

NEVERTHELESS THOU MAYEST CHOOSE

A Compendium for Spiritual Self-Defense

MICHAEL MOREH MASKIL

Nevertheless Thou Mayest Choose

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"For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things." — 2 Nephi 2:11

By Michael Moreh Maskil

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How to read this book

Each passage is set in its own block, marked by an emblem and a color so that the reader always knows its source:



Author's Commentary — the sun



The Holy Bible (King James Version) — the scroll and the tablets of the law



The Book of Mormon — the resurrected Christ



The Pearl of Great Price — the stars of Abraham



The Doctrine and Covenants — the key



Words of Latter-day Church Leaders — the beehive



America's Founding Documents — the Liberty Bell



Words of the Founders — the quill



Music for Reflection — a pair of notes on the staff

A Story (a work of fiction) — a meadow at dawn, with a stream winding toward the sun

About the Sources and Translations

Every passage in this book is quoted from a published source. This note explains which editions and translations were used for each kind of passage, so that readers can find and read them for themselves. Scripture from the Bible (King James Version), the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price follows the editions published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. America's founding documents follow the National Archives transcriptions, and the words of the founders are quoted from Founders Online, the Avalon Project, and the Library of Congress, keeping their original spelling. The words of latter-day Church leaders are quoted from the Journal of Discourses, the Conference Reports, Church magazines and manuals, and other published sources, as cited beneath each passage. The Author's Commentary blocks, marked by the sun, are the author's own. The prologue, marked by the meadow at dawn, is the author's original fiction: its characters are imagined, and its portrayal of angels is imaginative rather than doctrinal.

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A Note from the Author

This book is the fruit of many years of study. I began it long ago, searching the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets to understand how the adversary works and how the Lord overcomes him. The study has blessed my own life. It would not be too much to say that it changed my life, setting my feet more firmly on the covenant path and carrying me further along it. Let it be known, however, that I still make mistakes. I still do and say things I regret, and there are things in my life I would desperately like to go back and change—things I have chosen to lay before the Lord, praying for His redemption.

As you read, you will rightly conclude that I am a faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sometimes called "the Mormons." And if there is any doubt: yes, we are Christians. We worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and it is to Him that every page of this book is meant to point.

Life is hard enough; it is much harder when we try to walk it alone. None of us was meant to. I believe that the knowledge gathered here, joined with the never-ending help of the Savior, can spare a person many of the pitfalls the adversary lays along the way. I offer it in that spirit—not as a study of darkness for its own sake, but as a guide to spiritual self-defense.

Sincerely,
Your Brother in Christ,

Michael Moreh Maskil

About the Author

Michael Moreh Maskil is a student of the scriptures and a faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He writes for Latter-day Saints and for all Christians who love the Bible and want to know the world in which it was written. He writes as a fellow traveler rather than an expert: a man on a spiritual journey who does not claim to have every answer, but has found enough to share.

His method is the same in every book. He begins with the LDS Standard Works (Canon) and the words of latter-day prophets, then turns to Latter-day Saint scholarship, and

finally to the ancient writers, from Josephus and the apocryphal books to the sages of Israel. He keeps revealed doctrine, tradition and scholarship clearly apart, and lets the reader see which is which. Every page is meant to point to Jesus Christ.

His books are *On the Sixth Day*; *Nevertheless Thou Mayest Choose*; *Books from the Ethiopian Bible: Beyond the King James*, in three volumes; *From Tabernacle to Temple*; *Resurrection*; *Out of Their Prison*; *Stirred to Remembrance*; *The Thing About Cracked Screens*; and *My Father's House*, in two books, *What Manner of Stones* and *Not One Stone Upon Another*.

Visit michaelmaskil.com, and follow him on Facebook at the Michael Moreh Maskil page.



The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

Abilene, The Minister — A Story

A Note to the Reader

The story that follows is a work of fiction. Abilene, Sethar, Adiel, Malluch, Eliab, Caleb, and the Morales family are imagined characters. Babylon, Capernaum, and the events of scripture are real history used as a setting, and the ministry of angels is portrayed imaginatively, not as doctrine. The story is offered to illustrate, in human terms, the principles traced in the chapters that follow.

Before the World

Abilene, The Minister — A Work of Fiction

The Messenger

Before there was a sun to rise, there was light, and Abilene lived in it. It did not fall on him the way sunlight falls on a field. It moved through him, warm as breath and clear as water, the way music moves through a room. In that first home every spirit shone with its own color, and together they made a sky with no night in it.

