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A Comparison of Book of Mormon, Bible, and Traditional Teachings on the Doctrines of Salvation

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Joseph F. McConkie

*T*his paper will compare the teachings of the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and Christian tradition on doctrines essential to salvation. It will contrast the completeness and clarity with which these doctrines are taught in the Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph. Conclusions will then be drawn as to the most effective sources from which these doctrines ought to be learned and taught.

Jesus As the Son of God

No doctrine is more fundamental to true Christianity than that of the divine sonship of Christ. On this matter the Old Testament is silent¹ and the New Testament confusing. Matthew twice records that Jesus is the son of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:18-20), while Luke tells us that although Mary would be overshadowed by the Holy Ghost,

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the child conceived in her womb would be the "Son of the Highest" and was to be called "the Son of God" (Luke 1:32, 35). It is the Book of Mormon that resolves the matter. In vision, Nephi sees Mary "carried away in the Spirit" to the presence of God. Thus the Son of God is conceived, as Nephi tells us, "after the manner of the flesh," and Nephi testifies that he is "the Son of the Eternal Father" (1 Nephi 11:16-21). Prophesying of the same event, Alma describes Mary as "a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God" (Alma 7:10). Similarly, King Benjamin told his people that the "Lord Omnipotent" would come down from heaven and take upon himself a "tabernacle of clay." "He shall be called Jesus Christ," he said, "the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary" (Mosiah 3:5-8).

We depend on the testimony of Book of Mormon prophets for our understanding of the doctrine of the divine sonship of Christ. As we presently have it, the Old Testament makes no reference to the Messiah's being the Son of God; the Book of Mormon, from the writings of Nephi to those of Moroni, does so consistently. To establish this doctrine among the Zoramites, Alma quoted texts from Zenos and Zenock (see Alma 33:13-18), thus illustrating that the doctrine was once a part of the scriptures of the Old World and that the Nephites had brought it with them.

The importance of a God who is a personal being siring a Son of the flesh cannot be overstated, for it determines the very nature of the Atonement. A God of spirit essence cannot shed his blood in an atoning sacrifice, nor could such a one father a child in the flesh. Neither could an exalted, resurrected, and glorified being undergo a blood sacrifice himself, since the bodies of such beings do not contain the corruptible element of blood. Only the offspring of the union of an immortal being, one from whom the gift to live endlessly could be inherited, with a mortal personage of flesh and blood, could say of his own life: "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of

myself [having obtained such capacity from my mortal mother]. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again [which I inherited from my immortal Father]" (John 10:18).

Jesus As the Christ

We observe with some interest that critics of the Book of Mormon are offended by the book, not because it fails to teach and testify of Christ, but rather because it is so Christ-centered. Krister Stendahl, a Lutheran scholar, compares the Sermon on the Mount with the same discourse delivered by Christ in 3 Nephi. He observes that the Book of Mormon places a much stronger emphasis on the commissioning of the Twelve and the necessity of both baptism and belief in the words of Christ than the Gospel of Matthew does. He notes that "in the Matthean Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is pictured rather as a teacher of righteousness, basing his teaching on the law and the prophets, scolding the superficiality and foibles of the religionists of his time, proclaiming the will of God and not the glories of himself. Nor does the Sermon on the Mount specifically speak of 'being saved.'"²

Stendahl expresses concern about the doctrinal emphasis on the authority of Christ in the Book of Mormon account. The absence of such authority, he feels, strengthens rather than weakens "true revelation." He suggests that the beauty of the sermon is in its ambiguity, and that one characteristic of cults is the constant desire for additional answers. He likens the seeking of continuous revelation to putting "too much glitter in the Christmas tree."³

I was once involved in a formal debate with representatives of the Church of Christ in Issaquah, Washington. Their primary objection to the Book of Mormon, they told me, was its constant reference to Christ and his church prior to the meridian of time. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26), I was told, and none knew of Christ or his church before the time of his mortal ministry. The strength of this argument rests in the fact that neither the name *Christ* nor the word *church*

appears in any modern translation of the Old Testament, whereas the contemporary portion of the Book of Mormon contains over two hundred references to the Savior by the name *Christ* and almost as many references to his church. Representative of such passages is the testimony of Nephi:

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 (2 Nephi 25:24-26).

Such, we are told, were “called to the church of God, or the church of Christ” (Mosiah 18:17).

It is an interesting paradox that those so anxious to label us a non-Christian cult are offended by the Book of Mormon because it is so Christ-centered—in their view, anachronistically so (on this latter issue, see the essay of Kent P. Jackson in this volume).

