12

Bruce Satterfield

The Atonement is the greatest event in history because it enables us, as fallen humans, to return to our Father in Heaven. Most of Christianity bases its knowledge of the Atonement on the teachings found in the New Testament. But these teachings are incomplete and often insufficient, because the New Testament does not contain the fullness of doctrine. Thus the Lord brought forth the Book of Mormon to clarify the important doctrine of the Atonement.

The four Gospels were written to testify that Jesus is the Christ, whose sacred mission was to make an atonement for all of God's children. With this in mind, the climax of each Gospel is a narration of the historical events associated with the atoning sacrifice in Gethsemane and Golgotha. It was not the intent of the Gospels, however, to present a complete theological treatise on the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the Gospels do not provide a clear explanation as to the need for the Atonement, nor do they present a total picture of what the Savior actually suffered. Speaking of this, William Wolf wrote, "There is no single New Testament doctrine of the Atonement — there is simply a collection of images and metaphors with some preliminary analysis and reflection from which subsequent tradition built its systematic doctrines and theories."¹ The theories developed by Christian theologians regarding the Atonement have generally confused

the doctrine.² Therefore, to the Christian world the Atonement has remained "an expression of the mystery of God."³

One purpose of the Book of Mormon is to provide a second witness that Jesus is the Christ. As part of that witness the reality of the Atonement is confirmed within the Book of Mormon's sacred pages. The Book of Mormon does more than that, however. President Ezra Taft Benson taught that it "provides the most complete explanation of the doctrine of the Atonement."⁴ The Book of Mormon reveals the *need* for the Atonement. Further, it clarifies *what* Christ suffered for humankind.

Understanding why there is a need for the Atonement of Christ is critical to accepting him. President Benson observed, "Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ."⁵ Why there is a need for the Atonement will first be considered from the perspective of the four Gospels. Following this will be the testimony and additional information found in the Book of Mormon.

The Gospels divulge little as to the need for the Atonement. Nonetheless, several statements reveal a world in trouble with Jesus Christ providing the only way of escape. The Savior himself said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16-17). He then said that he who believes on him would not be condemned, while he "that believeth not is condemned already" (John 3:18). Why? "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19-20).

The Gospels teach that man's salvation will come at the expense of the Savior's own life, for he will give "his life" for the world (John 10:10-18). This sacrifice will be "a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The Savior's life will be sacrificed by the shedding of his blood (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20). His sacrifice will bring a remission of sins (Matt. 26:28). This offering will be voluntary (John 10:18) but will be the will of the Father (John 3:16-17; 6:38-40). After laying down his life, the Savior will have "power

to take it again" (John 10:17, 18) through the power of the Resurrection (John 11:25). The death and Resurrection of the Savior will give life to the world (John 6:51; 10:10).

To these statements, the Book of Mormon adds not only a confirming voice but also a wealth of information that greatly clarifies the need for the Atonement. In so doing, the Book of Mormon answers such questions as these: How did men arrive at a state of condemnation in which they love darkness rather than light? Why has God allowed this to happen? Why must there be a sacrifice for sin? Cannot God simply dismiss one's evil acts when one repents? Why must God's son be a sacrifice for our sins? What did the Savior suffer? The answers to these questions are indispensable in understanding the need for the Atonement.

The Divine Plan

Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated, "Fundamental to a man's understanding about his identity and purpose upon this planet is to know that God has a plan of salvation. . . . Yet there are no references to 'a plan' of salvation as such in the Old or the New Testament."⁶ Surely, biblical prophets understood the plan of salvation, for they refer to elements of the plan. Yet in its present form, the Bible does not refer to an overall plan that God has for humankind. The Book of Mormon, however, speaks of a divine plan that is variously called the plan of deliverance (2 Ne. 11:5), the plan of redemption (Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:25-33), the plan of salvation (Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14; 42:5), the plan of restoration (Alma 41:2), the plan of happiness (Alma 42:8, 16), and the plan of mercy (Alma 42:15, 31).

The Book of Mormon shows that the Atonement is part of this divine plan. God did not develop and enact this plan after some unforeseen trouble into which we had brought ourselves. Instead, the Book of Mormon teaches that this plan was "prepared from the foundation of the world" (1 Ne. 10:18; Mosiah 15:19; Alma 12:25, 30; 22:13; Ether 3:14). In view of this preparation, Elder Orson F. Whitney taught, "Bear in mind that the Gospel of Christ is not a mere life boat or fire escape—a way out of a perilous situation. It is all this and more. It is the path to endless glory and exaltation, the plan of eternal progression, designed by the wisdom of the Gods before the foundation of the world."⁷

The Book of Mormon reveals that three important events work together to bring about God's plan: the creation of the earth, the Fall of Adam, and the Atonement of Christ. Moroni taught that God "created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. Behold he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man. And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord" (Morm. 9:11-13).

A knowledge of the relationship between the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement is essential to understanding man's true relationship with God. This is seen in the account of Aaron teaching the king of the Lamanites. Before Aaron arrived, the king knew little of God and his dealings with his children (Alma 22:7-11). After Aaron had taught the king some initial principles about God and saw that the king believed his teachings, Aaron

began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king – how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen.

And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.

And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king (Alma 22:12-14).

After he discovered his true relationship with God, the king's greatest desire was to rectify his fallen condition and gain eternal life (Alma 22:15-18). Ammon, Aaron's brother, taught King Lamoni in the same manner with similar results (see Alma 18:24-42). It is fundamental to the theology of the Book of Mormon that before one can fully appreciate the need for the Atonement, a correct understanding of the purpose of the creation of the earth and the Fall of Adam is essential.

What role do the Creation and the Fall play in the plan of salvation and the need for the Atonement? Lehi taught that God “created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are,” including “our first parents” (2 Ne. 2:14–15). In their initial creation, Adam and Eve were “in a state of innocence,” where they knew “no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23). Lehi stated that “to bring about his eternal purposes,” God placed in the garden of Eden two opposing trees – the tree of life opposite the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2 Ne. 2:15). This opposition was indispensable to the “eternal purposes” of God’s plan. Lehi explained, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Ne. 2:11). Opposition is essential in order to have genuine and accurate knowledge.⁸ The Lord stated that “if [men] never should have bitter they could not know the sweet” (D&C 29:39). Only by experiencing opposites can we comprehend, for opposition gives definition. Elder Orson Pratt explained: “The tree of knowledge of good and evil was placed there that man might gain certain information he never could have gained otherwise; by partaking of the forbidden fruit he experienced misery, then he knew that he was once happy, previously he could not comprehend what happiness meant, what good was; but now he knows it by contrast, now he is filled with sorrow and wretchedness, now he sees the difference between his former and present condition.”⁹

The purpose of the creation of this earth was to provide a place where opposites not only exist but are experienced. Brigham Young observed, “Facts are made apparent to the human mind by their opposites. We find ourselves surrounded in this mortality by an almost endless combination of opposites, through which we must pass to gain experience and information to fit us for an eternal progression.”¹⁰ Lehi concluded that if opposites did not exist, the earth would “have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation” (2 Ne. 2:12). With no opposites there could be “no joy,” for there would be “no misery” (2 Ne. 2:23). The earth was created, therefore, that man “might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25), and joy can only come by experiencing misery.

The Fall and Its Effects

Though forbidden by God,¹¹ eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was necessary for Adam and Eve. Eating the fruit brought about the Fall. Though the Fall was a necessary part of God's plan, from a human perspective the Fall brought both positive and negative results. Understanding these effects is essential, for as President Ezra Taft Benson taught, "No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon all mankind."¹²

The Book of Mormon describes the positive results of eating the fruit as twofold. First, Adam and Eve could have children. As a result, God's children could continue their progression by coming from premortality to mortality (2 Ne. 2:20-25). Second, because of the mortal experience, Adam, Eve, and their posterity could "be as God, knowing good and evil" (2 Ne. 2:18). These positive results are confirmed in the book of Moses, where Eve declared, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil" (Moses 5:11).

Acquiring a knowledge of good and evil is vital for God's children. Without it they could not become as he is. Elder James E. Talmage wrote, "A knowledge of good and evil is essential to the advancement that God has made possible for His children to achieve; and this knowledge can be best gained by *actual experience*, with the contrasts of good and its opposite plainly discernible."¹³ Mortality is necessary to the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. Elder Talmage later said, "A knowledge of good and evil is essential to progress, and the school of experience in mortality has been provided for the acquirement of such knowledge."¹⁴ President George Q. Cannon explained this principle further: "It is for this purpose that we are here. God has given unto us this probation for the express purpose of obtaining a knowledge of good and evil—of understanding evil and being able to overcome the evil—and by overcoming it receive the exaltation and glory that He has in store for us."¹⁵ In light of this concept of understanding evil, at the beginning of World War I, the First Presidency gave the following instruction to the Church: "God, doubtless, could avert war, prevent crime, destroy poverty, chase

away darkness, overcome error, and make all things bright, beautiful and joyful. But this would involve the destruction of a vital and fundamental attribute in man—the right of agency. It is for the benefit of His sons and daughters that they become acquainted with evil as well as good, with darkness as well as light, with error as well as truth, and with the results of the infraction of eternal laws. Therefore he has permitted the evils which have been brought about by the acts of His creatures, but will control their ultimate results for His own glory and the progress and exaltation of His sons and daughters, when they have learned obedience by the things they suffer. The contrasts experienced in this world of mingled sorrow and joy are educational in their nature, and will be the means of raising humanity to a full appreciation of all that is right and true and good.”¹⁶

The negative side of all this is that the Fall brings dire consequences both in mortality and in eternity. An understanding of these consequences will explain why the Savior said men love “darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). It will also become clear why God simply cannot dismiss sin upon repentance without an atonement made for man.

The Book of Mormon reveals that the Fall of Adam brought upon Adam, Eve, and “all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 42:9; see also 2 Ne. 2:21; 9:6; Mosiah 16:3; Alma 12:22; Hel. 14:16). Together the death of the body and man’s separation from God comprise what the Book of Mormon calls the “first death” (Hel. 14:16). Mormon also called it “the curse of Adam” (Moro. 8:8).

With the Fall the physical nature of Adam and Eve changed. In the garden, Adam and Eve were in a deathless, immortal state. Because of the Fall, their bodies became mortal, subject to all of the ills and imperfections of mortality. This mortal condition continued with their children. Because of this, little children are born into a fallen condition. King Benjamin explained that although little children do not commit sin, nevertheless, because of “Adam, or by nature, they fall” (Mosiah 3:16). Elder Orson Pratt explained further: “Spirits, though pure and innocent, before they entered the body, would become contaminated by entering a fallen tabernacle; not contaminated by their own sins, but by their connection with a body brought into the world by the fall, earthly,

fallen, imperfect, and corrupt in its nature. A spirit, having entered such a tabernacle, though it may commit no personal sins, is unfit to return again into the presence of a holy Being.”¹⁷ This teaching is not to be confused with the theory of original sin espoused by many Christian theologians, wherein the total depravity of man is inborn.¹⁸

In this fallen state, man transgressed the laws of God, causing the natural man to “become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature” (Alma 42:10; see also D&C 20:20; Moses 5:13).¹⁹ Associated with the natural man are appetites and desires that, if left unchecked, are “contrary to the nature of God” (Alma 41:11), for the natural man craves the lusts of the world. Knowing this, Lehi admonished his sons not to give in to “the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate” (2 Ne. 2:29). It is because of the carnality of the natural man that the Savior said men “loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19).

Abinadi explained that the condition man inherited by the Fall is the very means by which he comes to the knowledge of good and evil. He taught that Satan “did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil” (Mosiah 16:3). Of this Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “From Father Adam we have inherited all the ills to which flesh is heir; but such are necessarily incident to a knowledge of good and evil, by the proper use of which knowledge man may become even as the Gods.”²⁰

Because of this condition, man’s relationship with God changed. The brother of Jared described this relationship while pleading with the Lord for a blessing: “We know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures [i.e., physical bodies] have become evil continually” (Ether 3:2). Further, King Benjamin stated that “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been since the fall of Adam” (Mosiah 3:19).

Beyond the mortal consequences, the Book of Mormon teaches that the Fall of Adam brought upon humankind eternal consequences. Jacob declared that because of the Fall, if there were no Atonement “our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the

devil, to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself" (2 Ne. 9:8-9). Elder Orson Pratt explained why this is so: "By one man came death – the death of the body. What becomes of the spirit when the body dies? Will it be perfectly happy? Would old father Adam's spirit have gone back into the presence of God, and dwelt there eternally, enjoying all the felicities and glories of heaven, after his body had died? No; for the penalty of that transgression was not limited to the body alone." He then explained: "When he sinned, it was with both the body and the spirit that he sinned: it was not only the body that ate of the fruit, but the spirit gave the will to eat; the spirit sinned therefore as well as the body; they were agreed in partaking of that fruit. Was not the spirit to suffer then as well as the body? Yes. How long? To all ages of eternity, without any end; while the body was to return back to its mother earth, and there slumber to all eternity." He then taught that without the Atonement of Christ, the Fall would have brought "an eternal dissolution of the body and spirit – the one to lie mingling with its mother earth, to all ages of eternity, and the other to be subject, throughout all future duration, to the power that deceived him, and led them astray; to be completely miserable."²¹

In addition to the eternal effects of the "curse of Adam," each person's own transgression of the laws of God also results in eternal consequences. Alma taught his son that each law of God has "a punishment affixed" (Alma 42:22). When a law is broken, justice demands that the penalty must be paid, for "justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:22). The penalty of a broken law is as "eternal as the life of the soul should be" (Alma 42:16). Elder Dallin H. Oaks stated, "According to eternal law, the consequences that follow from the justice of God are severe and permanent. When a commandment is broken, a commensurate penalty is imposed. This happens automatically."²² Therefore, Lehi taught that since all men violate the laws of God through sinful acts, "by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become

miserable forever" (2 Ne. 2:5). "And thus we see," said Alma, "that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence" (Alma 42:14).

Because of the negative consequences of the Fall, mankind is in trouble. According to the plan, men live and experience the knowledge of good and evil for themselves. To acquire that knowledge, they must suffer the effects of their fallen condition. They have become "carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature" (Alma 42:10), unworthy before God, and thus are shut out of his presence. This situation, if left unchecked, will bring upon humankind an unending misery, being eternally cast off from the presence of God.

The Atonement

The Book of Mormon teaches, "Since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself" (Alma 22:14). In essence, "man [has] fallen into a pit, and [is] unable to scale the sides thereof [to] emerge upon the plane above."²³ That is to say, man cannot deliver himself from his fallen condition and is in desperate need of help. That help comes through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Amulek taught, "According to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish" (Alma 34:9). Again, Jacob said, "If there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost" (Jacob 7:12). The Atonement of Jesus Christ will rectify each effect of man's fallen condition. Therefore, Lehi exclaimed, "How great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Ne. 2:8).

The Book of Mormon reveals that the Atonement of Christ redeems humankind from both "the curse of Adam" and from each man's personal fall. Redemption from the curse of Adam required a general atonement for all people. As already noted, humankind suffers a physical and spiritual death as a result of the Fall of Adam. This condition is the responsibility of Adam. Man is not liable. Therefore, the justice of God demands that an atonement be made for Adam's transgression to redeem humanity from

the curse of Adam.²⁴ Because of the Atonement for the Fall of Adam, man will be freed from both the physical death and the spiritual separation from God brought about because of the Fall.

Men are redeemed from the curse of Adam through the Resurrection of Christ. Moroni explained how: "And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death" (Morm. 9:13).²⁵ This verse reveals that the Resurrection redeems man not only from physical death but also from spiritual death, the state of being cut off from the presence of God. This is commonly misunderstood. Samuel the Lamanite taught: "For behold, [Christ] surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord. Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord" (Hel. 14:15–17).

Recall that Jacob taught that if there was no resurrection from the dead, men would become eternally enslaved to Satan. In this condition, they would remain forever in a state of misery (2 Ne. 9:8–9). However, because of the Atonement of Christ, all human-kind, "both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous" (Alma 11:44), will be resurrected and brought back into the presence of God. Thus they will escape the eternal misery associated with death.