His name meant serene meadows, and it suited him. There was a stillness in Abilene, like tall grass at the end of a long summer day, and other spirits found themselves resting when they stood near him. Abilene sang in the great choirs, and beside him always stood his closest friend, a spirit named Sethar, whose voice was clear as a struck bell. Where Abilene's light was the soft gold of early morning, Sethar's was a hard, bright blue, like the edge of a flame.

The brightest of them all was Lucifer, a son of the morning, an angel who was in authority in the presence of God. He was the Father's messenger, and when he came down the long halls of light carrying the Father's teachings, the

hosts gathered to hear him. His voice was polished silver. Abilene and Sethar sat at the edge of those crowds and listened with their whole hearts.

Then, slowly, the teachings changed. Lucifer began to speak less of the Father and more of knowledge itself—of good and evil as a science to be mastered, as if opposites were a puzzle and he alone held the key. He spoke of darkness the way a man describes a locked room he has not yet entered, and something in his eyes had begun to glitter rather than glow. For a season Abilene was fascinated. He leaned closer. But the closer he leaned, the colder the light became, like a lantern whose flame is shrinking behind smoked glass. And one day Abilene understood: Lucifer was not explaining the darkness. He was seeking disciples for it.

Sethar did not see it. Or perhaps he saw it and wanted it anyway. He began to linger after the gatherings, in the small circles that formed around Lucifer's inner company—the great and bright ones who spoke in low voices and fell silent when others passed. Abilene went to him again and again. "Come away," he pleaded. "Can you not feel how cold it is where he stands?"

Sethar only smiled. "You would rather bow and sing forever than ever hold power of your own," he said. "You will beg, Abilene. I intend to rule." Abilene reached for him, and then stopped, because he understood that he could not choose for his friend. It was the first time he felt that particular ache—the ache of loving someone whose will is his own—and it would not be the last.

The Council

At the great council, the Father set out His plan. His children would go down to a world where they would walk by faith, and where every soul would be free to choose. The Firstborn stood and said, "Here am I, send me. Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever."

Then Lucifer rose. He would bring every soul back, he said, and not one would be lost—because not one would be allowed to choose. "Give me thine honor," he said, and a murmur ran through his company like wind through dry grass. Abilene saw then that the circles in the corridors had never been idle. The conspiracy had been laid long before the council opened.

What followed was war, though not of swords. It was a war of light against a spreading shadow, of testimony against persuasion. Michael led the hosts who stood with the Father, and Lucifer's pride would not bend to honor him. In the end a third part of the host—the stars of heaven—were cast down. It was not like a lamp being blown out. It was like stars collapsing inward, all their brilliance pulled down into a hole that gave nothing back. Among them,

falling, Abilene saw a hard blue light go gray.

The heavens wept. Abilene wept with them, and his tears were many.

The Calling

When the grief had quieted, the Father called for servants who would minister to His children on the earth. Abilene knelt, and his answer came before he had finished thinking it. He was glad—glad to go on singing praises to the God he loved, glad to be of use to the brothers and sisters about to leave home.

But beneath the gladness ran a cold thread of fear. To serve on the earth meant going where the fallen had gone. It meant standing toe to toe with the very cohort who seeks to destroy—spirits he had once known by name, spirits who would know his name too. Abilene trembled at the thought. And then he felt a hand on his shoulder, though no one stood beside him, and a strength moved into him that was not his own. He would not face them alone. The strength of God would stand behind him. It always would.

The Ministers

The angels of the Lord were organized, every one according to his order. Some were warriors, assigned to defense and to battle, their brightness hard-edged as swords. Some were comforters, sent to soothe the grieving, soft as lamplight in a sickroom. Some were healers, who bound up broken hearts and bodies. And some, like Abilene, were ministers: messengers and observers, sent to watch, to carry word between heaven and earth, and to prepare the way.

Theirs was a quieter post than the warriors'. The ministers went before the Spirit the way servants go before a king, clearing the road so that His voice could pass.

His captain, a warrior named Adiel, taught him the rules of the work.