Christ As the Promised Messiah

Among Christians it is generally agreed that Isaiah 53 is the greatest of the Old Testament messianic prophecies. The prophecy has been variously interpreted as referring to Isaiah, the Jewish people, and Christ. No such ambiguity exists in the messianic prophecies of the Book of Mormon. Reference has already been made to the prophecy of Christ’s birth to the beautiful virgin girl of Nazareth (1 Nephi 11:13-18) and to the angel’s announcement that her name would be Mary (Mosiah 3:8). The angel also declared that Christ would work miracles, “such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men. And lo, 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.” The Nephite King Benjamin also foretold the manner in which the Savior would be rejected, called a devil, scourged, and crucified, and he further promised that three days after his death he would rise again (Mosiah 3:5-10). Nothing in the Old Testament matches these prophecies for detail and plainness.

Nor was King Benjamin alone in making such prophecies. Alma also detailed the birth of the Son of God to a virgin named Mary, whom he described as “a precious and chosen vessel.” This son of Mary, Alma tells us, was to “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. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he 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 7:10-12).

The Book of Mormon is replete with messianic prophecies that are as detailed and plain as the accounts of his ministry given by the Gospel writers. There are no Old Testament prophecies that can match them in plainness.

The Fall of Adam

The Book of Genesis records the story of the creation and the subsequent fall of man, the most perfect account of which is found in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. There is no indication that the Book of Mormon peoples had an independent revelation on this matter. In teaching about the Fall, Book of Mormon prophets quoted the account inscribed on the brass plates, which they had brought with them from Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 2:17).

The Bible is superior to the Book of Mormon in telling the story of the Fall. Yet it is one thing to tell the story and quite another to understand the story that has been told. The Bible contributes relatively little to our understanding of the Fall. No more evidence is needed of this than the confusion on the matter in the Christian world.

The Book of Mormon prophets, however, are plain and instructive. For instance, Lehi explains that if Adam had not fallen by partaking of the forbidden fruit, he and Eve would have remained endlessly in the Garden of Eden and all created things would have “remained in the same state in which they were after they were created” (2 Nephi 2:22). There would have been an endless state in which there was no change: no aging, no separation of the body and spirit in death, no reunion of the same in resurrection, no rewards for righteousness, no punishments for wickedness, no celestial kingdom, no doctrine of heirship, no obtaining of exaltation, no endless continuation of the family unit. Nor is this all, for Adam and Eve would have remained incapable of having seed of their own. Thus, as Lehi so eloquently stated, “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). Such is the eternal plan of our Heavenly Father.

From Alma we learn that Adam passed through a period of time in which he could have negated the effects of the Fall. He explained that “if Adam had put forth his hand immediately [after having partaken of the fruit], and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated” (Alma 42:5).

The Plan of Salvation

From the Book of Mormon we gain the concept of a “plan of salvation.” This phrase is not a part of the vocabulary or theology of those who believe the Bible alone, for it is not found in their Bibles. We know that it should be because it appears in the Book of Moses (Moses 6:62); but the Bible as we have it today does not contain this or any equivalent phrase. For that matter, neither does the Doctrine and Covenants. It is in the Book of Mormon that we repeatedly read such phrases as “the merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6), “the plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13), the “eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5), “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25), “the great plan

of the Eternal God" (Alma 34:9), the "plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8), "the plan of mercy" (Alma 42:15), and, of course, the "plan of salvation" (Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14; 42:5).

The Bible and the Book of Mormon both testify of a God of order. Yet only the Book of Mormon teaches of an ordered, eternal plan for the salvation of men, a plan requiring a fall from the immortal or bloodless state to a mortal state in which men would have the corruptible element of blood flowing in their veins, a blood fall that required a blood atonement.

The Atonement

"Nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with that most transcendent of all events, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord. It is the most important single thing that has ever occurred in the entire history of created things; it is the rock foundation upon which the gospel and all other things rest."⁴ Indeed, "all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it."⁵ Without the Atonement, the whole plan of salvation would have been frustrated: there would be no Savior, no gospel of salvation, no saving purpose in gospel rituals, no forgiveness of sins, no righteousness, no resurrection, no judgment, no eternal rewards, and no degrees of glory. Yet as basic as the doctrine is, we have no clear explanation of it in the Old Testament. Judaism, which maintains a zealous love for the principles of the Old Testament, espouses no such doctrine. On this matter their theology is much more consistent than that of much of the Christian world. Judaism rejects the idea that there was a fall and hence recognizes nothing from which man needs to be saved; thus, they profess no need for a savior.