Further, the sicknesses, diseases, and pains that have plagued lives since the Fall of Adam will cease to exist. Amulek explained that because of the Resurrection, "the spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be

restored to its proper frame" (Alma 11:43). Also, the Resurrection opens the way for the salvation of little children who die before the age of accountability. Christ stated, "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" (Moro. 8:8).

The universal redemption of humankind from the curse of Adam is free and unconditional. This is because man is not responsible for the mortal and eternal consequences that have come about as part of the Fall. Elder Orson Pratt wrote:

We believe, that through the sufferings, death, and atonement of Jesus Christ, all mankind, without one exception, are to be completely, and fully redeemed, both body and spirit, from the endless banishment and curse, to which they were consigned, by Adam's transgression; and that this universal salvation and redemption of the whole human family from the endless penalty of the original sin, is effected, without any conditions whatsoever on their part; that is, that they are not required to believe, or repent, or be baptized, or do any thing else, in order to be redeemed from that penalty; for whether they believe or disbelieve, whether they repent or remain impenitent, whether they are baptized or unbaptized, whether they keep the commandments or break them, whether they are righteous or unrighteous, it will make no difference in relation to their redemption, both soul and body, from the penalty of Adam's transgression.²⁶

While the Atonement for the Fall of Adam redeems people from spiritual death in that they are brought back into the presence of God, where they are to be judged, men will be accountable for their own actions while in mortality.²⁷ Orson Pratt taught that the "universal redemption from the effects of original sin, has nothing to do with redemption from our personal sins; for the original sin of Adam, and the personal sins of his children, are two different things."²⁸ Amulek declared that God's judgment of humankind will be at a personal level (Alma 11:44). The Atonement for the Fall of Adam will not save each man from his personal sins. An individual atonement is required. Thus, a modern revelation states that the mission of Christ was to redeem "mankind from the fall, and from individual sins" (D&C 138:19).

Though man suffers a spiritual death as part of Adam's Fall, he also suffers a spiritual death when he misuses the knowledge

of good and evil through sin. The Lord told Adam that humans are “conceived in sin” (Moses 6:55). That is, they are born into a world where sin prevails.²⁹ Additionally, the capacity to sin is passed on to their children through the natural body. Of this, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “The natural birth creates a natural man, and the natural man is an enemy to God. In his fallen state he is carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature. Appetites and passions govern his life and he is alive – acutely so – to all that is evil and wicked in the world.”³⁰ Consequently, when children are born and “begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good” (Moses 6:55). Men are accountable for the sin that “conceiveth in their hearts,” for according to Lehi, “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” (2 Nephi 2:5). Mormon explained that it is through the “Spirit of Christ” that is “given to every man” that they can judge “good from evil” (Moro. 7:16). In view of this, Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated, “The Spirit of the Lord, through conscience, instructs between good and bad all those who will heed it, thereby giving us an accountability which, though we may not appreciate it, is nevertheless there.”³¹ Thus, when a man arrives at an age when he is “accountable and capable of committing sin” (Moro. 8:10), he experiences a personal fall upon transgressing the laws of God.

The atonement for individual sins satisfies the demands of justice and establishes a “plan of mercy” that makes possible the salvation of each man from his individual fallen condition. Alma explained, “And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

Unlike the unconditional Atonement for the Fall of Adam, the redemption of man from his personal fall is conditional. The four Gospels affirm the conditional aspect of the personal atonement. The Savior declared, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). What is included in believing that Jesus is the Christ? Ultimately, we must believe and follow what he taught. The Savior said that unless a man believes in Christ, repents of his sins, is baptized, and endures to the end, he cannot be saved in the kingdom of God (e.g., Matt. 24:13; Mark 16:16;

Luke 13:3, 5). These same conditions are stated in the Book of Mormon as well. Jacob declared that if men "will not repent and believe in [Christ], and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it" (2 Ne. 9:24).

The Book of Mormon emphasizes the necessity of repentance to appease the demands of justice. Because Christ suffered the eternal consequences of our sins, repentance will release man from the grips of justice. Alma explained, "According to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men . . . for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice" (Alma 42:13). "Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah," said Lehi. "Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered" (2 Ne. 2:6-7). Because of his sacrifice, Christ stands "betwixt them and justice," having "satisfied the demands of justice" (Mosiah 15:9). Those who reject the mercy of Christ, however, will feel the full blow of justice's sword. Amulek spoke of this in these terms: "Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world. . . . And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption" (Alma 34:8,15-16).

Lehi explained that as part of the plan of salvation, it became necessary that "the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened" (2 Ne. 2:21; see also Alma 12:24). This is affirmed by the Lord himself in latter-day revelation: "But, behold, I say unto you that I, the Lord God, gave unto Adam and

unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death, until I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them repentance and redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son. And thus did I, the Lord God, appoint unto man the day of his probation – that by his natural death he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life, even as many as would believe; and they that believe not unto eternal damnation; for they cannot be redeemed from their spiritual fall, because they repent not; for they love darkness rather than light, and their deeds are evil, and they receive their wages of whom they list to obey” (D&C 29:42–45).

Those who do not accept Christ and repent of their sins will suffer a “second death.” Since all humankind will be redeemed from the “first death” and brought back into the presence of God to be judged, those who have not accepted Christ and repented of their sins will be “hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them *again* a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness” (Hel. 14:18, emphasis added). Alma explained, “Wherefore, [God] gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good – therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power, for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God” (Alma 12:31–32).

As noted earlier, the Gospels testify that God “gave his only begotten Son, that . . . the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16–17). To this, the Book of Mormon adds a resounding testimony (e.g., 1 Ne. 11:32–33; Mosiah 3:8–11; Alma 5:48; Morm. 7:5–7). In addition, the Book of Mormon explains why it must be the Son of God who atones for the sins of the world. Amulek taught, “Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another” (Alma 34:11). In other words, an imperfect, finite man cannot save another man from the

infinite consequences of his fallen condition. It takes an infinite being to atone for infinite consequences. "Therefore," Amulek declared, "it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice. . . . And that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God," who is "infinite and eternal" (Alma 34:13-14). Christ's sacrifice was not a human sacrifice but an infinite sacrifice. Jacob taught: "The fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement – save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration" (2 Ne. 9:6-7). That is, without an infinite atonement man would have become "lost forever" (Alma 42:6) in an endless state of spiritual and physical death.

The phrase "infinite atonement" describes at least three other aspects of the infinite nature of the Atonement. First, the Atonement covers every physical and spiritual aspect of the Fall of Adam and man's personal fall. Second, the Atonement encompasses all of God's children—past, present, and future, in this world and in every world created by Jesus Christ.³² Finally, the power of Christ's Atonement will last forever because Christ himself is infinite, eternal, and omnipotent. The infinite nature of the Atonement required Christ to be born of both mortal and divine parents (see Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35). From his mother, Christ inherited mortality, including the power to die. From his Father, he inherited the power of immortality or infiniteness, including the power to live again after death. "It was because of this doctrinal reality, this intermixture of the divine and the mortal in one person, that our Lord was able to work out the infinite and eternal atonement."³³

The Suffering of Christ

We are indebted to the writers of the four Gospels for our historical understanding of the atoning sacrifice. The combined Gospels tell us that after eating the Passover dinner with the apostles, the Savior went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Matt. 26:36; Mark 14:32). Upon entering the garden, he "began to be sorrowful and very heavy . . . even unto death" (Matt.

26:37–38). He cried out, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39; see also Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). He then began to suffer miserably. “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). During this time of great agony, “there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:43). Curiously, as intense as this suffering was, the Gospel writers are silent as to what caused the Savior’s misery in Gethsemane. Consequently, Christian theologians have been left to invent explanations that, as we shall see, fall short of the truth.³⁴

After the agony of Gethsemane, the Savior was taken captive and endured trials before the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman governor, Pilate (Matt. 26:57–27:25; Mark 14:46–15:14; Luke 22:54–23:24; John 18:12–19:16). He was then taken to Golgotha, where he was crucified (Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:17–18). The Gospels detail the incidents that occurred during the six hours the Savior hung on the cross until at the end he “yielded up the ghost” (Matt. 27:39–50; Mark 15:29–37; Luke 23:34–46; John 19:25–30). Finally, each Gospel relates the sacred events surrounding the Savior’s resurrection three days after his crucifixion (Matt. 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–14; Luke 24:1–48; John 20:1–21:24).

The Gospels record essentially these facts, though in greater detail, about what the Savior suffered during his atoning sacrifice. In an age when the historicity and divinity of Jesus Christ are questioned, the Book of Mormon adds a powerful second witness of the reality of these sacred events. The testimony of the Book of Mormon also gives additional insight into what the Savior actually suffered for humankind.

The Book of Mormon confirms the Savior’s atoning sacrifice through prophecy and the Savior’s own personal testimony. In the early pages of the Book of Mormon, Nephi saw in vision the life of Christ. He said, “And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Ne. 11:32–33). He added to his witness the testimony of several prophets whose writings were found on the brass plates (1 Ne. 19:10–13).

Later in the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin prophesied concerning the Savior's atoning sacrifice, saying, "He shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people" (Mosiah 3:7). It appears from this statement that King Benjamin is referring to the Savior's suffering in Gethsemane, for it was there that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). Hence, the agony experienced in Gethsemane was part of the atoning sacrifice. King Benjamin reveals that during those hours of anguish, the Savior's suffering was for "the wickedness and the abominations of his people." This is verified in modern revelation when the Lord said, "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" (D&C 19:15–18). Being finite and mortal, we will never fully comprehend all the Savior suffered in the atoning process. Nonetheless, we are told that he suffered all things spiritual and physical relative to man's fall. Included in this is the shocking reality that he bore not only the eternal consequences of our sins but also the very sins themselves (Mosiah 15:12; 26:23; Alma 7:13; 3 Ne. 11:11). It is no wonder that suffering such extreme agonies caused him "to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit" (D&C 19:18).

King Benjamin prophesied that after Christ would suffer the agony of man's "wickedness and abominations," his people "shall scourge him, and shall crucify him." But "he shall rise the third day from the dead" (Mosiah 3:9–10). Abinadi also prophesied of the Savior's sacrifice, in these words: "The Son . . . suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people. And after all this . . . he shall be led, crucified, and slain. . . .

And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death" (Mosiah 15:5-8). Other prophets prophesied of the Savior's suffering and crucifixion as well (see 2 Ne. 10:5; Alma 7:11-13; Alma 33:22).

Added to the prophecies found within the Book of Mormon of the Savior's atoning sacrifice is his own testimony of his suffering. To Alma the Elder, he stated, "For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world" (Mosiah 26:23). To those who survived the horrendous destructions that covered the land before the Savior's appearance to the Nephites, he said: "Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin. Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved" (3 Ne. 9:21-22). Later, when he appeared to the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful, the Savior declared, "I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world" (3 Ne. 11:11). He then requested that the people come to him and "thrust their hands into his side" and "feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet" that they might know that he had "been slain for the sins of the world" (3 Ne. 11:14-15).

A modern revelation declares that the Savior "descended below all things" (D&C 88:6). He who in premortality was the omniscient and omnipotent Jehovah gave up his premortal glory and came to mortality, where he descended below all the degradation mortality, could produce. He suffered all things man has suffered. Thus, he comprehends "all things" about man's physical and spiritual suffering (D&C 88:6). The Book of Mormon teaches that because Christ descended below all things, he came to "know according to the flesh how to succor his people" (Alma 7:12). This gave him the power to be a Savior to all men.

Alma, who was gifted with a great understanding of the Atonement, delivered a discourse wherein he taught that Jesus' suffering made possible the healing of man in four ways. Two of these are commonly spoken of: (1) he took "upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions," and (2) he took "upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people" (Alma 7:12-13). These have already been ad-

dressed. Yet Alma spoke of two additional areas that are important but rarely considered.

First, “he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11; cf. Matt. 8:17). Though he would have become acquainted with these things during his mortal life, it appears that he suffered “the pains and the sicknesses of his people” as part of the atoning process as well. Elder Maxwell stated: “Jesus’ daily mortal experiences and His ministry, to be sure, acquainted Him by observation with a sample of human sicknesses, grief, pains, sorrows, and infirmities which are ‘common to man’ (1 Cor. 10:13). But the agonies of the Atonement were infinite and first-hand! Since not all human sorrow and pain is connected to sin, the full intensiveness of the Atonement involved bearing our pains, infirmities, and sicknesses, as well as our sins.”³⁵ Again, he said that Christ “knew beforehand, *intellectually*, that His acceptance of the atoning role entailed awesome responsibilities, responsibilities that would eventually lead to His knowing *experientially* in Gethsemane and on Calvary as the weight of the yoke of our sins, sicknesses, pains, and infirmities fell upon him.”³⁶ Alma does not mention why Christ must “take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.” Yet, for the most part these afflictions have come upon humankind as a result of the Fall of Adam and therefore they must be infinitely removed through the infinite Atonement. That is, though sicknesses and pains are part of the mortal experience, they will not be part of our immortal experience.

Second, Christ “will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). Infirmities are weaknesses of every kind – physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. They are more than the physical illnesses that vex man. Indeed, they are why we commit sin in the first place. It was not enough that the Savior paid the penalty of our sins – it was also necessary that he heal the infirmities that generate sin. To accomplish this, he took upon himself our infirmities. As a result, “his bowels [were] filled with mercy, according to the flesh.” In other words, experiencing our infirmities gave him compassion and mercy for us as we

struggle in the war between the spirit and the natural man. He understands our continual nagging feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. This compassion was vividly demonstrated when he visited the Nephites. Toward the end of the first day, the Savior looked upon the people and said, "Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you" (3 Ne. 17:6). Then, displaying his power to heal both body and spirit, he asked them to bring the sick and afflicted, saying, "Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy" (3 Ne. 17:7).

By experiencing our infirmities, he also comprehends perfectly each of our weaknesses and how to heal and strengthen them. Elder Maxwell observed: "Being sinless Himself, Jesus could not have suffered for personal sin nor known what such agony is—*unless* He took upon Him our sins, not only to redeem us and to save us, but also in order that He might know how 'according to the flesh . . . to succor his people according to their infirmities.' A stunning insight!"³⁷ This makes him the perfect Savior because not only does he pay the penalty of sin but he also heals the sinner. It is the same as if a man, who did not know how to swim, fell into deep water and began to drown. Then a lifeguard dove into the water and saved the drowning man. Not leaving it at that, he stayed with the man and helped him learn to swim. So it is with the Savior; he jumps into the deep waters of our agony and lifts our souls to safety. Then he helps us to overcome the very infirmities that caused our troubles in the first place. The bearing of our infirmities gave the Savior the knowledge and power to perfect each man who comes unto him and accepts his divine help. Moroni exhorted his latter-day reader to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him" (Moro. 10:32). However, our becoming perfect is not a passive experience. We must do our part. The man being taught by the lifeguard to swim must do what the lifeguard tells him. He must move his arms and kick his feet or he will never overcome his infirmity. Therefore, Moroni declared, "if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ" (Moro. 10:32).