"You will not be seen unless you are sent to be seen," Adiel said. "You will watch, and you will remember, and you will carry what you see to the Father—every prayer, every tear, every choice, the good and the bad alike. When He sends a message, you will carry it down. And you will prepare the way. You will set the right person on the right road at the right hour: a friend at the door, a book left open on a table, a stranger who asks exactly the right question. Most will never know you were there."

"Your post is the space between a thought and a deed. The adversary

plants the first spark, and his servants will not whisper. They will scream—urging, crowding, hurrying, filling every silence with noise. Do not try to shout them down; that is not your office. The voice that answers them is still and small. Your work is to clear a space where it can be heard."

"But how," Abilene asked, "can someone who is listening to the wrong voice ever hear the Spirit?"

Adiel was quiet for a moment. "Every storm has a lull, and every noise must stop to take a breath. There will be a silence—after the laughter has gone, after the bottle is empty, after the thing is done that cannot be undone, in the gray hour before dawn when even the proud lie awake. That is when the Spirit can be heard. Watch for that hour, and prepare the way to it."

"And remember this: the Spirit's voice will not sound strange to them. Every one of them brought a little of this light with them when they left home. When the Spirit speaks, it will sound like something they already knew—their mother singing, a verse learned as a child, the voice of their own better self. They will not hear it with their ears. They will recognize it with their hearts. Although the darkness can be louder, it can never be familiar."

"And you will never, ever compel. The Father fought a war to protect their freedom to choose. If you force a single soul toward the light, you have done Lucifer's work in the Father's clothing. They may shut the Spirit out. They may shut it out a thousand times. You will stay anyway, and watch at the closed door, and carry their names to the Father."

"But when one of them calls upon the Father—when a child prays, or a man lifts his arm and commands the darkness to leave in the name of the Only Begotten—then the whole company is released. The warriors will drive back the dark, the comforters will come, and the healers will begin their work. That is the moment we all wait for. Your work is to prepare the way to it."

Abilene bowed his head. Then he went down to the earth, and he stood in the green light of a garden on its last morning, and he watched a man and a woman walk out into a lone and dreary world. He followed them. He has been following their children ever since.

Babylon, in the Days of Daniel



Abilene, The Minister — A Work of Fiction

The boy's name was Malluch, and he was fifteen when the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar marched him out of Jerusalem in a line of captives, his wrists bound with rope. Abilene walked beside him the whole way to Babylon. Malluch could not see him, but on the worst nights, when the desert cold came down like a blade, Abilene knelt beside him and carried his broken prayers to the Father, and the Spirit answered him in the dark: *The Lord has not forgotten you.* And the boy, without knowing why, would think of his mother's voice singing the psalms, and sleep.

Abilene could see Babylon blazing. Its walls were glazed in blue so deep it seemed to hold the sky. At night its temples burned with a thousand torches, and the smoke of offerings to Marduk rose in thick, sweet columns that hid the stars. Everything glittered. Almost nothing glowed.

The captives were brought to the palace on the banks of the Euphrates, where the river ran brown and wide between rows of date palms. Malluch had never seen so much water, or so much gold. The courtyard floors were paved with polished stone that held the sky like a mirror. Servants moved through the halls carrying bowls of figs and pomegranates, and the air smelled of cedar and incense and the river. At night he lay on a real bed for the first time in his life, and he stared at the painted ceiling and thought of his mother's small clay house in Jerusalem, with its one oil lamp and its smell of bread, and he could not tell whether the ache in his chest was grief or wonder.

The king's steward gave the chosen boys new names. Daniel became Belteshazzar. Malluch became Nabu-ahi, a name that honored a Babylonian god he had never prayed to. They were taught the tongue and the writing of the Chaldeans, pressing wedge-shaped marks into wet clay tablets; they studied the stars and the omens and the long lists of Babylon's kings. Malluch was quick, quicker than most. His teachers praised him. For the first time since the soldiers came, he felt that he mattered.

Malluch was chosen with Daniel and his three friends to be trained in the king's court. When the steward brought the king's meat and wine, Daniel quietly refused them, observing the Law of Moses. Abilene had seen to it that Malluch was seated beside Daniel at that table, and the Spirit spoke to Malluch's heart: *Stand with him.* Malluch heard it as a flicker of conscience, small as the flame on the end of a match. But the meat smelled of honey and fire, and the Babylonian boys were laughing, and Malluch thought, *It is only one meal.* He ate. The Spirit's voice grew fainter, the way a voice fades when a door is slowly closed.