Many Christians, on the other hand, maintain a verbal allegiance to the doctrine of an atonement while labeling the Fall a myth. The Atonement, as seen by such, centers in the suffering of Christ and a reconciliation between God and man which is independent of Old Testament doctrine and priesthood. Old Testament ritual is seen as a prophetic type of New Testament events, but it is not believed

that the Old Testament peoples understood its prophetic implications. Such views see no kinship between temple sacrifices, the payment of money, the burning of incense, or even prayers and the grace spoken of by Paul. The essence of their doctrine is that accepting Christ is all that is necessary to obtaining a remission of sins and the assurance of salvation in the world to come.

In contrast, the Book of Mormon maintains a consistency of doctrine between the Old and New Testament periods. Moroni, for instance, explained that God created Adam, that Adam in turn brought about the Fall, and that Christ came as a result of the Fall. He testified:

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. And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still (Mormon 9:13-14).

This brief excerpt from the Book of Mormon, representative of many passages, is without peer in the Bible.

Though we have but briefly touched on this doctrine of unsurpassed importance, what we have said is sufficient to establish the fact that Latter-day Saint understanding of the Atonement comes from the Book of Mormon. Although the Bible is admittedly superior to the Book of Mormon in describing events that led to Christ's suffering and death, we must turn to the Book of Mormon to find the more important matter of why he suffered.

The Resurrection

One may search the Bible from cover to cover in hopes of finding a definition of the word *resurrection*, but the effort will be in vain. The Old Testament does not even mention the word, and the closest we can come in the

New Testament is Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:44 that we are "raised a spiritual body," which has led many to conclude that the resurrection is not corporeal. The Book of Mormon, by contrast, plainly teaches the nature of the resurrection. Amulek defined it thus: "This mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption" (Alma 11:45). Alma described the resurrection in this language: "The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame" (Alma 40:23). Prior to the recent addition of Joseph F. Smith's "Vision of the Redemption of the Dead" to the Doctrine and Covenants, even that compilation of revelations did not contain a definition of resurrection. Clearly our doctrine is founded on the Book of Mormon.

The Spirit World

Our comparison here is very simple. The Bible says nothing on the matter, except inferentially.⁶ We turn to Alma to learn about the world of the spirits. Knowing that death is the separation of the body and the spirit and that resurrection is the inseparable reunion of the same, Alma was in a position to ask a question that those having no idea about the true nature of the Resurrection are unable to ask. "I would inquire," he said, "what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?" At the feet of an angel he had learned that at death the righteous are received into a state of rest and peace, "where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow." This state is called *paradise*. The wicked, those having "no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord," Alma learned, are consigned to a portion of the spirit world called "outer darkness." Among the wicked there is "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own

iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil” (Alma 40:7, 12-13).

As one cannot understand the Atonement without understanding the Fall, so one cannot understand the nature of the spirit world without a proper understanding of the nature of the Resurrection. If a theology does not admit a physical resurrection, then biblical references or allusions to the “spirit world” would naturally be confused with heaven because that term is used to describe the Saints’ eternal home.

The Necessity of Ordinances

If the Bible is clear on the necessity of ordinances, there is no evidence of it among those professing an allegiance to it. Let us consider baptism as an illustration. The word *baptism* is not found in the Old Testament, and most refuse to acknowledge its existence in Old Testament times. Christian denominations are divided as to the necessity of the ordinance. Among those that acknowledge its necessity, ritual history has witnessed a remarkable diversity of practices, ranging from the daily immersions of the Essenes to the practice of sprinkling infants.

The Book of Mormon is most explicit on this matter. Baptism is essential to salvation. Nephi tells us that Christ himself, though he was without sin, could not be saved without it (see 2 Nephi 31:5-9). For Latter-day Saints, what Nephi says about the necessity of baptism is equally true of all ordinances of salvation. Thus Joseph Smith said: “If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord.”⁷

Justification: By Grace or Works?

What must one do to stand justified before God? Does one seek God’s favor through fasting, prayer, and rituals? Or are such to be eschewed in favor of the doctrine that “the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17)? Such was the issue over which the Roman Catholic Church and Martin Luther did battle. Of this struggle one noted

scholar wrote: "This doctrine of justification by faith has divided the old unity of Christendom; has torn asunder Europe, and especially Germany; has made innumerable martyrs; has kindled the bloodiest and most terrible wars of the past; and has deeply affected European history and with it the history of humanity."⁸

And what does the Book of Mormon have to say on a matter of such doctrinal importance? No answer is more effective than Alma's instruction to Corianton. Burdened with sin, Corianton was greatly agitated over the requirements of salvation. His father Alma taught him the principle of "restoration," declaring that "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. And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil" (Alma 41:3-4). "The meaning of the word restoration," he said, "is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful" (Alma 41:13). The principle is immutable. Alma instructed his son to

see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again. For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all (Alma 41:14-15).