Knowing that the Savior experienced our infirmities gives us better understanding into the agony he suffered while on the cross. The Gospels inform us that three hours after Jesus was

crucified, darkness covered all the land for another three hours (Matt. 27:45–46; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). Elder James E. Talmage believed that during this time, “the agony of Gethsemane had recurred, intensified beyond human power to endure.”³⁸ Elder Bruce R. McConkie expressed this same view.³⁹ Toward the end of the three hours of darkness, the Savior cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Unlike at Gethsemane, where he received some divine help, in the Savior’s suffering on the cross he was destitute of his Father’s comforting influence. Suffering the eternal consequences of our sins, he experienced the misery of banishment from God’s presence. At this point the Savior uttered painfully, “I thirst” (John 19:28). He to whom all must go to receive the “living water” that they may “never thirst” again (John 4:10, 14) now thirsted! Bearing our infirmities, fears, guilt, and remorse, he had become like “the poor and needy” who “seek water, and there is none” (Isa. 41:17). He had become like us, lost and alone. When finally he had suffered the full extreme of man’s suffering, the lesson of compassion was learned. With the eternal consequences paid, satisfying justice, the Savior sighed, “It is finished.” He then “bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:30). “Thus,” Elder Maxwell wrote, “the compassion of the divine Jesus for us is not the abstract compassion of a sinless individual who would never so suffer; rather, it is the compassion and empathy of One who has suffered exquisitely, though innocent, for all our sins, which were compounded in some way we do not understand. Though He was sinless, yet He suffered more than all of us. We cannot tell Him anything about suffering. This is one of the inner marvels of the atonement of Jesus Christ!”⁴⁰ “Can we, even in the depths of disease, tell Him anything at all about suffering? In ways we cannot comprehend, our sicknesses and infirmities were borne by Him even before they were borne by us. The very weight of our combined sins caused Him to descend below all. We have never been, nor will we be, in depths such as He has known. Thus His atonement made perfect His empathy and His mercy and His capacity to succor us, for which we can be everlastingly grateful as He tutors us in our trials.”⁴¹

The Perfecting Power

The Book of Mormon gives great insight into the need for the Atonement of Jesus Christ and what he suffered as part of the atoning process. The Atonement is part of a grand plan to exalt man, a plan that included man's Fall. The Fall would give man certain experiences that were necessary for his progression, part of which was being able to distinguish the difference between good and evil through personal experience. Elder B. H. Roberts appropriately summarizes:

Unbelievers delight to represent God, the great Law Giver, as unspeakably cruel in permitting such a Fall of man and demanding such an Atonement as Christ made for the salvation of men from the effects of that Fall. I have already indicated that the purpose of man's existence in the earth was to obtain a body and acquire that experience in this probation which will enable him to appreciate God's greatest gift to man, *viz.*, the gift of eternal life; and to learn by actual contact with evil in this life, and by becoming acquainted with its effects—to flee from it and to love that which is good and pure and virtuous. These lessons involved the necessity of death, the existence of evil and sin. Otherwise man could not acquire the lessons it was intended he should learn in this probation; and without those lessons he could not attain to that exaltation and eternal weight of glory that God has designed for his offspring—man. And though the experience of man in this life's probation may be and often is severe, still it is but as a moment of time as compared with eternity—nay, not so much—not a moment; and the results in eternity will vindicate the wisdom of giving to man his earth life—his probation in earthly mortality.⁴²

Through the Atonement man can escape the negative consequences of misuse of the knowledge of good and evil and return to the presence of God. Those who decide to choose good over evil will progress forward in God's kingdom. They will receive the perfecting power of the Atonement. Through it, their infirmities will become strengths (Ether 12:27) and they will become even as God. The Book of Mormon's plea to man is, "Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him" (Moro. 10:32), for without Christ, man is endlessly lost.

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Notes

1. William J. Wolf, "The Atonement," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 1:496.
2. For a review of Wolf's theories, see Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1:496–98.
3. *Ibid.*, 1:498.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, "Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 5; see also *Conference Report*, October 1986, 4.
5. Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 33.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, *But For a Small Moment* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 62.
7. Orson F. Whitney, *Conference Report*, October 1925, 101.
8. See Kay P. Edwards, "Opposition," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1031.
9. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 1:285–86.
10. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:42.
11. It seems the reason the fruit was forbidden is a matter of responsibility. If God would have commanded Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit, then God would have been responsible for their fall. The consequences of the Fall had to come by man's agency rather than by God imposing fallen conditions upon his children.
12. Benson, *A Witness and a Warning*, 33.
13. James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, 12th ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), 54; emphasis added.
14. Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1919), 46.
15. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:191.
16. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 4:325–26.

17. Pratt, "The Pre-existence of Man," *The Seer* 1, no. 7 (July 1853), in *Prominent Works in Mormon History* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 98.

18. For an explanation of original sin, see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 550; and Byron R. Merrill, "Original Sin," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1052–53.

19. Elder Maxwell wrote: "There are those who, reading certain scriptural descriptions about the nature of man (such as that man is 'carnal, sensual, and devilish,' Alma 42:10) brush by these scriptures hurriedly, even nervously, because they feel so uncomfortable upon reading them. Such readers may feel, wrongly, that these scriptures sound much like a Calvinistic denigration of man. Such offended readers may even say those adjectives do not sound like most of the people they know. The same brush-by occurs regarding the numerous scriptures concerning 'darkness' and 'light.'

"There is a danger, however, in ignoring these scriptures and the profound message they contain. Calvinism focused *unnaturally* on the *natural* man and lacked the lifting dimension contained in the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, with its exalting perspectives and sweeping promises. Though these scriptural insights concerning the natural man may seem to put us sternly in our place, when they are combined with the fullness of the gospel, we are shown our immense possibilities and what we have the power to become. Are we not wiser to understand our fallen nature and then, with equal attention, to be taught about how we can be lifted up? Indeed, for one to ask 'Where do we go from here?' he must know where 'here' is!" *Notwithstanding My Weakness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 70.

20. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, 64.

21. Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:284.

22. Dallin H. Oaks, "Sins, Crimes, and Atonement" (presented to CES educators, 7 February 1992), 1.

23. Whitney, *Conference Report*, April 1908, 86.

24. The idea of a general atonement is confirmed in the Book of Moses: "The Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world" (Moses 6:53–54).

25. Joseph Fielding Smith taught: "No person who has lived and died on this earth will be denied the resurrection. Reason teaches this, and it is a simple matter of justice. Adam alone was responsible for death, and therefore the

Lord does not lay this to the charge of any other person. Justice demands that no person who was not responsible for death shall be held responsible for it, and therefore, as Paul declared, 'As in Adam *all* die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive.'" *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:274; see also, 2:273–74 and 2:223–24.

26. Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 25.

27. This is the meaning of the second Article of Faith: "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." See Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:49.

28. Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:329.

29. Elder George Q. Morris taught, "This being 'conceived in sin,' as I understand it, is only that they are in the midst of sin. They come into the world where sin is prevalent, and it will enter into their hearts, but it will lead them 'to taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.'" *Conference Report*, April 1958, 38.

30. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 282.

31. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 44.

32. We learn this from a poem written by Joseph Smith in which the following is stated: "He's the Saviour, and only begotten of God – By him, of him, and through him, the worlds were all made, Even all that career in the heavens so broad, Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last, Are sav'd by the very same Saviour of ours." "The Answer. To W. W. Phelps, Esq. A Vision," *Times and Seasons* 4 (1 February 1843): 82–83.

33. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 471.

34. Generally, most theologians believe that the suffering of Christ in Gethsemane was emotional agony related to his future suffering on the cross. The following is representative of most theologians' views. "In Gethsemane he underwent a most unusual sense of being troubled that we must feel is connected not only with the fact that he would die, but that he would die the kind of death he faced, a death for sinners. Jesus was a brave man, and lesser people by far, including many who have owed their inspiration to him, have faced death calmly. It is impossible to hold that it was the fact of death that moved Jesus so deeply. Rather, it was the kind of death that he would die that brought the anguish. . . . Jesus would be one with sinners in his death,

he would experience the death that is due to sinners, and it seems that it was this that brought about the tremendous disturbance of spirit." Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 667.

35. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 51.

36. Maxwell, *Meek and Lowly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 38.

37. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 35.

38. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 613.

39. McConkie, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign*, May 1985, 10; see also McConkie, preface to *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, xiv.

40. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, 35-36.

41. Maxwell, *Even As I Am* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 116-17.

42. B. H. Roberts, *The Gospel and Man's Relationship to Deity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1924), 20-21.

Spiritual Rebirth: Have Ye Been Born of God?

13

Brent L. Top

Christ and his apostles taught the concept of spiritual rebirth in the New Testament, but the Book of Mormon portrays it more vividly and teaches that the gate to spiritual rebirth is baptism. Not all conversions, however, are as sudden as those of King Benjamin's people, Alma the Younger, and King Lamoni and his wife. Spiritual rebirth is a continuous process, the fruits of which are a peaceful conscience, joy, desire to do good continually, and an increase of love and spiritual understanding.

When Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, approached the Savior by night to learn of this remarkable Rabbi, Jesus admonished him, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Blind to the spiritual significance of Jesus' teaching, Nicodemus expressed his confusion concerning Jesus' reference to rebirth. "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4). The Master responded, not with an extensive doctrinal explanation, but by reiterating the charge he had previously given, with a minor amplification. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8).

The New Testament provides brief glimpses of what is meant by the injunction, “Ye must be born again.” These glimpses are like small pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle. John the Baptist taught his disciples that he baptized with “water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt. 3:11). At the Last Supper, Jesus promised the apostles that he would pray unto the Father that the Father might bestow upon them “another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). The apostle Paul also taught of a spiritual birth whereby a person becomes a “new creature” in Christ and walks thereafter in a “newness of life” (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:4). Each of these passages is an important piece of the puzzle and indirectly refers to the spiritual rebirth of which Jesus spoke as he commanded Nicodemus, “ye must be born again.” Yet they do not fully explain what the baptism of fire really is and how it is obtained (John 3:7). It is only through the doctrines of the Restoration and through the Book of Mormon that more pieces of the puzzle are revealed and fitted together. Only through the Restoration can we see the true picture of the doctrine of spiritual rebirth. Through a careful examination of the doctrinal teachings of the Book of Mormon prophets, we can more fully understand what it means to be born again, how one comes to experience spiritual rebirth, what the fruits or indicators of that transformation are, and how one retains a remission of sins.

Baptism – Gateway to Spiritual Rebirth

Just as the Savior explained to Nicodemus that being “born of the Spirit” is linked to being “born of the water,” the Book of Mormon teaches that baptism is the “gate” which opens the pathway to spiritual rebirth, and, if faithfully followed, it ultimately leads to eternal life. “For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water,” Nephi declared, “and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17). The Prophet Joseph Smith also taught this relationship between baptism and spiritual rebirth when he declared: “Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”¹

Throughout the scriptures one can see how ordinances are physical events that symbolize spiritual processes. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the ordinance of baptism. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Saints: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3–4). Not only does the ordinance open the gate to spiritual birth, but it also symbolizes the death of the sinful nature and the birth of a “new creature” – cleansed by the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and sincere repentance (2 Cor. 5:17). President Joseph Fielding Smith further explained the important link between baptism and being born again: “Every child that comes into this world is carried in water, is born of water, and of blood, and of the spirit. So when we are born into the kingdom of God, we must be born the same way. By baptism, we are born of water. Through the shedding of the blood of Christ, we are cleansed and sanctified; and we are justified, through the Spirit of God, for baptism is not complete without the baptism of the Holy Ghost. You see the parallel between birth into the world and birth into the kingdom of God.”²

Being Born Again

Spiritual rebirth—also described in the scriptures by such terms as baptism of fire or a mighty change—is the spiritual transformation that results when one has actually received the Holy Ghost and experienced the remission of sins that accompanies it. Nephi explained that after one has followed the Savior “with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of [his] sins, witnessing unto the Father that [he is] willing to take upon [him] the name of Christ, by baptism,” only then will that person “receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can [he] speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” (2 Ne. 31:13). Two of the most illustrative examples in the Book of Mormon of how the process described by Nephi actually works are the accounts of the conver-

sion of King Benjamin's people and the dramatic transformation of Alma the Younger.

King Benjamin taught his people that there was "no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men" except through the Atonement of Jesus Christ (Mosiah 3:17). He further explained that the natural man, who is "an enemy to God," could only be overcome by submitting to Christ's redemptive power, continually repenting and forsaking sins, calling on the Lord daily, and continually obeying him (Mosiah 3:19). Benjamin's people were already members of the Church. They had already received the ordinance of baptism and perhaps had previously received the baptism of fire. However, as Benjamin taught them anew concerning the principles of the gospel and how to "retain a remission of [their] sins" (Mosiah 4:12), a remarkable thing occurred: "And now, it came to pass that when King Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them. And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:1-2).

King Benjamin's doctrinal explanation to his people regarding what had indeed occurred within their hearts also serves as one of the best definitions of being born again: "And now, these are the words which King Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant. And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters" (Mosiah 5:6-7).

Experiencing a similar yet even more dramatic conversion, Alma the Younger described his spiritual transformation: he was changed by the power of the Holy Ghost from an enemy of God to a "new creature," converted and committed to the cause of righteousness. "For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have

been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God" (Mosiah 27:24-26).

The Book of Mormon clearly teaches that while the ordinance of baptism allows one to enter in at the gate—"for the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water"—salvation cannot be obtained without also experiencing the spiritual rebirth—"then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost" (2 Ne. 31:17). "Water baptism is only a preparatory cleansing of the believing penitent," explained Elder Orson Pratt, "whereas, the Baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost cleanses more thoroughly, by renewing the inner man, and by purifying the affections, desires, and thoughts which have long been habituated in the impure ways of sin."³ There are several passages in the Book of Mormon that illustrate, as well as define, this spiritual rebirth (see Enos 1:1-6; Alma 13:1-12; 18:41-43; 19:6, 33; Hel. 5:41-49; 3 Ne. 9:20-22). The spiritual rebirth that Jesus told Nicodemus was required in order "to see the kingdom of heaven" is the same baptism of fire that we experience when we fulfill the commandment given at confirmation: receive the Holy Ghost (John 3:3). Being born again is the actual reception of the Holy Ghost, which brings a remission of our sins and a newness of life—being raised from a lower or carnal state to a state of righteousness and increased spiritual enlightenment. "The baptism of the Holy Ghost is the baptism of fire," Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote. "Sins are remitted not in the waters of baptism, as we say in speaking figuratively, but when we receive the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Spirit of God that erases carnality and brings us into a state of righteousness. We become clean when we actually receive the fellowship and companionship of the Holy Ghost. It is then that sin and dross and evil are burned out of our souls as though by fire."⁴

Some of the scriptural accounts of men and women whose lives were transformed by the baptism of fire and whose sins were remitted involve dramatic or almost sensational events. Alma (see

Mosiah 27; Alma 36), Paul (see Acts 9), King Benjamin's people (see Mosiah 5), King Lamoni and his wife (see Alma 18–19), and the general gathering of the Saints on the day of Pentacost (see Acts 2) are among the many who were born again in a most remarkable manner—in a singular and overwhelming event. These miraculous conversion stories often leave readers wondering if they must be born again in the same manner. The Book of Mormon also provides us with accounts that describe this same spiritual transformation as a less visible, more gradual process rather than a single event. The resurrected Christ declared: "And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanties, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not" (3 Ne. 9:20). Even in our day, there are those who receive the Holy Ghost and become new creatures in Christ through sudden, miraculous conversions, and yet others likewise are baptized by fire and become "quickenened in the inner man" (see Moses 6:65–66) and still, like the Lamanites, may not even recognize it. "A person may get converted in a moment, miraculously," Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught. "But that is not the way it happens with most people. With most people, conversion [spiritual rebirth and the accompanying remission of sins] is a process; and it goes step by step, degree by degree, level by level, from a lower state to a higher, from grace to grace, until the time that the individual is wholly turned to the cause of righteousness. Now this means that an individual overcomes one sin today and another sin tomorrow. He perfects his life in one field now, and in another field later on. And the conversion process goes on until it is completed, until we become, literally, as the Book of Mormon says, saints of God instead of natural men."⁵

"We say that a man has to be born again, meaning that he has to die as pertaining to unrighteous things in the world. Paul said, 'Crucify the old man of sin and come forth in a newness of life' (Rom. 6:6). We are born again when we die as pertaining to unrighteousness and when we live as pertaining to the things of the Spirit. But that doesn't happen in an instant, suddenly. That also is a process. Being born again is a gradual thing, except in a few isolated instances that are so miraculous they get written up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the

Church are concerned, we are born again by degrees, and we are born again to added light and added knowledge and added desires for righteousness as we keep the commandments.”⁶ Thus there is no real difference in the quality of the conversion or spiritual rebirth – whether it comes gradually over time or suddenly in a singular event. The process may differ, but the results are the same. It could perhaps be compared to “the difference between suddenly emerging from a dark room as into a bright sunlight as opposed to experiencing the dawning of day. The dawning is more gradual but results in just as much light.”⁷

The Fruits of Spiritual Rebirth

Whether it be a sudden and singular transformation or a slow process of growth with almost imperceptible changes, becoming born again – becoming Christ’s sons and daughters with a baptism of fire – brings with it fruits that can be felt and discerned within the heart and life of one who has overcome the natural man through the Atonement of Christ. Just as spiritual rebirth can be a process as well as an event, so can this spiritual transformation occur on various levels and at different times in one’s life. The Book of Mormon, perhaps better than any other volume of scripture, teaches and illustrates not only how we can tell if we have been born of God but also to what extent. The following fruits or indicators of spiritual rebirth, taught in the Book of Mormon, are not given to be an exhaustive inventory of experiences we must have in order to be considered born again; rather, they may serve as inspiring examples and illustrative guides. The Book of Mormon can bring us comfort by helping us recognize how the Atonement has indeed transformed us. It can also inspire us to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” that we may be born again and again – from one level to a higher one until finally we hear the blessed pronouncement, “behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Ne. 31:20).