It was only one meal, and then it was only one prayer skipped, and then it was only one feast at the temple of a god whose name he did not even believe in. Each choice was as light as a single strand of flax. Abilene watched the strands wrap around the boy, turn over turn, until the cord had become a chain.

The years slid by like the river. Malluch rose in the king's service, first as a scribe, then as a keeper of the royal storehouses. He married a Babylonian woman. They kept small household gods of painted clay in a niche by the door, because everyone did, and because it seemed foolish to offend anyone. He still thought of himself as a son of Judah. But the Hebrew prayers came slower to his tongue each year, and one evening he realized he could no longer remember the words of the psalm his mother used to sing. He felt a brief, cold pang, like a draft from an open door, and then he poured himself more wine and the feeling passed.

Abilene never left. At night, when the house was dark and the clay gods stood watching in their niche, he set small things in Malluch's path—a Hebrew scroll for sale in the market, an old man from Jerusalem singing the psalms at the city gate—and the Spirit brought the old words back to Malluch in his dreams. Sometimes Malluch woke with tears on his face and did not know why.

Years later, on the plain of Dura, the king raised an image of gold ninety feet tall. When the music sounded, every man in the empire was to fall down and worship it. Malluch, now a minor official in fine linen, stood in the crowd. Three men nearby did not bow. Abilene stood beside Malluch and pleaded with the Father for him, and the Spirit spoke to Malluch one last time, as clearly as it ever had: *Remember who you are.*

The horns sounded. The harps and the sackbuts rang across the plain. Malluch's knees bent, and his forehead touched the dust.

Something laughed beside him. Abilene turned and saw it: a shape of smoke and cinders crouched at Malluch's shoulder, where it had crouched for years. He knew it. It was Sethar. Once, before the world, it had sung beside him in the same choir, its voice clear as a struck bell, its light a hard and brilliant blue. Now its face was a hollow, like a charred log that holds the shape of wood but crumbles at a touch.

"Watch closer, little messenger," it sneered. "Run your errands and carry your reports until your light goes dim. He chose me. He chose me a thousand small times before today, and every time you stood there glowing like a candle in a windstorm, and every time you lost." It leaned close to the kneeling man and breathed on him, and the air turned gray. "You cannot touch his will. I do not have to. He hands it to me."

Abilene's light flared hot with anger—and then, because the thing was right about that one fact, it dimmed with grief. There was nothing he could do about it. He would not seize the boy or drag him to his feet, because to do so would be to take the very gift the Father had fought a war in heaven to protect: the freedom to choose. Lucifer had wanted to force men to be good; Abilene would rather lose a thousand battles than win one that way. That was the frustration older than the world: the Father's servants must honor agency, even when it is used against them, and the adversary knows it, and laughs.

That afternoon the furnace was heated seven times hotter than it was wont, and its mouth glowed white. Malluch watched from a distance as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were thrown in—and then watched the king leap to his feet, crying out that he saw four men walking in the fire, and the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. For one moment the brightness from that furnace fell across Malluch's face, and he trembled. Abilene held his breath and waited.

Malluch looked away. He went home that evening and drank until the light in his lamp and the light in his eyes were both gone out.

The decades passed. Nebuchadnezzar died, and his sons, and Babylon itself fell to the Persians in a single night while its lords feasted. Malluch, gray and bent and grown rich, survived every change of power by learning to bow to whoever stood highest. Daniel survived too, by bowing to no one but God—and under the new king, Darius, Daniel rose above all the princes of the kingdom. The old officials hated him for it. They met in the dark of a counting-room, lamps turned low, and plotted how to bring him down. Malluch, now past eighty, sat among them. Abilene stood behind his chair and carried the old man's name to the Father, and the Spirit pleaded with him

one final time: *You knew him when you were boys. You walked beside him out of Jerusalem. Get up and leave this room.*

Malluch did not get up. He added his seal to the petition that made prayer to any god but the king a crime, knowing Daniel would pray anyway, knowing exactly what would happen.

King Darius loved Daniel, and when he understood that his own officials had tricked him into signing the decree, he was sore displeased with himself and labored until sundown to find a way to save him. But the law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, and a stone was rolled across its mouth and sealed with the king's own signet. That night the king would not eat, and no music was played in the palace, and he could not sleep.