Martin Luther, during his notable career, became the author of one of history's most classic cases of proof-texting. Taking selected texts from Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, Luther said that these three books—along with 1 Peter, John's Gospel, and 1 John—would "teach everything you need to know for your salvation, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or hear any other teaching."⁹ As is apparent, this is a very selective

viewpoint which requires that one read only a narrow band of works in the Bible to sustain this doctrine. Paul is quoted to that end; Christ is not. The Old Testament and its doctrines are disregarded, James is called a "straw book," and a host of other references to works in the New Testament, most of which come from Paul, are ignored. Again, on this matter the Book of Mormon is most plain.

The Gathering of Israel

The Book of Mormon and the Old Testament both have much to say on the subject of the scattering and gathering of Israel. New World prophets frequently quote the prophecies of their Old World counterparts on this subject. The Book of Mormon makes three distinctive contributions regarding the gathering of Israel. First, it emphasizes the fact that the people of Israel were scattered because they rejected the Holy One of Israel, namely Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches that Israel will not be gathered until her people accept the Christ. As wickedness preceded the scattering, so righteousness must precede the gathering. The gathering, according to the Book of Mormon, is always first to Christ through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, and only then to a geographic location. Jacob taught the principle thus:

Because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified. Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodshed shall come upon them; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations. But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance (2 Nephi 10:5-7).

Surely God is appreciably more concerned with how his people live than where they live.

The second matter is an extension of the first. The Book of Mormon tells us that one does not accept Christ without uniting with his Church, thereby obtaining citizenship in his kingdom (see 2 Nephi 9:2; 3 Nephi 21:22). The third distinctive contribution of the Book of Mormon is the

expansion of the Lord's promise to return Israel not to a single land of promise, but to *lands* of promise (see 1 Nephi 22:12; 2 Nephi 6:11; 9:2; 10:7-8). The Americas, the Book of Mormon declares, have been promised to the tribe of Joseph. Other lands undoubtedly have been promised to others of Jacob's children.

Scriptural Inerrancy and Infallibility

Various camps of the so-called Bible-believing world have recently revived the struggle over the issue of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. Since the extent of our faith and trust in scripture is very directly associated with our understanding of the doctrines of salvation, let us address this matter from the perspective of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith said "that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth" (Book of Mormon Introduction). The eighth article of faith states: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Given such statements, are we as Latter-day Saints to argue for the inerrancy or infallibility of the Book of Mormon as the fundamentalists do for the Bible?

Significantly, Book of Mormon prophets responded to this issue, while Bible prophets are not recorded as having done so. For the Bible it can only be said that it offers no justification for the fundamentalist tenets of infallibility and inerrancy. The Bible makes no claim to either. One cannot fairly say that they are biblical doctrines. But what does the Book of Mormon say on this matter?

Book of Mormon prophets emphatically rejected the notion of infallible scripture. The title page to the Book of Mormon announces the book to be the result of "the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—written by way of commandment." In it, Mormon, who abridged the record, states that "if there are faults they are the mistakes of men." This says simply that inspired men, prophets of God, and men commissioned to write the word of God are not themselves infallible. Even in the inspiration of their office they may be hindered by frailties of the flesh. The weaknesses of the flesh have been the common lot of all the Lord's

prophets and none have been more sensitive to those weaknesses than the prophets themselves.

Nephi wrote, "If I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself" (1 Nephi 19:6). His reference to "they . . . of old" would include such as Isaiah, Moses, and Abraham, none of whom made any pretense to perfection in their inspired writings. Of himself, Nephi said he was not "mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it into the hearts of the children of men." That which he wrote in "weakness," he maintained, would have to be made strong, like his spoken words, by the power of the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi 33:1, 4). In other words, the lifeblood of proper understanding of the written or the spoken word must always be the spirit of revelation, or the Holy Ghost. Thus, infallibility is no more necessary in the written word than in the spoken word, for both are equally dependent on the spirit of revelation for understanding.