Peace of Conscience

One of the most significant indicators or by-products of spiritual rebirth is found in Enos’ declaration: “My guilt was swept away” (Enos 1:6). Approximately four centuries after Enos’

wrestle with God that resulted in a baptism of fire, King Benjamin's people experienced similar feelings after their prayer of faith and penitence: "O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified" (Mosiah 4:2). The Book of Mormon records their miraculous spiritual rebirth, which effected a remission of their sins and was accompanied by a "peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ" (Mosiah 4:3). Like Enos, King Benjamin's people experienced a sweet spiritual fruit of conversion that swept away feelings of guilt and pain and replaced them with a peace of conscience that permeated their very souls. Spiritual rebirth does not eliminate our memory of our sins but instead affects us in much the same manner as Alma, who explained to his son: "I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more" (Alma 36:19). Although he continued to remember his sins and even the pain he suffered as a result of them, after his spiritual rebirth he was no longer tortured by guilt. Each of us, like Alma, may continue to remember our sins, and, to a degree, the feelings of remorse and pain associated with them, even after we have been born of God. Through faith and repentance, however, the harrowing or debilitating effects of a guilty conscience are removed, and with a baptism of fire will come a peace of conscience that will cause us to feel as Alma testified: "My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more" (Mosiah 27:29).

A Feeling of Joy and Divine Love

Another indicator of the mighty change of heart often cited in the Book of Mormon conversion accounts is overwhelming joy and envelopment in the divine love of God. Alma contrasted this divine feeling with the pains of his wickedness when he declared: "And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy" (Alma 36:20-21).

Another example of the joy that accompanies spiritual rebirth is found in the scriptural account of the conversion of King Lamoni and his wife. After being taught the gospel by Ammon, they were “overpowered by the Spirit” and they fell to the ground “as though they were dead” (Alma 19:13, 18). Witnessing this remarkable scene, Abish, the converted Lamanite woman, took the queen by the hand, who arose and testified of her remarkable spiritual transformation: “O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! . . . And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy” (Alma 19:29–30). King Benjamin’s people experienced something akin to this: “Behold they had fallen to the earth, for fear of the Lord had come upon them,” the scriptural account records. After they petitioned the Lord for forgiveness of their sins “the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy” (Mosiah 4:1, 3).

Although we may not become so overwhelmed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost that we fall to the earth in a spiritual trance, we can, nonetheless, feel the exquisite joy that comes with a remission of sins and conversion. Associated with this increased sense of joy is also an intensified awareness of divine love. Alma characterized this fruit of being born again as a joyful desire to “sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26). This in turn heightens our love, appreciation, respect, reverence, and awe for God. This intense love for God and from God causes those who have experienced the mighty change to echo Nephi’s declaration: “He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh” (2 Ne. 4:21).

Moroni taught that “despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moro. 10:22). Darkness, despondency, and discouragement are destroyed by the joy that blesses those who are born of God. Hearts burdened with hopelessness are lifted and illuminated by a hope instilled by the companionship of the Comforter. “The remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart,” declared Mormon, “and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love” (Moro. 8:26).

No Desire to Do Evil, but to Do Good Continually

Another testament of spiritual transformation is a mighty change in dispositions and desires. King Benjamin's people experienced this fruit and joyfully declared: "The Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). King Lamoni, his wife, and all those who on that occasion had been converted following Ammon's ministrations likewise testified of the mighty change that took place in their lives when they were spiritually reborn and forgiven of their sins. "They did all declare unto the people the self-same thing – that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil" (Alma 19:33). Similarly, Alma spoke of the high priests whose "garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb" and whose hearts and lives were changed by the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost so that they "could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence" (Alma 13:11–12).

Thus we can determine the degree to which we have been born again by examining our disposition toward evil and our desires to do good continually. This condition does not mean that we never again succumb to any of the temptations surrounding us, but it does mean that sinfulness becomes repugnant to us, and the desires of our hearts are turned to righteousness and doing good. This fruit of spiritual rebirth is reflected in the following experience of President Joseph F. Smith:

The feeling that came upon me was that of pure peace, of love and of light. I felt in my soul that if I had sinned – and surely I was not without sin – that it had been forgiven me; that I was indeed cleansed from sin; my heart was touched, and I felt that I would not injure the smallest insect beneath my feet. *I felt as if I wanted to do good everywhere to everybody and to everything. I felt a newness of life, a newness of desire to that which was right. There was not one particle of desire for evil left in my soul. . . . Oh! that I could have kept that same spirit, that same earnest desire in my heart every moment of my life from that day to this. Yet many of us who have received that witness, that new birth, that change of heart, while we may have erred in judgment or have made many mistakes, and often perhaps come short of the true standard in our lives, we have repented of the evil, and we have sought from time to time forgiveness at the hand of the Lord; so that until this day the same desire and purpose*

which pervaded our souls when we . . . received a remission of our sins, still holds possession of our hearts, and is still the ruling sentiment and passion of our souls.⁸

Increased Love for Our Fellowman

The spiritual transformation that comes with the reception of the Holy Ghost also creates a “new heart” and a “new spirit” – a heart softened by the mercy of Christ, a heart that is filled with greater love and compassion toward others (Ezek. 36:26). Enos exemplified this when, after the Lord assured him that his sins were forgiven, his compassion and concern extended beyond himself to his brethren, the Nephites, and even to his enemies, the Lamanites (see Enos 1:9–13). After the remarkable conversion of the sons of Mosiah, “they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (Mosiah 28:3). The love of God and the joy of the Lord that fills our hearts when we are born again naturally becomes reflected in our desire to “bring [others] to taste of the exceeding joy of which [we] did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Alma 36:24). King Benjamin perhaps explained it best as he counseled his people regarding the mighty change they had experienced: “If ye have known of [God’s] goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, . . . ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peacably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due. . . . And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need” (Mosiah 4:11, 13, 16).

Increased Spiritual Understanding

Several Book of Mormon accounts of baptism by fire and the accompanying spiritual transformation speak of souls being filled with light. A natural or sinful man is spiritually darkened, whereas one who has overcome the natural man and has become a new creature in Christ is enlightened by the Holy Ghost. Such

spiritual enlightenment is evident in the conversion of King Lamoni – “the dark veil of unbelief was being cast away from his mind, and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was a marvelous light of his goodness – yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul” (Alma 19:6). This increased guidance of the Holy Spirit not only brings comfort, peace, and joy but also an increased spiritual perspective on life. President Wilford Woodruff testified of the increased spiritual discernment that comes with the reception and companionship of the Holy Ghost. “The veil of darkness, of doubt, and fear is taken from our minds,” he explained, “and we can see clearly where to go and what to do; and we feel that our spirit is right – that we are acceptable before the Lord our God, and are the subjects of his blessings.”⁹

King Benjamin’s people witnessed that “the manifestations of his Spirit” and “great views of that which is to come” accompanied their baptism of fire (Mosiah 5:3). These “great views of that which is to come” not only instruct the spiritually reborn concerning the doctrines of the kingdom and the “mysteries of God” but also give them strength in times of uncertainty and trial and provide practical insight into the daily challenges of life (Alma 26:22). One who is quickened by this spiritual outpouring is drawn to spiritual things more than the natural man. This baptism of the Spirit has “enlightened our minds, enlarged our understandings, extended our feelings, informed our judgment,” President John Taylor taught. “[It] has warmed up our affections to God and holiness; has nourished and cherished us, and put us in possession of principles that we know will abide for ever and for ever.”¹⁰ Men and women who are born of the Spirit – who are changed and renewed through the Atonement of Christ – “come to see and feel and understand things that the spiritually inert can never know. They become participants in the realm of divine experience.”¹¹

Having the Image of God Engraven upon Our Countenances

Speaking to the Church in Zarahemla, Alma asked a simple yet significant question of the Saints regarding their level of

spiritual rebirth and conversion. “Have ye received [God’s] image in your countenances?” (Alma 5:14). Perhaps Alma was referring to a literal and discernible change that comes upon a person who is spiritually reborn and whose life is redirected to righteousness—a real, spiritual appearance that bespeaks a new life of goodness and purity. However, rather than referring to an outward, visible aura, Alma may have been speaking more of an inward, spiritual transformation that manifests itself in the actions of the recipient of that mighty change. As one LDS scholar of the scriptures explained: “An ‘image’ is not just an outward visual impression but also a vivid representation, a graphic display, or a total likeness of something. It is a person or thing very much like another, a copy or counterpart. Likewise, *countenance* does not simply mean a facial expression or visual appearance. The word comes from an Old French term originally denoting ‘behavior,’ ‘demeanor,’ or ‘conduct.’ In earlier times the word *countenance* was used with these meanings in mind. Therefore, to receive Christ’s image in one’s countenance means to acquire the Savior’s likeness in behavior, to be a copy or reflection of the Master’s life. This is not possible without a mighty change in one’s pattern of living. It requires, too, a change in feelings, attitudes, desires, and spiritual commitment.”¹²

Determining whether we have been born again and to what extent we have experienced this mighty change requires a self-examination of our countenances. This examination is not conducted in front of any physical mirror but through sincere soul-searching and by listening to the still, small voice of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost will help us to answer the question: Is our renewed commitment to follow the Savior discernible in our countenance, both in our appearance and, more importantly, in our actions? Sometimes we may recognize the level of spiritual regeneration we have experienced as much by what we do as by what we feel. “If a man bringeth forth good works,” declared Alma, “he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd” (Alma 5:41). Our countenance becomes engraven with the image of God as we continue to exercise faith in the Redeemer, repent of our sins, and strive to keep God’s commandments. As we are spiritually reborn again and again and again—each time being elevated to a higher level of spirituality—our countenance, or more precisely, our behavior, becomes more like him whom we seek to

emulate (see 3 Ne. 27:21, 27). C. S. Lewis provides us with a profound insight regarding the spiritual rebirth process that may help us to better understand what Alma may have meant when he asked, "Have ye received his image in your countenances?" "Christ, here and now, in that very room where you are saying your prayers, is doing things to you. It is not a question of a good man who died two thousand years ago. It is a living Man, still as much a man as you, and still as much God as He was when He created the world, really coming and interfering with your very self; killing the old natural self in you and replacing it with the kind of self He has. At first, only for moments. Then for longer periods. Finally, if all goes well, turning you permanently into a different sort of thing; into . . . a being which, in its own small way, has the same kind of life as God; which shares His power, joy, knowledge and eternity."¹³

Retaining a Remission of Sins

Being born again and receiving forgiveness of our sins does not mean that we have arrived at spiritual maturity or that we are guaranteed eternal life, nor does it mean that we can never lose the fruits of that spiritual rebirth. "It is a possibility that one may be born of the Spirit and then, because of his sinfulness or slothfulness, he may lose the Spirit and fall from grace," President Harold B. Lee stated. "The Spirit will not dwell in unholy tabernacles."¹⁴ This important realization is reflected in the searching question posed by Alma as he taught the Saints in Zarahemla concerning the spiritual rebirth he called a mighty change. It is a question that we today must continually ask of ourselves: "If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26). Implicit in Alma's question is the reality that once a person has received the baptism of fire and has known and experienced the fruits of spiritual rebirth, if he becomes slothful or sinful he may lose the desire "to sing the song of redeeming love." What then can be done to recapture that spiritual regeneration?

"I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts," King Benjamin admonished his people after their hearts had been changed, "that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which

ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you" (Mosiah 5:12; see also 5:7-10). King Benjamin counseled his people that in order for them to retain or regain their spiritual rebirth in Christ, they must exercise faith in Christ, repent of their sins, and strive to keep the commandments all the days of their lives. Those attitudes and actions that initially led them to be born of God will also result in a retention or reclamation of that newness of life.

And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them. And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith. . . . And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true (Mosiah 4:10-12).

King Benjamin's exhortations are as relevant to us today as they were when given to his own people. If we are to retain God's image in our countenance and his divine love in our hearts, we will, as Nephi declared, "Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:20).

We may learn from the New Testament of the necessity of being born of the water and of the Spirit to gain salvation. It is, however, through the teachings and examples given in the Book of Mormon that we learn what that really entails, how it is to be achieved, and what it does for and to us. But perhaps most importantly, we learn from the Book of Mormon that becoming a new creature in Christ is a lifetime endeavor. Birth— even spiritual rebirth— is just a beginning. Just because we may have once had

our hearts “changed through faith on [Christ’s] name” and our sins burned from our souls through the baptism of fire, we cannot let go of the iron rod. Pressing forward—holding on to the iron rod unceasingly—will inevitably lead to the tree of life. For this reason King Benjamin’s final exhortation to his people—a people who had been born of God and had commenced a new life—is our charge today as well: “Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen” (Mosiah 5:15).

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The Resurrection: An Embattled Keystone

14

Keith J. Wilson

The doctrine of the Resurrection, traditionally the central belief of Christianity, finds little practical consensus among many Christians today. However, the Book of Mormon provides not only marvelous doctrinal clarity but also a powerful witness of the resurrection of Jesus and of all humankind.

A keystone of an arch is the central stone that structurally holds the other stones in place. If Christianity possesses a theological keystone, then many would designate it as the doctrine of the resurrection. This doctrine, which began on that original Easter morning, has developed into the most fundamental belief of professing Christians. Theologians such as Moltmann, Robinson, and Küng support this premise with bold statements such as: “Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God.”¹ “The resurrection of Jesus Christ represents the watershed of N[ew] T[estament] history and the central point of its faith.”² “Christianity, inasmuch as it is the confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the living and powerfully effective Christ, begins at Easter. Without Easter there is no Gospel . . . no faith, no proclamation, no Church, no worship, no mission.”³

As strong as these contemporary voices are, an even more credible Christian source speaks directly from the New Testament. In Paul’s first epistle to the Saints at Corinth, he writes:

“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). These Christian theologians,

both ancient and modern, all attest to the central position of the Resurrection in Christian theology.

The fact that Paul would write so forcefully in defense of the Resurrection within the close chronology of the event itself portends a second relevant resurrection issue—namely, how did the early Christian community understand the concept of the Resurrection? Were there differences then in their understanding and, if so, to what extent? Have these early doctrinal divisions influenced modern Christian traditions? The answers to these questions will shed light on the uniformity of this foundational Christian principle.

While the event of the Resurrection provided the central theme for early Christianity, it by no means spawned a uniform interpretation. To the contrary, the occurrence generated a host of different meanings, almost as varied as the early Christians themselves. Even the New Testament writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each highlight diverse elements of this event. A review of the specific contributions of each Gospel writer about the Resurrection will assist us in conceptualizing the various interpretations.

Matthew, one of Jesus' original twelve disciples, records much detail about the Resurrection. He alone relates the incident of the guards at the sealed sepulcher (Matt. 27:62–66), the rolling back of the stone (28:2–3), the simultaneous resurrection of other Saints (27:52–53), and the chief priests' attempts to suppress the evidence of the empty tomb (28:11–15). In concert with the other writers, he cites the visit of Mary and the other women to the tomb (28:1) and their encounter with the risen Lord (28:9–10).