At the first gray light of dawn he hurried to the den and cried out in a trembling voice, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God able to deliver thee from the lions?" And Daniel answered from the dark: "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths." The king was overjoyed and commanded that Daniel be lifted out, and not a scratch was found on him.

Then the king's joy turned to fury against the men who had deceived him. He commanded that Daniel's accusers be cast into the den themselves, with their families. Malluch was among them.

Abilene stood at the mouth of the den as the stone was rolled back, and he wept—not because he had failed, for he had never once been allowed to decide for the boy. He could only offer. For seventy years he had offered, every day, every night. The choice had always belonged to Malluch, and Malluch had chosen, one small strand at a time, until the flaxen cord was a chain that dragged him down into the dark. Sethar was already gone. It never stayed for the endings.

Abilene, The Minister — A Work of Fiction

Six hundred years later, Abilene was given another charge: a young man of Capernaum named Eliab, the second son of a fisherman.

Capernaum sat on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, a town of black basalt houses that soaked up the sun all day and gave off its warmth at night. In the mornings the sea lay flat and pale as a sheet of hammered silver, and the fishing boats came in heavy with musht and sardines. Eliab had grown up in the smell of it—wet nets, fish scales, pitch, and woodsmoke—and in the sound of his father's voice calling across the water before dawn. When he was small, his mother used to wait for them on the shore with bread still warm from the oven, and the whole world had seemed to fit inside the curve of that little harbor.

Then a fever came through the town in the winter he turned twelve. His mother burned with fever for six days in the dark back room while the rabbi prayed and the physicians shook their heads, and on the seventh day she was gone. Eliab had prayed harder than he had ever prayed for anything. The silence that answered him was the loudest sound he had ever heard.

Eliab was angry, and his anger had a hundred reasons. His father had given the better boat to his older brother. The rabbi at the synagogue had shamed him in front of the other boys. His mother had died when he was twelve, and the God of the psalms had not saved her. Every reason was different, but Abilene saw that they had all rolled into the same dark knot in Eliab's chest. He had been offended, and he had chosen to stay offended, and the offense had become a place to live.

So Eliab left. He took a job collecting tolls for Rome on the road outside the city, which was the surest way a Jewish son could spit in his father's face. The old spirit of smoke followed him there, delighted. Abilene watched it pour bitterness into the young man's cup every evening, and watched Eliab drink it.

The toll booth was a narrow stone hut on the trade road that ran along the lake toward Damascus. All day long the caravans came through—camels loaded with bales of cloth, donkeys carrying jars of oil and fish sauce, merchants with dust in their beards—and Eliab counted their goods and took

Rome's share and a little extra for himself. The coins were cold and heavy and smelled of other men's hands. He grew rich enough to buy fine sandals and a room of his own, but no one in the town would look at him. Old women walking crossed to the other side of the street. Children were pulled indoors. His father did not come to see him once. At night he drank alone and told himself he preferred it that way.

One morning, down by the harbor, Eliab watched another tax collector, a man called Levi who kept the customs table at the water's edge, simply stand up from his coins in the middle of the day and walk away with a traveling teacher from Nazareth. He left the money on the table. Eliab laughed out loud at the foolishness of it. But that night, for reasons he could not name, he could not stop thinking about Levi's face as he walked away. It had looked like a man walking out of a prison.

"He is mine already," the smoke-thing told Abilene one night, grinning with a mouth like a cracked kiln. "He hates his father, he hates his God, and he hates himself most of all. Not even God can speak past that much hatred."

Abilene did not answer. He only kept working, night after night, preparing the way. He guided an old fisherman, a friend of the family, to stop at Eliab's booth and ask after his health. He carried Eliab's name to the Father every evening. And in the rare quiet moments, the Spirit spoke the smallest good things: *Your father walks to the shore every evening to look for you. You were not always like this. There is a man in the city who is healing people.*

One afternoon a crowd surged along Eliab's road, and in the middle of it walked a man unlike any other. He had a glow. It was not the hard glare of Babylon's gold. It was the kind of light that makes shadows soft—light that does not expose you so much as it finds you. When the Master passed the toll booth, He stopped. He looked at Eliab, and Eliab felt, for the first time in years, that someone was seeing all of him and was not turning away.

That evening, Eliab stood at the edge of a hillside and heard the Master tell a story about a son who took his inheritance and wasted it in a far country, and who came home ashamed, rehearsing his apology—and about a father who saw him a great way off, and ran.