Moroni shared the concern of his fellow prophets when he wrote, "The Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing." We "stumble," he lamented, "because of the placing of our words," though he added that it is fools who mock (Ether 12:23-36). "If there be faults," he declared, "they be the faults of a man" (Mormon 8:17). Yet, in the spirit of prophecy he said: "I speak unto you as though I spake from the dead; for I know that ye shall have my words. Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been" (Mormon 9:30-31).

Revelation

The Bible evidences that whenever God had a people whom he acknowledged as his own, he guided them by

revelation. The Book of Mormon affirms that God spoke to the scattered remnants of Israel anciently and testifies that he will continue speaking to those willing to hear his voice until the end of time. Indeed, the Book of Mormon sounds a solemn warning to any who deny the spirit of revelation:

Wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost! Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more! And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall. Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have (2 Nephi 28:26-30).

Has God ceased to be a God of miracles? Have angels ceased to appear? Has God withheld the power of the Holy Ghost, the revelator, from the children of men? "Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?" (Moroni 7:36-37). The Book of Mormon answers with a most emphatic "No!"

Conclusion

A brief comparison of the Book of Mormon and the Bible on doctrines fundamental to salvation and the Christian message allows us to draw the following conclusions.

New Testament doctrines fundamental to the Christian message—the promised Messiah's being the Son of God; Jesus' being the Christ; the nature of the spirit world and resurrection; the plan of salvation; church organization; the ordinance of baptism; and the conferring of the Holy Ghost—often go unmentioned in the Old Testament as we now have it. But each of these doctrines is clearly taught in the Book of Mormon, which is largely contemporary with the Old Testament. In the Book of Mormon we

find a doctrinal consistency not found in the Bible. Developing this principle, Nephi said of God:

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him. For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round (1 Nephi 10:18-19).

The Book of Mormon is superior to the Bible in teaching each of the doctrines of salvation considered in this paper. While the Bible is superior to the Book of Mormon in detailing circumstances surrounding Adam's transgression and events that attended the atonement of Christ, yet it is to the Book of Mormon that we turn for understanding of the doctrinal implications of both. Affirming this principle, Elder Bruce R. McConkie observed "that Lehi and Jacob excel Paul in teaching the Atonement; that Alma's sermons on faith and on being born again surpass anything in the Bible; that Nephi makes a better exposition of the scattering and gathering of Israel than do Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel combined; that Mormon's words about faith, hope, and charity have a clarity, a breadth, and a power of expression that even Paul did not attain; and so on and so on."¹⁰

The Book of Mormon and the Bible are not in disagreement on the doctrines under consideration. The Book of Mormon consistently goes beyond the Bible in its teachings, but is certainly in harmony with it.

In the case of each doctrine considered, it is the Book of Mormon and not the Bible that establishes the doctrinal position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are not dependent on the Bible for our knowledge of the doctrines of salvation.

On each of these doctrines there is considerable diversity of understanding in the Bible-believing world. When we as Latter-day Saints seek to justify our doctrinal beliefs through the Bible, we are clearly out of context. We did not obtain our understanding from the Bible, and if we had only the Bible, there is every reason to believe that our understanding would be similar to that of those whom we

are attempting to persuade otherwise. Joseph Smith put it this way: "Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations and where is our religion? We have none."¹¹

When the Lord spoke to Joseph Smith saying, "This generation [meaning dispensation] shall have my word through you" (Doctrine and Covenants 5:10), the context of the revelation was the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. From the Book of Mormon we learn the basic doctrines by which salvation comes. The Book of Mormon is the source from which we are both to learn and to teach the doctrines of the kingdom to each other and to the world. Competent doctrinal understanding presupposes a mastery of the Book of Mormon. In the context of missionary work, no true conversion can take place until the Book of Mormon is accepted as the basic source of the doctrines of salvation.

Notes

1. The phrase "Son of God" in Daniel 3:25 is "angel" in verse 28. A better rendering of verse 25 would be "looks like a god" as in the New English Bible, or "looks like an angel" as in the James Moffatt translation.

2. Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1978), pp. 143-44.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

4. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 60.

5. Joseph Smith, in Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), p. 121.

6. For instance, from Genesis 37:35 it can be inferred that Jacob, who vowed to wear mourning clothes until his death, expected to be both recognized by his son Joseph and dressed in his mourning garments in the realm of the dead after being buried in them. See also Zechariah 3:1-5; 1 Peter 3:19-22; 4:6.

7. *Teachings*, p. 308.

8. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 196, as cited in Sidney B. Sperry, *Paul's Life and Letters* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), p. 172.

9. As cited by Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), p. 179.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, October 1983, p. 106.

11. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 2:52.