The second writer, Mark, parallels most closely the other three accounts. While he notes such particulars as Mary Magdalene's difficult past (Mark 16:9) and the missionary charge of the risen Lord (16:15–18), in general his record closely follows many of the consensual resurrection details such as timing, location, and participants.

Luke chronicles a number of significant details. He agrees with his counterparts in the salient facts of the first female visitors to the tomb and the subsequent experience of Peter. However, he presents a most divergent event in the account of two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). This singular recording focuses at length on the physical nature of the resurrected Lord,

as does Luke's subsequent statement concerning Christ's flesh and bones (24:39).

John, the last of the four evangelists, gives Christians perhaps the largest contribution of original resurrection details. While he confirms most of the general events of that first Easter morning, he breaks new ground in areas such as Christ's encounter with Mary at the garden tomb (John 20:11-17), his pointed conversation with Thomas about disbelieving his physical nature (20:24-29), and the extensive report of his visit to his disciples by the sea of Tiberias (21:1-25). While the four Gospel writers were not the only New Testament witnesses concerning the Resurrection, they do chronicle the supporting events from a first-person perspective.

Ancient and Modern Views

The apostles and disciples of the New Testament period devoted much of their teaching and writing to the Resurrection (e.g., Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32). Even within their ministry they confronted distortions and outright rejections among the believers (2 Tim. 2:17-18; 1 Cor. 15:12). The believers' responses merely foreshadowed the divergent resurrection notions that blossomed during the post-New Testament period. Those reconstructions grew out of the philosophic intersections of Christianity with neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Docetism, all of which stamped deep impressions on this nascent faith. Neo-Platonism brought with it the Hellenistic idea that the body is undesirable and restrictive, whereas the soul is destined for immortal existence. Gnosticism emphasized secret knowledge as the key to a reunion with an immaterial God. Finally, Docetism taught that divine beings only appear to be human or physical, and Christ never came into real "contact with the world of matter."⁴ During the first four centuries, these philosophic movements combined with the emerging Christian faith. The result was a blending process that altered or at least influenced many of the fundamental Christian doctrines. Foremost among these impacted doctrines was that of the Resurrection.

The theological interpretations of the Resurrection bifurcated into divergent positions as these philosophies were assimilated into Christianity. A divisive issue became the nature of a resurrected body. The Hellenistic camp believed that the Resurrection

of Jesus was only a spiritual or noncorporeal occurrence. They cited both the disciples' failure to recognize the risen Lord and the words of the apostle Paul, which described the Resurrection as a "transformation" and a "spiritual body," to signify a noncorporeal or spiritual event. In contrast, the second position held that the Resurrection was a physical event, and Christ came forth from the tomb with a glorified, tangible body. The chasm between these two interpretations became a doctrinal battleground of the post-apostolic period.

Augustine wrote about the resurrection discord in the early church with this description, as noted by scholar Hugh Nibley: "Since it is the one doctrine that makes Christians Christians, it is alarming to learn from St. Augustine that in his day 'in nothing is there so much conflict and controversy among Christians (themselves) as on the subject of the resurrection of the flesh.' 'On no other matter,' he writes, 'do they disagree so vehemently, so obstinately, so resolutely, or so contentiously as on the subject of the resurrection of the flesh.'"⁵ Here Augustine summarized the ideological collisions of the first four centuries. Staunch supporters of a physical resurrection, such as Ignatius,⁶ Justin Martyr,⁷ and Tertullian,⁸ tried to withstand the wave of incorporealism. They rallied their churchmen with cries such as, "I *know* that Christ had a body after the resurrection"⁹ and "Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of . . . Platonic and dialectic composition!"¹⁰ In spite of this, they were increasingly arrayed against educated intellectuals. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine represented the core of these immaterialists who ardently promulgated a disembodied, spiritual, or soul-type resurrection. Following the victory of the intellectuals at the Council of Nicaea, the incorporeal view of the Resurrection firmly established itself in Christian theology and has maintained that position ever since.¹¹

In spite of these doctrinal squabbles, the concept of the Resurrection has managed to maintain a central theological position within modern Christianity. And yet, in recent years this doctrinal centerpiece has been subjected to increased scrutiny. Contemporary scholars such as Gerd Lüdemann¹² and John Crossan¹³ have blatantly challenged the historicity of the Resurrection. Physicist Frank Tipler avers that "most modern Christian theologians" no longer believe in the reality of the Resurrection.¹⁴ These recent

challenges solicit a pair of questions: Do modern, practicing Christians profess an active belief in the Resurrection? And if so, what do they understand the doctrine of the Resurrection to be?

National polling services such as Gallup, Harris, and Barna have closely monitored America's religious pulse. Recently, Gallup researchers have established that 94 percent of all Americans believe in God. Also, the related issue of belief in Jesus Christ's divinity has found 84 percent of Americans in agreement.¹⁵ On the surface these numbers portray a decisive Christian majority that accepts the fundamental doctrines. However, a more careful analysis projects a people who accept the fundamentals but struggle to define the specifics. The doctrine of the Resurrection is a case in point.

Kenneth Woodward addressed the specifics of the Resurrection with a feature article in *Newsweek* entitled "Rethinking the Resurrection." His piece argues that even though "most Christians still believe in the risen Jesus, . . . very few Christians are literalists on this point and . . . there is a range of opinion on what the Resurrection means."¹⁶

His article was not the first to identify the public confusion about this central doctrine. In 1988 the Gallop organization probed this same issue of resurrection by asking 750 adults whether or not people will have "human form" in the life after death. Slightly less than half of the respondents (43 percent) said "yes," while the remaining 57 percent either disagreed or didn't know.¹⁷ Yet another survey by the National Opinion Research Center in 1984 phrased a resurrection-related query with the words, "Will life after death be a spiritual life involving our mind but not our body?" The respondents leaned noticeably to an immaterial resurrection; 75 percent replied that this was either "somewhat" or "very likely" to be the case.¹⁸

What these surveys seem to indicate is that public opinion varies widely over the specifics of the Resurrection. The first survey suggests that almost half of all Christians believe that the resurrected state will include a physical form or body. Yet the second survey swings back to a 75 percent tally for a nonphysical resurrection. Perhaps the best summary of these findings is that no consensus exists beyond the notion of a generic or generalized resurrection. To become more precise suggests that either the populace splits evenly over the physical/spiritual resurrection

debate or that Americans favor a spiritual view of resurrection. Regardless of where the fulcrum pivots, the specifics of this Christian theological centerpiece, the Resurrection, are anything but clear in our current context. In retrospect, this development is somewhat ironic. What began as perhaps the very theological keystone of Christianity itself has become, in recent times, truly an embattled doctrine.

The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine of the Resurrection

In modern times a marvelous work has commenced. The Lord has revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith an additional witness of Jesus Christ, namely, the Book of Mormon. This volume of scripture supports the Bible. In recent years, a prophet has elaborated on the interplay and relationship between the Bible and the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson stated: "The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace."¹⁹ These words confirm what Book of Mormon writers anciently foretold concerning the tandem relationship between the Book of Mormon and the Bible. In 1 Ne. 13:40 we read: "These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them." An express purpose of this revealed text is to establish the truth or truths of the Bible. Certainly the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection qualifies as a plain and precious truth in need of clarity.

The Book of Mormon proclaims the reality of the Resurrection through two contrasting approaches. First, numerous prophets record within their inspired writings doctrinal descriptions of the nature of the Resurrection. They speak in unmistakable terms about who will be resurrected, when resurrection will occur, and what it will entail. In particular, many of those ancient seers write with keen insight into the confusion that would engulf believing Christians centuries later. Their frontal approach to the physical,

literal nature of the Resurrection speaks volumes to our current controversies.

The second level of Book of Mormon support for a corporeal resurrection shifts to the powerful realm of experience. This book of scripture records the epiphany of the risen Lord and a short but detailed account of his ministry with a branch of Israelites (see 3 Nephi 11–26). Giving a scriptural description of the Resurrection, it leaves the deductive doctrinal explanations and portrays the actual experience with the physical resurrected Jesus.

The Book of Mormon includes fifteen different books of prophetic writings. Often, multiple prophets contribute within a specific book. While almost every prophet mentions either the doctrine of the Resurrection or the resurrected Lord, some give much greater attention than others to this doctrine. Among those who devote considerable space to the Resurrection are Jacob, Abinadi, Amulek, and Alma.²⁰

Jacob is one of the earlier prophets in the Book of Mormon sequence (ca. 550 B.C.). He delivers to his people a mighty sermon on the Atonement of Jesus Christ and places the Resurrection at the core of his remarks. Beginning with verse 4 and continuing through verse 26 of 2 Nephi chapter 9, Jacob teaches about the Resurrection. He mentions specifically the following ten points:

1. All flesh must die; nevertheless, we will all stand before God with physical bodies (9:4).

2. Jesus Christ will live in the flesh upon the earth. He will die and perform the infinite Atonement, which includes the power of resurrection and enables all to overcome the impact of the first judgment, which mandated death (9:5–7).

3. Without the power to be resurrected and overcome physical death, all humankind would have been miserable forever and in eternal bondage to Lucifer (9:8–9).

4. The goodness of God is manifest through Christ overcoming physical death (9:10).

5. Christ delivers us from the physical grave as well as the spiritual grave. Through his power, the spirits and bodies of individuals are restored, reunited, and become immortal as well as incorruptible (9:11–13).

6. Resurrected beings will have a perfect knowledge of either their guilt or their righteousness (9:14).

7. All beings after resurrection will stand before God and will retain their same state of righteousness or wickedness (9:15–16).

8. The joys of the resurrected righteous will be “full forever” (9:18).

9. The Lord suffered the pains of all the family of Adam so that each person will be able to be resurrected (9:21–22).

10. The Atonement (which circumscribes the Resurrection) will assure that even those who died in ignorance will be delivered from physical death (9:26).

The Prophet Jacob certainly explicated the doctrine of resurrection in succinct terms. His teachings alone build a strong case for the doctrinal significance of the Resurrection in the Book of Mormon.

A second strong witness for the doctrine of the Resurrection surfaces in the teachings of Abinadi (ca. 150 B.C.). As he rebuked the apostate King Noah, he emphasized the following:

1. All prophets had essentially taught that the Messiah would have a physical body, suffer afflictions, and accomplish the resurrection of the dead (Mosiah 13:33–35).

2. The Son has power over the dead, he breaks the bands of death, and he effectuates the Resurrection (15:8–9, 20).

3. There will be a First Resurrection for those who have been righteous or have died without the law, such as children. The willfully rebellious will not have part in the First Resurrection (15:21–26).

4. Without Christ and his ability to overcome death, the Resurrection would have been impossible. He has removed the “sting of death” (16:6–8).

5. The Resurrection will place individuals into an eternal state of either happiness or misery, depending upon their choices (16:10–12).

Like Jacob, Abinadi makes frequent references to the doctrine of the Resurrection. He is the first Book of Mormon prophet to teach us of the multiple phases of the Resurrection, with his references to a “first” resurrection. Also, he adds his voice to those of the previous prophets who all testified of a resurrection of the dead.

Yet another witness within this scriptural text is Amulek (ca. 80 B.C.). He speaks to his people with doctrinal candor that leaves little room for ambiguity. Even though his remarks surface in a single chapter, Alma 11, he is still able to proclaim the following truths:

1. All will overcome temporal death through the death of Christ (11:41–42).

2. The Resurrection will combine the spirit and the body again in a perfect form. We will appear as we do right now (mortally) with physical body parts (11:43).

3. Our memories will also be made perfect (11:43).

4. The physical process of the Resurrection will cover even minute details (11:44).

5. The Resurrection is inextricably linked with the Judgment (11:44).

6. A resurrected being will have body and spirit inseparably unified (11:45).

While Amulek did not cover a wide band of subjects in his teachings, he did give considerable emphasis to a select few, which included some pronouncements about the nature of the Resurrection.

Perhaps the greatest resurrection theologian in the Book of Mormon is the prophet Alma (ca. 70 B.C.). In an extensive discourse covering three scriptural chapters, Alma 40–42, he teaches his rebellious son Corianton about the doctrine of the Resurrection. What he mentions is not new material in general for the Book of Mormon text. However, his concentrated sermon, his directness, and his precision set Alma apart from his prophetic colleagues. Most of Alma’s Resurrection doctrine emerges early in

his discourse in Alma 40. Specifically, he emphasizes these points of doctrine:

1. The general resurrection will commence after the resurrection of Christ and will give priority to those who lived before Christ (40:16-19).

2. The term “first resurrection” includes those who preceded Christ – from Adam until the Savior’s resurrection (40:16, 18).

3. There is a time period between mortal death and the Resurrection. This will be a spiritual existence and will bifurcate into a realm of the righteous in “paradise” and the wicked in darkness (40:11-15, 21).

4. The soul (spirit) will be reunited or restored to the body in the Resurrection (40:18-23).

5. Every limb, joint, or body part will be restored to its “perfect” or “proper” frame in the Resurrection (40:23; 41:2).

Not only does Alma raise these resurrection issues, but he also boldly reiterates some of them again and again. The corporeality of the Resurrection is such a case in point. In a span of just six verses, Alma refers to the “reuniting” or “restoring” of the “soul to the body” five times (Alma 40:18-23). This is all the more remarkable considering the divisiveness of the doctrine of a physical resurrection in our modern Christian context. Alma does not stop there, however. He states that all physical body parts will be restored in a perfect way to the resurrected being (40:23). A final tribute to Alma’s passages comes in the form of a profound theological concept. This prophet reveals the idea of an interim spiritual existence between death and the Resurrection. While this may not be resurrection theology per se, it nevertheless helps us considerably to understand the context in which the Resurrection will occur. On the basis of these principles and concepts, Alma certainly deserves to be categorized as the preeminent prophet of the Resurrection doctrine.

In summary, the Book of Mormon emerges as a deep reservoir of resurrection doctrine. Four prophets in particular promulgate the doctrine of the Resurrection. They teach us that Jesus Christ is the power behind the universal resurrection, that the

resurrected state is the key to happiness, that without the Resurrection humankind would be miserable forever, that there will be various phases within the Resurrection, that in the Resurrection the body and the spirit will be inseparably reunited, and that all bodily elements will be restored to their perfect condition. To say that the Book of Mormon is a treasure trove of Resurrection doctrine is an understatement.

The Resurrected Christ

Even with its doctrinal significance, the Book of Mormon offers yet another invaluable view of the Resurrection discussion. This volume of scripture includes an extended account of the resurrected Lord and his visit with an unknown branch of the house of Israel. In the record of 3 Nephi, the Savior appears initially to 2,500 people (3 Ne. 17:25) and ministers to them and then others for a number of days. Thus the Book of Mormon not only addresses the doctrinal issues of the Resurrection, but it also includes an extended experience with the physically glorified, resurrected Lord.

In the book 3 Nephi, commencing with chapter 11 and concluding with chapter 28, this sacred text chronicles the Nephite ministry of the resurrected Christ. Chapter 11 begins the account and focuses directly on the physical nature of the Resurrection. Shortly after the Lord appears to the righteous multitude, he invites each individual to come forth:

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world. And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come (3 Ne. 11:14-15).

This scriptural incident leaves little room for doubt about the physicality of the resurrected Lord. He not only shows them the marks of the Crucifixion, but he also invites them to touch him

and verify individually that he is physically the resurrected Jesus. The account indicates that 2,500 individuals participated. But this is only the initial exchange in a series of physical encounters.