Eliab did not move for a long time. He sat on the hillside after the crowd had gone, while the stars came out one by one over the dark water and the lamps of Capernaum flickered below him. He thought about the son in the story, feeding pigs in a far country, so hungry he would have eaten their husks. He thought about how the son had rehearsed his speech: *I am no more*

worthy to be called thy son. He had rehearsed speeches too—angry ones, cruel ones, speeches about everything his father had done wrong. He tried to remember one of them now and found he could not. All he could see was his father, older and grayer than he remembered, standing at the water's edge every evening, looking up the road.

Abilene carried word of that moment up to the Father, and the Spirit spoke the only thing that mattered: *Go home.*

Eliab walked through the night. At dawn the sea was silver, and his father was already on the shore, mending nets in the half-light as he had every morning for three years. The old man looked up, and dropped the nets, and ran.

The smoke-thing did not sneer that morning. It simply dissolved into the gray edge of the dawn, and Abilene rose above the water with a light in him like a trumpet. All around him, unseen, the comforters and the healers and the warriors were singing. He sang with them. Rejoicing, he learned that day, is also part of the work.

Phoenix, in the Year of the Empty Streets



Abilene, The Minister — A Work of Fiction

In the spring of 2020, the world went quiet. Schools closed, restaurants locked their doors, and the streets of Phoenix lay empty under a sky so clear it looked scrubbed. Caleb Torres was twenty-four, and he lost his job as a line cook in a single phone call.

The first beer was nothing. A single cold can on a hot evening, sweating on the counter of his apartment while the news played. Abilene was there, and he saw what Caleb did not see: a thought, then a match, then a small flame. Abilene had already set the old leather scriptures from Caleb's grandfather on the shelf by the door, where Caleb would see them every time he went out, and now the Spirit prompted him, soft and plain: *Call your mother. Go for a run. Open the scriptures your grandfather gave you.* Caleb thought about it. Then he opened another can.

The weeks ran together. The blinds stayed closed, and the apartment filled with a stale, amber dimness, the color of light seen through the bottom of a bottle. The fire was lit now, and Caleb fed it every night. By summer he was drinking in the mornings. By fall his savings were gone.

Sethar had found him early. The smoke-thing lounged across the back of Caleb's couch like a guest who never intended to leave. It did not whisper. It screamed—*one more, you deserve it, no one cares, you're fine*—and the noise filled the apartment until the Spirit's still, small voice could not find a single quiet corner.

The Crash

On a Saturday night in October, the first cool night after a summer that had lasted forever, Caleb drove across the city to a party at his friend Tyler's house. It was the first time in seven months he had been around more than two people at once. The backyard was strung with little white bulbs that swayed in the breeze like a net of stars. Someone had built a fire in a metal pit, and the flames jumped and crackled and threw sparks up into the dark. Music thumped from a speaker on the porch. People he hadn't seen since before the shutdown were hugging him, slapping his back, shouting his name.

And the drinks were flowing. The first one went down cold and bright, and within twenty minutes the world had turned gold. The warmth spread from his chest out into his arms and his face. The heaviness of the last seven months—the lost job, the empty bank account, the silent apartment—lifted off him like a coat he had forgotten he was wearing. He laughed until his stomach hurt at a story Tyler told. He danced badly and didn't care. He sat by the fire with an old friend and talked about the future as if it were a wide-open road. Every color was brighter. Every joke was funnier. For a few hours he felt more alive, more loved, more himself than he had felt in years. He felt, he would remember later, almost invincible.

Abilene watched him with a strange sorrow. He did not begrudge Caleb the laughter; the Father had made His children for joy. But this was not joy. It was borrowed light, bought on credit, and the bill was coming due. Abilene could see how thin it was, like the glow of a sparkler—dazzling for a moment, and then nothing but a bent black wire in the hand.

It did not last long. By eleven the gold had begun to smear. The fairy lights blurred into streaks. His words came out thick and loud. The laughter still bubbled up, but now it came from farther away, as if someone else were laughing inside him. The warmth had turned to a heavy, swimming dizziness,

and when he stood up the whole yard tilted like the deck of a ship. Three hours of happiness, and it was already draining away.