Later as the Savior prepared to leave, he changed his plans and administered to the sick and afflicted. Then, in a poignant scene, he called for the children of the multitude and physically blessed them one at a time, whereupon the heavens were opened to the entire assemblage (17:21–25). Following this outpouring, he instituted the ordinance of sacramental emblems. He conspicuously took up bread, blessed and broke it, and then gave it to his disciples to eat (18:3; 20:3). Prior to his final departure, the text records the Lord “touching” his disciples to give them the “power to give the Holy Ghost” (18:36–37), and then “touching” the nine disciples who desired to be with the Lord in his heavenly kingdom (28:12). The text of the Book of Mormon, particularly the account in 3 Nephi of the risen Jesus, gives us a very lucid account of a physical, glorified, resurrected being. The account is a strong and ideal complement to a volume that is loaded with definitive doctrinal support for the Resurrection.

The book of 3 Nephi also contributes one other witness to the reality of the Resurrection. After the Savior showed himself physically to the multitude, he conversed directly with their leaders, asking them about their diligence in keeping a written record of their experiences (3 Ne. 23:7–10). As part of his inquiry, he specifically probed whether or not they had recorded the resurrection of many of the Nephite Saints subsequent to his own resurrection (23:11). This miraculous event had fulfilled a prophecy of the earlier prophet Samuel. When they admitted their oversight, he asked them to amend their records (23:12–13). This event lends further credibility to the reality of the physical resurrection. Although it is secondary compared to the marvelous manifestation of the risen Lord, it is nevertheless another witness to the reality of a universal resurrection.

Conclusion

In retrospect, the doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus has become the focal point of all Christianity. Without it, as President Howard W. Hunter stated, “The gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a litany of wise sayings and seemingly unexplainable miracles.”²¹

This premise of the centrality of the Resurrection finds support across a broad spectrum of Christian denominations and respected theologians. However, the doctrinal specifics of the Resurrection do not enjoy the same kind of unanimity. This has been the case from the original Easter morning, when even Jesus' closest followers disbelieved until shown otherwise, to the Saints at Corinth whom Paul sought to persuade, to the immaterialists with whom the early church father Tertullian battled, and to the current Christian audience. Indeed, a surge of resurrection skepticism seems to be currently cresting with such reassessments as "Rethinking the Resurrection."

Amidst all this controversy in Christianity, a new volume of scripture has emerged with unmistakable clarity concerning the Resurrection. First, the Book of Mormon discusses the doctrine of the Resurrection with both depth and breadth. Several prophets choose this doctrine as one of their central scriptural topics. Their sermons directly address corporeality, as a testament to their inspired vision. Then, as a perfect complement to the doctrinal discussion, the Book of Mormon portrays perhaps the ultimate resurrection treatise: an eye-witness account of the risen glorified Lord. It is no wonder that a latter-day prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, would characterize the Book of Mormon as the "keystone of the doctrine of the Resurrection."²²

This poses a rather intriguing relationship between the Book of Mormon and Christianity in a current context. If Christianity indeed builds itself upon the doctrine of the Resurrection, and if that keystone represents an ambiguous doctrinal block at best, then surely the Book of Mormon beckons to all Christianity to come and learn of the reality of this glorious doctrine.

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Scripture Index

Old Testament

Exodus		Isaiah	
20:4-6	64	chapter 29	93
23:11	142	41:17	194
		53:10	47
Leviticus		Ezekiel	
19:10	142	36:26	211
Deuteronomy		Malachi	
15:7-8	142	3:1-5	106
Psalms			
16:8-11	81		

New Testament

Matthew		JST 3:36	152
		JST 3:38	143
1:18-25	51	JST 3:38-40	144
1:20	188	JST 3:44	149
chapter 3	37, 139	4:17	52
3:5-6	142	4:17-22	41
3:7-8	143	5:16	169
3:8-11	144	5:21-22	12
3:11	53, 146, 202	5:22	57, 60, 78-79, 85
3:12	85	5:27-28	12
3:13-14	147	5:30	79
3:15	147	chapters 5-7	154
3:16	149	6:12	8

Scripture Index

6:14-15	8	22:13	78, 87
7:1-2	8	22:36-40	74
JST 7:1-2	8	22:37-28	166
7:14	154	23:13-36	30
7:21-23	5	23:15	79
8:2-3	160	23:23	26
8:10	161	23:27-28	70
8:11-12	87	23:33	79
8:13	161	23:37	22
8:17	192	24:13	54, 185
9:2	162	25:23	10
9:6-7	162	25:26-30	10
JST 9:18-20	144	25:30	87
JST 9:18-21	150	25:31-46	14, 17
9:22	160	25:34-40	10
chapter 10	41	25:41-46	11
10:1-20	18	JST 26:22	129
10:8	41	26:26	129
10:28	79	26:26-27	129
11:5	46	26:26-29	126
11:10	149	26:28	135, 174
11:20-24	6	26:29	135
11:23	79	26:36	188
12:34-37	12	26:36-42	52
12:41-42	17	26:37-38	188
13:14	24	26:39	52, 189
13:40	85	26:57-27:25	189
13:42	85	27:26-50	52
14:13-21	127, 134	27:35	189
15:22	160	27:39-50	189
15:24-28	160	27:45-46	194
15:32-38	134	27:46	194
16:13-20	31	27:52-53	220
16:16-17	20	27:62-66	220
16:17	31	28:1	220
16:18	79	28:1-8	189
16:27	4	28:2-3	220
18:3-6	21	28:9-10	220
18:8	85	28:11-15	220
18:10-11	121	28:19	18, 53, 150
JST 18:11	121		
19:17	168	Mark	
19:28	2, 3		
20:28	48, 174	chapter 1	139
21:12-13	64	3:1-6	62
21:14	64	3:14	18

6:7-12	52	4:16-19	121
6:30-44	127	5:32	53
9:45	85	6:37	17
9:48	85	7:48	161
10:13-16	134	7:50	161
11:15-17	65	8:4-15	55
11:25-26	17	8:13	54
12:38-40	30	9:10-17	127
13:10	46	10:1-3	18
13:11	53	10:10-16	17
13:13	54	11:37-54	30
JST 14:20-25	44	11:52	19, 22-23
14:22	42	11:53	20
14:22-25	126	JST 11:53	23
14:24	42	12:12	54
14:25	135	12:47-48	6
14:32	188	13:3	186
14:32-42	52	13:5	186
14:36	52, 189	14:16-23	5
14:46-15:14	189	16:19-26	81
15:15-37	52	16:23	79
15:24	189	JST 17:39-40	101
15:29-37	189	18:22	68
15:33	194	19:41-42	22
15:34	194	19:45-46	65
16:1-14	189	22:16-18	126
16:9	220	22:18	135
16:15-16	135, 140	22:19	131
16:15-18	220	22:19-20	126
16:16	7, 53, 185	22:20	174
		22:30	2, 135
		22:32	11, 168
		22:39-46	52
		22:42	52, 189
		22:43	189
		22:44	132, 189-90
		22:54-23:24	189
		23:33	189
		23:33-46	52
		23:34-46	189
		23:44	194
		24:1-48	189
		24:13-35	220
		24:39	221
Luke			
1:6	37		
1:35	188		
1:77	20		
2:6-21	51		
2:10	47		
chapter 3	139		
3:7-8	152		
3:8	142		
3:9	85		
3:11	142		
3:12-13	142		
3:14	142		
3:16	53		

John		14:16	202
JST 1:14	52	14:26	54
1:33	149	17:3	164
2:13-16	65	17:4	54
3:3	201, 205	18:1	52
3:4	201	18:12-19:16	189
3:5	7, 53, 140	19:16-30	52
3:5-8	201	19:17-18	189
3:7	202	19:25-30	189
3:14-16	162	19:28	194
3:16-17	120, 174, 187	19:30	194
3:18	174	20:1-21:24	189
3:19	179, 180	20:11-17	221
3:19-20	174	20:24-29	221
3:23	148	20:31	162
4:1-2	150	21:1-25	221
4:1-3	40	21:15-17	169
4:10	194	21:17	18
4:10-14	127		
4:14	194	Acts	
5:14	53	1:8	221
5:22	2	1:22	221
5:24	162	chapter 2	206
5:24-29	121	2:27	79
5:30	47	2:32	221
6:5-14	127	chapter 9	206
6:32-33	127	17:18	68
6:35	127	17:26	34
6:38	52	17:30	31
6:38-40	174		
6:51	175	Romans	
6:51-55	127	1:25	63
7:24	9	2:12	31
8:15-16	2	3:23	49
8:24	185	chapters 4-5	120
8:26	2	6:3-4	203
8:50	2	6:4	202
9:39-41	6	6:6	206
10:10	175	8:29	34
10:10-18	174		
10:17-18	122, 175	1 Corinthians	
10:18	174	3:16-17	131
11:25	162, 175	6:13-20	131
12:48	13		
14:15	168		

10:13	192	James	
11:23-29	133	3:6	80
11:30	133	5:14-15	134
12:3	20	1 Peter	
chapter 15	120	1:2	34
15:12	221	1:20	34
15:14	219	2 Peter	
15:22	1	2:4	79
2 Corinthians		1 John	
5:17	202-3	1:8	71
Ephesians		Revelation	
1:3-4	34	1:18	80
4:5	149	2:11	82
4:11	42	6:8	80
2 Thessalonians		19:20	85
2:8	101	20:6	82
2:13	34	20:12	13
2 Timothy		20:13	80
1:9	34	20:13-14	80
2:17-18	221	20:13-15	85
Hebrews		20:14	78, 83
11:1	163	21:4	107
		21:8	78, 83, 85
		22:16	100

Book of Mormon

1 Nephi		8:33-34	96
1:10	41	10:6	49, 117, 118
1:18-20	22	10:7-8	38
2:9-11	105	10:7-10	141
4:15-17	39	10:8	38
7:12	161	10:9	141
8:12	169	10:9-10	38
8:26-27	96	10:18	175
		10:19	50

Scripture Index

10:21	14, 17, 18	17:36	115
11:13-21	115	18:15	4
11:15	47	19:10-13	189
11:21	47	19:23-24	26
11:24-25	20	22:15	101
11:26-27	141, 148	22:17	101
11:27	141		
11:28	20	2 Nephi	
11:32-33	187, 189	1:6-11	95
11:34-35	21	1:10	17
11:34-36	42	1:13	80
11:36	21	1:26	67
12:9	42	2:4	117
12:9-10	17	2:5	182, 185
12:10	162	2:6-7	186
12:16	80	2:8	116, 118, 182
12:18	50	2:10	17
13:1-19	95	2:11	168, 177
13:20-34	111	2:12	177
13:24	42	2:14-15	177
13:24-29	127	2:15	177
13:26-27	58	2:16	168
13:27	112	2:17-18	115
13:29	58	2:18	178
13:32	112	2:19	117
13:34	17	2:20-25	178
13:39	114	2:21	18, 179, 186
13:39-40	58	2:23	177
13:40	114	2:25	69, 115, 117, 177
14:3-4	80	2:26	71
14:7	92	2:27	105, 168
14:10	92	2:29	180
14:11	92	3:6	93
14:12	92	3:7	93
14:13	92	3:9	93
14:14	92	3:11-12	93
14:15-17	92	3:12	75, 95
15:18	97	3:15	93
15:28-30	82	4:21	209
15:29	80	4:27-29	73
15:32	18	4:31	73
15:32-33	17	4:32	80
15:33	14-15	4:34	73
15:35	80	6:8-11	94
16:2	67	6:11	94
16:28	161		

9:2	94	25:20	116
9:4	225	25:24-27	40
9:4-10	117	26:13	50
9:5-7	225	26:24	63
9:6	114, 179	26:29-30	108
9:6-7	188	26:32	59
9:6-9	115, 118	27:5	93
9:7	4	27:6	93
9:7-9	119	27:7-8	93
9:7-10	81	27:9	93-94
9:8-9	181, 183, 225	27:12-13	93
9:10	225	27:15-18	94
9:10-12	81	27:15-20	93
9:10-13	115	27:25	24
9:11-13	225	27:26	94
9:14	3, 226	27:29	94
9:15	4	27:29-30	93
9:15-16	81, 226	27:30	94
9:16	86, 88	27:31-32	94
9:18	226	27:33	94
9:19	81	27:34	94
9:19-21	49	27:35	94
9:21-22	226	28:7-8	15
9:23	41, 141	28:12	23
9:23-24	49	28:14	112
9:24	186	28:14-15	24
9:25-26	7	28:16	95
9:26	81, 225-26	28:22-23	88
9:27	18	28:23	14, 17
9:28	114	29:8-14	113
9:29	24	29:11	17, 18
9:41	3	30:2	153
9:42	24	chapter 31	41
9:44	17	31:2-32:6	55
9:46	3	31:6	147
10:3-6	94	31:7	147
10:5	191	31:8	147
10:7	94	31:9-12	148
11:4	39	31:11	141
11:5	175	31:13	135, 203
11:6	117	31:17	50, 135, 202, 205
25:2	37	31:17-18	140
25:14-15	94	31:17-21	155
25:16	94	31:18	50, 165
25:17	23	31:20	50, 207, 215
25:18	18	31:21	116

33:1	50	2:41	14
33:6	118	3:3	47
33:14-15	18	3:4	17
		3:7	132, 190
Jacob		3:8	115
		3:8-11	187
1:19	11	3:9	163
2:23	64	3:9-10	190
2:35	105	3:10	17
3:7	105	3:11	17, 117
3:11	78, 83	3:16	117, 179
3:11-12	80	3:17	48, 116, 204
4:5	40	3:19	74, 116-17, 180, 204
4:14	23	3:24	17
5:61	97	3:24-27	87
5:71-72	97	3:25	17
5:75	101	3:27	86
6:8	114, 175	4:1	209
7:1-27	96	4:2	208
7:7	96	4:3	208-9
7:11	116	4:5	117
7:12	117, 182	4:7	117
		4:8	116
Enos		4:10-12	215
		4:11	211
1:1-6	205	4:12	204
1:5-6	162	4:13	211
1:6	207	4:13-15	105
1:8	162	4:16	211
1:9-13	211	4:30	59
		chapter 5	206
Jarom		5:1-2	204
		5:2	210
1:2	114, 175	5:3	212
		5:6-7	204
Words of Mormon		5:7-10	215
		5:8	116
1:11	13	5:12	215
		5:15	216
Mosiah		chapter 7	31
		8:17	104
2:5-9	105	chapters 9-22	31
2:17	11	12:28-30	25
2:36-37	97	13:28	48
2:38	86	13:29-31	39
2:38-39	86	13:33-35	116, 226

15:5-8	191	28:3-4	169
15:7	48	chapter 29	31
15:8-9	226	29:27	17
15:9	186		
15:12	190	Alma	
15:19	175	chapter 1	96
15:20	116, 226	1:3-4	108
15:21-26	4, 226	1:21	96
15:24	16	1:26-33	103
15:26	18	2:1	27
16:1	3	4:3	17
16:3	179, 180	4:4-5	103
16:3-4	117	4:6-10	103
16:3-12	116	4:8-9	104
16:5	97	4:8-10	104
16:6-8	226	4:10	104
16:10	17	4:18-20	103
16:10-12	226	5:7	80
16:13	116	5:9-10	80
chapter 18	28	5:10	17
18:7	145	5:14	213
18:8-9	25, 130, 145, 154	5:15	17
18:8-16	141	5:18	17
18:9	130	5:26	209, 214
18:10	131, 145, 153	5:33	49
18:13	41	5:41	213
18:16-17	154	5:48	187
18:17-18	41	5:62	141
21:33	41	7:10	115
21:33-35	150	7:11	192
21:35	145	7:11-13	191
23:14	26	7:12	191-92
24:1-7	26	7:12-13	191
24:4-8	105	7:13	132, 190
24:6-7	27	7:14	146
25:17-18	151	8:17	28
26:23	190-91	9:6	205
26:24	14	9:14-15	17
26:27	14	9:33	205
26:31	8	10:1-32	28
chapter 27	205	10:22-23	105
27:24-26	205	11:23	80
27:28	72	11:34-37	15
27:29	208	11:37	49
27:31	1	11:41	17
28:3	211		

Scripture Index

11:41-42	227	19:29	80
11:42-45	116	19:29-30	209
11:43	184, 227	19:33	210
11:44	2, 17, 183-84, 227	21:4	27
11:45	227	22:7-11	176
12:8	17	22:12-14	176
12:11	80	22:13	175
12:12	17	22:13-14	118
12:13	84	22:14	118, 182
12:14	12, 17, 59	22:15-18	176
12:15	17	chapters 22-26	103
12:16	14, 83	24:14	114, 175
12:16-18	84	24:28-29	27
12:17	14, 86	24:30	97
12:22	117, 179	26:13	80
12:24	16, 131, 186	26:14	80
12:25	114, 175	26:22	212
12:25-33	175	28:13	114
12:30	114, 175	29:4	13
12:31-32	187	29:5	7
12:31-37	84	30:6-60	21, 29
12:32	83	30:13	96
chapter 13	34	30:13-14	96
13:1	27, 34	30:14	96
13:1-12	205	30:15	96
13:1-16	114	30:16	96
13:2	114	30:17	96
13:3	34, 35	30:18	96
13:3-7	36	30:28	96
13:4	36	30:43-46	96
13:6-11	27	30:60	80
13:11-12	210	31:5	103
13:23	114	32:17-43	30
13:25-26	107	32:21	163
13:30	80, 83	32:26-27	165
14:6	80	32:28	166
15:6-12	141	33:22	17, 191
15:10-11	161	34:8	186
chapters 17-18	97	34:9	114, 119, 182
18:24-42	176	34:9-12	116, 118
18:36	118	34:10	119
18:41-43	205	34:11	187
chapters 18-19	206	34:13-14	188
chapter 19	6, 212	34:14	119
19:13	209	34:15-16	186
19:18	209	34:32	16

34:34-35	87	42:23	17
chapter 36	205	43:2-3	99
36:13	80-81	chapters 43-62	99
36:15	17	48:17	80
36:16-20	81	49:30	100
36:19	208	50:20-22	100
36:20-21	208	54:7	80
36:24	169, 211	54:11	80
37:30	17	58:9	17
37:36	167	59:13	62
38:9	116	60:31-33	17
38:12	69	chapters 60-61	103
chapter 39	105	chapters 60-62	105
chapter 40	228		
40:11-12	88	Helaman	
40:11-14	4	2:2-13	98
40:11-15	228	4:4	96
40:12	17	4:23	17, 104, 106
40:13	87	5:9	116
40:16	228	5:11	49, 122
40:16-29	228	5:17	97
40:18	228	5:19	141
40:18-23	228	5:41-49	205
40:21	17, 228	6:1	106
40:23	228	6:17	104
40:26	15	6:28	80
chapters 40-42	227	6:36-37	97
41:2	114, 175, 228	6:37-40	103
41:3	13, 17, 59	7:5-9	28
41:4	14	7:21	28
41:4-5	14	8:14	163
41:11	180	8:15	163
41:15	175	8:18	27
41:31	175	8:25	7
42:4	18	9:5	17
42:5	175	12:2-3	63
42:6	188	13:6-7	47
42:6-7	117	13:11	62
42:8	114, 175	chapter 14	103
42:9	179	14:3-4	100
42:10	18, 180, 182	14:6	106
42:13	18, 186	14:11	17
42:14	182	14:14-18	116, 118
42:15	114, 185	14:15-17	183
42:16	175, 181	14:15-19	83
42:22	181		

14:16	179	chapters 11-28	229
14:18	187	12:1	41, 146
14:18-19	83	12:1-2	42, 134
14:20-24	106	12:16	169
14:25	106	12:22	12, 57, 62, 80, 86
3 Nephi		13:14-15	17
chapter 1	103	14:21-23	5
1:15	100	15:4-5	134
1:17	100	16:9	17
1:20	106	chapter 17	107
2:1	106	17:6	193
2:3	103	17:7	193
2:14-16	106	17:8	161
3:22	106	17:20	161
6:15-16	103	17:21	134
7:23-24	143	17:21-25	230
7:24-25	141	17:25	229
7:25	151	18:3	129-230
8:4	106	18:5	42, 128-29, 135, 153
8:6-18	106	18:5-7	128
8:22	106	18:7	43
9:1	106	18:8-9	132
9:1-13	106	18:8-11	132
9:12-13	100	18:10	43, 132
9:15-16	106	18:11	43, 132, 153
9:20	206	18:11-12	135
9:20-22	205	18:12	133
9:21-22	191	18:13	80, 133
10:12	106	18:21	105
chapter 11	103	18:28	133
11:1-11	106	18:29	133
11:11	132, 190-91	18:36-37	41, 230
11:14	106	19:1-14	42
11:14-15	191, 229	19:11-12	129
11:18-21	129	chapter 20	43
11:21-22	151	20:3	230
11:22-28	40, 149	20:3-5	134
11:29-30	62	20:6	134
11:31-34	141	20:7	134
11:31-41	55	20:8	134
11:32	50	20:9	134
11:36	50	20:10	43
11:39-40	80	20:29	95
chapters 11-26	225	20:30-31	95
		20:33	95
		21:2-7	98

21:6	152	5:2	17
21:9-11	93	5:16-18	105
21:11	98	6:21	17
21:23	98	7:5-7	187
21:25	98	7:6	17
21:26-27	98	7:7	14
21:28-29	98	7:10	7
23:7-10	230	8:17	80
23:9-14	106	8:19	9
23:11	230	8:25-26	95
23:12-13	230	8:26-41	95
24:5	17	8:33	111
25:1	104	8:35	104
25:5	107	8:36-41	105
26:4	17	9:11-13	176
chapter 27	46, 51, 54, 55	9:12	119
27:13	46	9:12-13	118
27:14	2, 48	9:13	17, 183
27:14-15	17	9:14	14
27:16	8, 17, 48, 155	9:28	18, 69
27:16-17	50	9:29	133, 142
27:19	15, 146, 162		
27:20	50, 146	Ether	
27:21	214	2:9-10	95
27:25-26	13	2:12	95
27:27	3, 17, 42, 214	3:2	118, 180
28:12	230	3:13	118
28:31	17	3:14	175
28:40	14	5:1-4	93
29:8	95	8:11-18	98
30:2	142, 153	8:19	98
		8:21	98
4 Nephi		8:22	98
1:2	101	8:23-24	98
1:15	71	8:25	99
1:15-17	101	8:26	98
1:34	96	12:6	163
1:38	97	12:27	195
		12:38	17
Mormon			
3:18	17	Moroni	
3:18-19	2	chapter 3	42
3:20	17	3:2	151
4:5	17	chapters 4-5	43

4:1	129	7:48	72, 167
4:2	130	8:8	118, 179, 184
4:3	130-31, 135	8:8-24	116
5:1-2	132	8:9	50, 156
5:2	135	8:10	156, 185
6:1-3	143	8:11	155
6:4	135, 154	8:13	80
6:6	133	8:21	14
7:3-5	96	8:24	118
7:11	71	8:25	143
7:13-17	97	8:26	72, 147, 209
7:15-18	9	8:27	104
7:16	9, 185	9:14-15	17
7:25-26	163	10:4-5	50
7:41	163	10:22	209
7:45	71	10:32	193, 195
7:47	166	10:34	17

Doctrine and Covenants

1:15-17	30	45:39-40	101
5:19	101	45:40	106
17:6	94	45:43	31
19:15-18	190	45:44	101
19:18	132, 190	45:48	106
20:19	167	45:49	106
20:20	180	45:51-52	106
20:25-27	129, 141	46:29	129
20:37	144-45	49:24	106
20:46	129	59:21	25
20:72	144	section 76	14
20:73	156	76:36-38	88
20:76	129	76:37	78
20:77	131	76:40-42	46
27:2-5	136	76:45-48	78
27:5-14	136	76:72	31
29:11	106	76:81-85	78
29:12	3	76:98-112	78
29:39	177	76:103-12	83
29:42-45	187	76:106	88
34:9	106	82:3	70
38:39	104	84:28	37
43:29-31	4	88:6	191
45:32	106	88:14-24	131

88:34-39	15	121:36	16
88:93	100	121:41-43	68
88:95-102	106	123:7	23
88:99	31	124:45-46	106
Section 89	131	128:7	14
93:28	24	132:6-7	129
93:36-37	24	133:70-73	88
93:39	22	138:18-19	123
101:78	105	138:18-37	82
101:90-91	88	138:19	184
107:68-72	129	138:53	35
107:91-92	129	138:55	35
115:6	106	138:56	35
121:34	36		

Pearl of Great Price

Moses

1:40-41	111
chapters 5-6	22
5:11	178
5:13	180
5:18-38	76
5:25	24
6:28	24
6:43	24
6:49	24
6:52	140
6:53-54	197
6:55	185
6:65-66	206
7:62	97

Abraham

2:11	97
3:22	35
3:25	167

Joseph Smith-Matthew

1:22	96
1:23	99
1:27	97
1:29	99
1:31	97, 101
1:36	100
1:41	97
5:34	79

Joseph Smith-History

1:63-65	94
1:68-69	152

Articles of Faith

A of F 4	159
----------	-----

Subject Index

A

Aaron (son of Mosiah), 118, 176

Aaronic Priesthood, 37-39, 42

Abinadi

on judgment, 4

on mortality, 16

is put to death, 25

on law of Moses, 39

on natural man, 180

on Christ's suffering and

Crucifixion, 190-91

on Resurrection, 226-27

Abish, 209

Accountability

for acceptance of gospel, 5-7

for forgiving, 7-9

for service and teaching the
gospel, 9-11

for words, thoughts, 11-13

for sins, 184-85

Adam and Eve, 21-22, 177-79

See also Fall, the

Adam-ondi-Ahman, 136

Afflictions, 192

Agency, 35, 105, 179

Alma the Elder

on judgment, 4

on words and thoughts, 12-13

on mortal life, 16

seeks word of God, 25-26

on exercising faith, 29-30

baptizes with authority, 41,

144-45, 150-51, 153-54

Alma the Younger

on judgment, 1, 7

teaches in Ammonihah, 28-29

on foreordination, 34-36

on repentance, 49

experiences pains of hell, 81

on second death, 84, 86, 187

on outer darkness, 87

on coming of Christ, 107

on baptism, 146

heals Zeezrom, 161

on faith, 163, 165-66

on love of God, 167

on sharing the gospel, 169

on justice, 181, 182, 186

on mercy, 185

on Atonement, 191-93

is spiritually reborn, 204-5,
208

on receiving image of Christ
in countenance, 212-13

on retaining spiritual rebirth,
214

on Resurrection, 227-28

American continent, 95

Amlici, 27, 96-97

Ammon (leader of expedition to
land of Nephi), 41, 150

Ammon (son of Mosiah)

as great missionary, 97, 209

on plan of salvation, 176

Amulek

on judgment, 2, 184

on mortality, 16

teaches in Ammonihah, 28-29

on repentance, 49

on the plan of salvation, 119,
182

on Resurrection, 184, 227

on Atonement, 186, 187-88

Amulon, 25–26, 96–97

Anger

- wrongness of, 59, 62
- different Bible translations of, 60–61
- understanding, of Christ, 62–64
- justice confused with, 66–68
- world philosophies of, 68–71
- supplanting, with love, 71–74

Anthon, Charles, 94

Apostles, ancient twelve, 2, 40–41

Apostles, Nephite, 2, 40–43, 230

Atonement

- effect of, upon final judgment, 4, 7
- experiences in spirit world based on, 35–36
- necessity of, 48–49, 115–16, 120–23, 174–75, 195
- overcome sins through, 72–74
- escaping hell through, 81–84
- sacrament a reminder of, 132
- is clarified through Book of Mormon, 173–74
- personal acceptance of, 185–88
- infinite nature of, 188
- physical process of, 188–91
- all aspects of, 191–94

Augustine, St., on Resurrection, 222

B

Baptism

- as saving ordinance, 7–8, 49, 134–35, 140–42
- authority for, 40–42, 149–51
- as found in Gospels, 53
- as relates to sacrament, 130, 153
- repentance precedes, 142–44
- as covenant with Lord, 144–47
- of Christ, 147–48
- manner of, 148–50

- Gentiles become members of House of Israel through, 152
- as means to entering Christ's Church, 153–54
- as gateway to spiritual rebirth, 202–3

Benjamin, King

- on service to God, 11
- on Christ's birth, 47
- on salvation through Christ, 48, 74, 163
- on suffering of wicked, 86–87
- on fallen state, 179–80
- on Atonement and Crucifixion, 190
- on spiritual rebirth, 211, 214–15, 216

Benjamin, King, people of

- are spiritually reborn, 204, 206
- receive peace, 208
- have no disposition to do evil, 209–10
- experience enlightenment, 212

Benson, Ezra Taft

- on Bible, ix
- on Book of Mormon, x, 96, 97, 98, 99, 224
- on secularization of history, 25
- on parallels of Book of Mormon to our day, 102–3, 104
- on Second Coming, 107
- on love of God, 167
- on obedience, 168
- on Atonement, 174
- on Fall, 178

Bible

- correctness of, ix
- truths taken out of, 57–58, 111–14
- different, translations of Matthew 5:22, 61

Bible, JST of

- clarifies key of knowledge, 20, 23
- clarifies Lord's position on anger, 60

clarifies baptism, 144, 150
 Bishop, 129
 Book of life, 13-14
 Book of Mormon
 clarifies doctrine, ix, 16, 20, 91
 identifies judgments, 4
 translation of, restores light
 and truth, 24
 clarifies priesthood, 32
 contains truths taken from
 Bible, 57-58
 clarifies anger of Christ,
 63-64, 74
 clarifies hell, 80-81, 88
 clarifies second death, 83-84
 clarifies lake of fire and
 brimstone, 85-87
 coming forth of, as sign of
 Second Coming, 93-94
 confounds false doctrines,
 95-97
 gives advice to people in
 latter days, 99-100, 102-5
 as type for Second Coming,
 105-7
 clarifies plan of salvation,
 111-14
 clarifies the Fall, 117-20
 clarifies sacrament, 128, 136
 clarifies baptism, 139-41, 149,
 156
 clarifies faith, 160
 clarifies spiritual rebirth, 202
 clarifies Resurrection, 224, 231
 Bradley, Omar O., 99
 Bradshaw, John, 70
 Bread of Life, 127
 Brewster, Hoyt W., 100-101
 Brimstone, 85-87
 See also Hell

C

Cannon, George Q., 178
 Change, mighty
 See Rebirth, spiritual

Charity, 71-72
 Children
 are innocent before God, 116,
 121
 no baptism of, 155-56
 are blessed by Christ, 230
 Christianity, 219-20, 222-24
 Church, Nephite
 has Melchizedek Priesthood,
 38
 has Law of Moses, 39
 has priesthood renewed, 41-43
 at Savior's appearance, 101,
 229
 falls away, 102-4
 partakes of sacrament, 128
 practices doctrine of baptism,
 140-41, 146, 151
 Christ explains Atonement
 to, 191
 Church of Jesus Christ of
 Latter-day Saints, 92, 97-98,
 153-54
 Clement of Alexandria, 222
 Commandments, 167-68
 Compassion
 of Christ, 192-94
 increases with spiritual
 rebirth, 211
 Consubstantiation, 127-28
 Contention, 59, 62
 See also Anger
 Conversion, 206-7
 See also Rebirth, spiritual
 Corporeality, 224-30
 Countenance, 213
 Covenants, 144-47
 Cowdery, Oliver, 141, 144
 Creation, 167-68, 176-77
 Crossan, John, 222