At midnight he stood in the driveway with his keys in his hand, and Abilene stood beside him, blazing. He had seen to it that Tyler's roommate came out onto the porch at that very moment and offered Caleb the couch. And the Spirit spoke one last time: *Give someone your keys. Call a ride. Sleep on the couch.* For half a second Caleb hesitated. But alcohol had done its quiet work: it had not only dulled his eyes and slowed his hands, it had dulled his conscience, the very place where the Spirit speaks. Sethar screamed, *You're fine. It's ten minutes. Go.* Caleb got in the car.

The city lights ran together in the windshield like wet paint. The radio was loud. He was still smiling, humming along, when he reached the intersection.

The light at the intersection was red. He never saw it. He saw only a sudden wall of headlights, and then the world became a single white roar of glass and steel.

When it was still again, three people were gone: a young mother named Rosa, and her two daughters, eight and five, driving home from their grandmother's house. Their father, Roberto, had stayed behind to finish a late shift. He would get the phone call at 12:40 in the morning.

Blue and red lights washed over the wreckage, strobing across the wet asphalt. Caleb stood by the curb with blood on his forehead and his hands cuffed behind his back, and he did not understand yet what he had done. None of it would have happened sober. That was the most terrible part. There was no great hatred behind it, no plan. Only a bottle, and a still, small voice he had drowned out.

Sethar laughed until it shook. "Look at your little flame now," it jeered at Abilene. "Six months you watched and ran your little errands. Six months! He chose me every single night, and tonight he chose me for three people who never got a vote. There is your precious agency, messenger."

Abilene did not answer. He could not have stopped the car without tearing away the very freedom he was sent to protect. So he did the only thing left to him. He knelt in the broken glass beside the silent car where the children had been, and he wept, and the comforters came down around him like snow, and went on to find a father who was about to answer his phone.

The Morning After

Caleb woke in a holding cell at dawn, and he was sober. That was the

cruelty of it. The alcohol had worn off, and the truth had not. The cell smelled of bleach and old sweat. A fluorescent tube buzzed and flickered overhead, throwing a light so flat and white that it seemed to have no source and cast no shadows. Somewhere down the corridor a man was coughing, and a metal door slammed, and the sound rang through the concrete like a bell that would not stop.

At seven o'clock a deputy slid a paper tray through the slot and told him, without looking at him, that three people had died at the scene. A woman and two little girls. Caleb heard the words, but they seemed to arrive from very far away, as if someone were shouting them across a canyon.

The truth came in pieces over that day. The red light. The minivan. The car seats. His blood-alcohol level, nearly three times the legal limit. A booking photo that would be on the evening news. By nightfall he understood the shape of it: three people were dead because of him. A family was destroyed. Nothing could be undone—not with money, not with tears, not with any apology in any language. The circumstances were fixed forever, like words carved into stone.

He sat on the steel bench and thought: *My life is over.* And in a way it was. The life he had known was as gone as the lives he had taken.

Abilene knelt beside him and carried his name to the Father, and the Spirit came, quiet as dawn: *He is near. Even here. Call on Him.* But Caleb did not hear. Adiel had warned him long ago that the Spirit cannot be heard while the screaming is loudest, and the storm inside Caleb had only just begun. It would take two years to pass through it. Abilene would be there for every day of them.

Denial: The First Months

The first thing Caleb's mind did was refuse.

The light was yellow, he told himself in the dark of the county jail. *It was yellow. It changed too fast. The other car came out of nowhere.* He said it to his public defender, a tired woman with gray streaks in her hair and a stack of files taller than her coffee cup. He said it to his mother on the phone, through the scratched glass of the visiting room. He said it so often that some nights he almost believed it.

He told himself he had not been that drunk. He had driven after drinking a dozen times before, and nothing had happened. He told himself it was an accident, and that accidents happen to everyone. He told himself the

intersection was badly lit, that the city should have put in a better signal, that his friend should have taken his keys. Each excuse was a thin board nailed across a window, keeping out a light he could not bear to see.

Sethar helped him build every one. The smoke-thing sat on the upper bunk and fed him lines all night long: *It wasn't really your fault. Anyone could have done it. They'll see that. You'll be home by Christmas.* Denial was Sethar's favorite shelter, because a man who will not admit what he has done can never repent of it.

Abilene came every night anyway. He could not argue with the lies; that was not his office. But he carried Caleb's name to the Father, and the Spirit set the truth down gently beside the lies, like a lamp placed in a dark room: *You know what happened. You were there. Their names were Rosa, Lucia, and Maria.* Caleb would lie awake, rigid, staring at the underside of the bunk above him, and somewhere around three in the morning his eyes would fill, and he would roll toward the wall and pull the thin blanket over his head.