D

Dahl, Larry E., 80, 206-7
 Darkness, outer, 87-88
 See also Hell

- David (King of Israel), 79–81
- Death
- physical, 122, 179
 - second, or spiritual, 78, 82–84, 187
- See also* Hell
- Desires, 12–13
- Docetism, 221
- E**
- Earth, cleansing of, 101
- Elisabeth (wife of Zacharias), 37
- Emotions, morality of, 59
- Endurance to end, 7–8, 50, 54, 215
- Enlightenment, 212–13
- Enos, 162, 207–8, 211
- Eternal life, 51, 162–63
- F**
- Faith
- foreordination is conditional upon, 36
 - healing based on, 160
 - brings forgiveness of sins, 161–62
 - brings eternal life, 162–63
 - as knowing Christ, 164–66
 - increases love of Christ, 166–67
 - increases obedience, 167–68
 - results in service, 168–70
- Fall, the
- as part of plan of salvation, 115–16, 176–77
 - as taught in Book of Mormon, 117–20
 - as taught in New Testament, 120–23
 - results of, 178–82
 - being redeemed from, 182–83
- Families, 105
- Feelings, 12
- Fire, 78–80, 85–87
- See also* Hell
- Foreordination, 34–37
- Forgiveness, 8–9, 161–62
- Freud, Sigmund, 70
- G**
- Gentiles, 152–53
- Gethsemane, Garden of, 188–90, 198–99 n. 34
- Gnosticism, 221
- God
- as judge, 2
 - powers of, 16
- Gospel of Jesus Christ
- acceptance of, 5–7, 11
 - teaching of, 11, 20–21
 - ancient meaning of, 45–46
 - Christ’s explanation of, 46–51
 - New Testament scriptural references to, 51–54
 - restoration of, as sign of Second Coming, 92
 - parts of, diluted in Bible, 112–13, 119, 122–23
 - includes plan of salvation, 113–17, 175–76
- Greek Enlightenment, 22–23
- H**
- Harris, Martin, 94
- Healings, 160–61, 230
- Helaman (son of Helaman), 49
- Hell
- world’s understanding of, 77–78
 - gospel’s clarification of, 78–82
 - as second death, 82–84
 - as lake of fire and brimstone, 85–87
 - as outer darkness, 87–88
- Hinckley, Gordon B., 11
- Holy Ghost
- as judge, 2

receiving gift of, as saving ordinance, 7–8, 50
 as found in Gospels, 53–54
 gives remission of sins, 135, 146–47
 gift of, promised, 148
 bears testimony of Christ, 166
 as baptism by fire, 203
 brings about change of heart, 209–13
See also Rebirth, spiritual
 House of Israel, 2–3, 152–53
See also Judah
 Hunter, Howard W., 230

I

Idolatry, 63–64
 Ignatius, 222
 Incorporealism, 222
 Infirmities, 192–94
 Intellectualism, 19–21
 Intelligence, 24
 Isaiah, 93–94

J

Jacob (brother of Nephi)
 on judgment, 3–4, 7
 on teaching the gospel, 11
 on rejection of revelation, 23
 on law of Moses, 40
 on baptism, 41
 on repentance, 49
 on hell, 80–81, 86
 on Fall, 118–19, 180–81
 on Atonement, 182, 186, 188
 on Resurrection, 225–26
 James, 79–80
 Jared, Brother of, 180
 Jeremiah, 38
 Jesus Christ
 as judge, 2–4
 uses and bestows priesthood, 40–43

birth of, 46–48, 51–52, 100
 Atonement of, 48–49, 52, 173–74, 186–88
 explanation of anger of, 62–64, 67–68
 cleanses temple, 64–66
 overcoming sins through, 71–74
 coming unto, 81
 prophecies of Joseph Smith, 93
 prophecies of Judah, 95
 prophecies of missionary work, 97–98
 appears to Nephites, 105–7, 229
 mission of, 113–17, 120–22
 record of gospel of, diluted, 122
 sacrament symbolizes, 126–27
 covenants made with,
 through sacrament, 130–32
 will again partake of
 sacrament on earth, 135–36
 baptism of, 140–42, 147–49
 covenants with us at baptism, 144–47
 rewards faithful, 160–64
 developing faith in, 164–66
 increasing love for, 166–67
 obeying commandments of, 167–68
 physical suffering of, during Atonement, 188–90
 suffers for sins, afflictions, infirmities, 191–94
 receiving image of, in countenance, 213
 Jesus Christ, teachings of
 on final judgment, 5–6
 on saving ordinances, 7–8
 on forgiveness and judging others, 8–9
 on service and teaching, 9–11
 on words, feelings, thoughts, desires, 11–12
 on judgment by recorded word, 13

- on rejection of revelation, 19–20
 - refute intellectual community, 22–23
 - explain gospel, 46, 50
 - on hell, 79–80, 87
 - instruct Nephite church in sacrament, 128–29, 133–34, 153
 - on baptism, 142–43, 149–51
 - on service, 168–69
 - on Atonement, 185, 187, 191
 - on being born again, 201, 206
 - See also* Atonement, Second Coming, Resurrection
 - John the Baptist
 - authority of, 37–39, 149
 - prepares world for Christ, 40, 202
 - ministry of, 139–40, 142–43, 144, 146, 152
 - baptizes Christ, 147, 148–49
 - John the Revelator
 - has vision of hell, 80
 - on second death, 82–83
 - on lake of fire and brimstone, 85
 - on faith, 164
 - on Resurrection, 221
 - Joseph (of Egypt), 93
 - Joy, 208–9
 - Judah, tribe of, 94–95
 - Judaism, 22, 37
 - Judgment, final
 - questions about, 1
 - Christ in charge of, 2–4
 - time of, 4
 - different standards for, 5–7
 - saving ordinances important to, 7–8
 - judgment of others affects, 8–9
 - of service and teaching, 9–11
 - of words, thoughts, feelings, desires, 11–13
 - from books, 13–14
 - punishments and rewards after, 14
 - reasons for, 15–16
 - Judgments
 - interim, 4
 - righteous, of others, 8–9
 - Justice, 63, 66–68, 82, 185
- K**
- Kimball, Spencer W., 8
 - Kingdom of God (heaven), 5, 7–8, 15, 114–15
 - Knowledge
 - key of, 19
 - tree of, 177
 - of good and evil, 178
 - Korihor, 21, 29, 96
 - Küng, Hans, 219
- L**
- Lamoni and wife, 209–10, 211
 - Last Supper, 125–27, 135–36
 - Law of Moses, 39–40
 - Lectures on Faith*, 164, 167
 - Lee, Harold B., 51, 214
 - Lehi
 - knows of John the Baptist, 38
 - on justice, 67, 181–82
 - on being saved through Christ, 118, 182, 186
 - on baptism, 141
 - is rewarded for faithfulness, 161
 - on agency, 168
 - on sharing the gospel, 169
 - on plan of salvation, 177
 - on natural man, 180
 - Lewis, C. S., 71–72, 214
 - Liahona, 161
 - Light, 24, 100, 211–12
 - Limhi, people of, 145, 150–51
 - Love
 - of Christ, for us, 63
 - of God, supplants anger, 71–72
 - increases with faith, 166–67

- increases upon being
 spiritually reborn, 209
 of fellowman, 211
 Lüdemann, Gerd, 222
 Luke, 126–27, 220–21
- M**
- Man, natural, 116, 180, 197 n. 19
 Mark, 126–27, 220
 Martyr, Justin, 222
 Materialism, 103–4
 Matthew, 126–27, 147, 220
 Maxwell, Neal A.
 on judgment, 3
 on foreordination, 36
 on doctrine in Book of
 Mormon, 58
 on plan of salvation, 175
 on Spirit of Lord, 185
 on Christ's Atonement, 192,
 193
 on Christ's compassion, 194
 on natural man, 197 n. 19
 McConkie, Bruce R.
 on correctness of Bible, ix
 on judgment of our words, 12
 on ancient baptisms, 41
 on Christ's mortal and divine
 natures, 47
 on superiority of Book of
 Mormon, 91
 on natural man, 185
 on Christ's suffering, 194
 on baptism by fire, 205, 206
 McKay, David O., 66
 Melchizedek Priesthood, 34–36,
 38
 Mercy, 185
 Mikvah washings, 144
 Millennium, 101
 Missionary work, 97–98
 Moltmann, Jürgen, 219
 Mormon
 on judgment according to
 written word of God, 13
 on secularization, 26–27
 on charity, 71, 166
 on change of heart, 72
 sees latter days, 104–5
 gives order of sacrament, 129
 on infant baptism, 155–56
 on faith in Christ, 163
 Moroni (son of Mormon)
 on saving ordinances, 7
 on righteous judgments, 9
 gives priesthood instructions,
 42
 prophesies of Joseph Smith, 93
 on secret combinations, 98–99
 on pride, 104
 on being saved through
 Christ, 119, 193
 gives instructions on
 sacrament, 129–30, 132–33
 on baptism, 142–43
 on faith, 163
 on Resurrection, 183
 on the Holy Ghost, 209
 Morris, George Q., 198 n. 29
 Mortality, 16, 178–80, 195
 Mosiah, sons of, 169, 211
- N**
- Nehor, 27, 96
 Nelson, Russell M., 56 n. 18, 59
 Neo-Platonism, 221
 Nephi (son of Helaman)
 on acceptance of gospel, 6–7,
 163
 as presiding authority, 129
 preaches repentance, 143
 Nephi (son of Lehi)
 on truths taken out of Bible,
 ix–x
 on final judgment, 15, 162
 on those who reject word of
 God, 20–21, 23
 on law of Moses, 39–40
 teaches baptism, 41, 140–41,
 147–48, 154–55, 202

- has vision of Twelve Apostles, 41-42
- uses justice of God, 67
- on overcoming sins through Christ, 73, 118
- on hell, 82
- on Satan's tactics, 88
- has vision of latter days, 92-93
- prophesies concerning Judah, 94
- rewarded for faithfulness, 161
- has vision of Crucifixion, 189
- on receiving the Holy Ghost, 203
- on enduring to the end, 215
- New Jerusalem, 98
- Nibley, Hugh, 222
- Nicaea, Council at, 222
- Nicodemus, 140, 201
- Noah, King, 25-26

- O**
- Oaks, Dallin H., 181
- Obedience, 168
- Opposition, 177
- Ordinances
 - saving, 7-8
 - power of, is with president of Church, 129
 - sacrament as, 134-36
 - baptism as, 140-41, 202-3
- Origen, 222

- P**
- Packer, Boyd K., 66, 104
- Parables of Christ
 - of Great Supper, 5-6
 - teach about judgment, 5-7
 - of Steward, 6
 - teach about service and teaching, 9-10
 - of Talents, 9-10, 87
 - of Sheep and Goats, 10
 - of Sower, 54, 55 n. 17
 - teach of afterlife, 81
 - of Lazurus and Rich Man, 81-82
 - of Wedding of Rich Man's Son, 87
 - teach of punishments, 87
- Paul
 - on foreordination, 34
 - on Fall of Adam, 120
 - on sacrament, 133
 - on faith, 163
 - on spiritual rebirth, 202, 203
 - on Resurrection, 220
- Peace, 207-8
- Perdition, sons of, 77-79, 81
- Perfection, 193
- Persecution, 96-97
- Peter, 79, 168-69
- Pharisees, 5-6
- Philosophies of world, 68-71, 95-97, 219-24
- Plan of salvation, 114-17, 175-76
- Plates of Laban, 39
- Powers of God, 16
- Pratt, Orson
 - on judgment, 14
 - on tree of knowledge, 177
 - on fallen state, 179-80, 181
 - on Resurrection, 184
 - on being spiritually reborn, 205
- Pre-mortal life, 34-37, 115
- Pride, 21, 23, 103-4
- Priesthood
 - foreordination to, 34-37
 - of John the Baptist, 37-39
 - authority of, to administer sacrament, 129
- Prophets
 - following, 100
 - of Book of Mormon, see our day, 104-5
 - of Church, in charge of all ordinances, 129
- Prophets, false, 96-97
- Prosperity, 103-4

Punishments, 14

See also Hell

R

Reason, 24

Rebirth, spiritual

begins with baptism, 202-3

is receiving Holy Ghost, 203

of people of King Benjamin,
204

of Alma the Younger, 204-5

as baptism by fire, 205

brings peace of conscience,
207-8

joy from, 208-9

turns hearts to righteousness,
210-11

increases love of fellowman,
211

increases spiritual
understanding, 211-12

changes countenance, 212-14

retaining or regaining, 214-16

Records, 113-14

Repentance

necessity of, 48-49

as found in Gospels, 52-53

brings remission of sins, 135

precedes baptism, 142-44

appeases justice, 186

Reproving, 68

Resurrection

before final judgment, 4

as part of plan of salvation,
116

sacrament a reminder of, 131

redeems man from Fall,
183-84

importance of, to Christianity,
219-20

four Gospels on, 220-21

ancient views of, 221-22

modern Christian views of,
222-24, 231

surveys on, 223

as revealed in Book of
Mormon, 224-29

Revelation, 19-23

Righteous, 15-16

Righteousness, 210-11

Roberts, B. H., 195

Robinson, J. A. T., 219

Romney, Marion G., 99

S

Sacrament

clarification of, 42-43

as noted in Gospels, 125-28

is clarified in Book of
Mormon, 128, 136, 230

blessing of, 128-32

partaking of, 133-34

as a saving ordinance, 134-35

to be taken at Adam-ondi-
Ahman, 136

relates to baptism, 153

Samuel the Lamanite

on Christ's birth, 47

on death and Resurrection
of Christ, 83-84, 183, 230

Satan

as cause of contention, 62, 74

counterfeit doctrines of, 68-69

tactics of, 88, 103-4

at Second Coming, 101

Scott, Richard G., 48

Scriptures, 13-14

Second Coming, signs of

Book of Mormon clarifies,
91-92

restoration of gospel as, 92-94

Judah accepting Christ as,
94-95

rise up of promised land as, 95

rise of false philosophies as,
95-97

rise of missionary work as,
97-98

building of New Jerusalem as,
98

- rise of secret combinations as, 98-99
 - wars and rumors of wars as, 99-100
 - sign of Son of Man as, 100-101
 - cleansing of earth as, 101
 - have parallels in Book of Mormon, 102-4
 - first coming of Christ parallels, 105-7
 - Secret combinations, 98-99
 - Secularism, 25-29, 96
 - Self-righteousness, 69-70
 - Sermon on the Mount, 169
 - Service, 9-11, 168-69
 - Sherem, 96
 - Sign of Son of Man, 100-101
 - Sinfulness, 210
 - Skinner, Andrew, 213
 - Smith, Hyrum, 35
 - Smith, Joseph
 - seeks correct church, ix
 - on confusion in world, 22-23
 - on judgment by light received, 24
 - on foreordination, 34, 36
 - is foreordained to priesthood, 35
 - on Melchizedek Priesthood, 38
 - ministry of, as sign of Second Coming, 93-94
 - on Second Coming, 100
 - on truths removed from Bible, 112
 - on baptism, 141, 144, 202
 - receives Aaronic Priesthood, 151-52
 - on Christ as Savior, 198 n. 32
 - Smith, Joseph F.
 - identifies those foreordained, 35
 - on baptism, 139
 - on authority, 150
 - on being spiritually reborn, 210-11
 - Smith, Joseph Fielding
 - on priesthood in pre-existence, 36-37
 - on priesthood of John the Baptist, 37-38
 - on the sacrament, 133
 - on Resurrection, 197-98 n. 25
 - on baptism, 203
 - Spirit of Christ, 185
 - Stones, 152-53
 - Surveys, on Resurrection, 223
- T**
- Talmage, James E., 178, 180, 194
 - Taylor, John
 - on learned men of world, 24-25
 - foreordained to priesthood, 35
 - on sacrament, 133
 - on enlightenment from Holy Ghost, 212
 - Temple, Jerusalem, 64-66
 - Tertullian, 222
 - Thoughts, 12-13
 - Tipler, Frank, 222-23
 - Tithing, 66-67
 - Transubstantiation, 127
 - Truth, 24, 165
- W**
- Warner, C. Terry, 69-70
 - Wars, 99-100
 - Webster, Daniel, ix
 - Whitney, Orson F., 175
 - Wicked
 - punishment for, 14, 78-82
 - at Second Coming, 101
 - prior to Second Coming, 103-4
 - Wirthlin, Joseph B., 47
 - Wolfe, William, 173-74
 - Woodruff, Wilford, 35, 212
 - Woodward, Kenneth, 223
 - Words, 11-12
 - Works, good, 5, 13

Y

Young, Brigham, 35, 65, 177

Z

Zacharias, 37

Zeezrom, 27, 161