Meanwhile Abilene was preparing the way. A bus driver who had been stopped at the intersection that night kept feeling that he should not let the city erase the footage from his camera, and one afternoon, for reasons he could not quite explain, he called the public defender's office. In December Caleb's lawyer brought him the dashcam footage from a city bus that had been stopped at the intersection. Caleb watched it on a small laptop in a windowless room. The light had been red for four full seconds before his headlights appeared in the frame. He watched his own car slide through the intersection without braking. He watched it three times. The boards across the windows came down all at once.

Anger: The First Year

What came in through the broken windows was not light. It was fire.

Caleb was angry at everything. He was angry at his friend Tyler, who had poured the drinks and waved from the doorway as he drove away. He was angry at the bar that had sold the bottle, and mad at the pandemic that had taken his job, and especially at his father, Luis, who had walked out when he was six. He was angry at his mother for crying on every visit. He was angry at the deputies who called him by his booking number. He picked a fight in the dayroom over a television remote and spent eleven days in solitary confinement, pacing a cell eight feet long, punching the concrete until his knuckles split.

Most of all he was angry at God.

"Where were You?" he shouted one night at the ceiling of the solitary cell, loud enough that the man in the next cell pounded on the wall. "You could have stopped me! You could have made the light change, or the car stall, or made them leave five minutes later. You could have done something! What kind of God just watches?"

Abilene stood in the corner of the cell and wept. He had heard that question in every generation, from Babylon to Galilee to Phoenix. It was always the same question, dressed in different clothes: *Why did You let me choose?* And the answer was always the same one, the one Adiel had taught him before the world was made. Because to stop the choice would be to unmake the chooser. Because the Father would not do Lucifer's work, not even to save a family from a drunk driver.

Sethar loved the anger. It fed it the way Caleb had once fed his campfire, one log at a time. *God abandoned you. Your mother is ashamed of you. That family hates you and they always will. You don't owe anyone anything.* The anger burned so loudly that there was no silence anywhere in it, and so Abilene waited, and carried Caleb's name to the Father every night. When the Spirit could find a crack of quiet, it spoke only the smallest things, over and over, like a man tapping on a wall in a code he hopes a prisoner on the other side will one day learn to read. *He did not abandon you. He was in that intersection too. He wept.*

The anger lasted most of a year. But fire cannot burn forever. Sooner or later it runs out of wood.

Bargaining: The Plea

By the next autumn, the fire had burned down to embers, and in the gray ash Caleb began to make deals.

The county jail had a small library cart that rattled down the tier on Tuesdays, and one week he took a Bible from it, the cover soft and torn. He did not read it so much as hold it, the way a man holds a lottery ticket. At night, lying on the thin mattress while the fans roared and someone down the row played the same song over and over on a contraband speaker, he prayed for the first time since he was a boy. But his prayers were contracts.

If You get me a short sentence, I'll never drink again. If the judge gives me probation, I'll go to church every Sunday. If You let me out in time to see my mom's birthday, I'll pay that family back every cent, I swear it. Just this

one thing. Just get me out.

He thought of himself as a man who had finally turned to God. But Abilene could see that Caleb was still standing in the center of his own world, trying to buy his way out of the consequences rather than out of the sin. Sethar could see it too, and it was delighted. *Good,* it purred. *Make your deals. And when He doesn't pay up, you'll know what He really is.*

His lawyer told him the prosecution would accept a guilty plea to three counts of manslaughter, and recommend a sentence of sixteen years. Caleb took it the way a drowning man grabs a rope. He practiced his statement for the sentencing hearing in his cell, pacing the four steps between the bunk and the steel toilet, saying the words out loud to the painted cinderblock: *I'm sorry. I made a mistake. I'm not a bad person.* He practiced the tremble in his voice. He believed he was sorry. What he did not yet understand was that most of what he felt was sorry for himself.

The courtroom was on the ninth floor, paneled in pale wood that tried to look warm and failed. The windows faced the mountains, and the late-afternoon light came in low and gold across the benches. Caleb sat at the defense table in an orange jumpsuit with his wrists chained to his waist, and he did not dare turn around.

Roberto Morales stood at the lectern. He was younger than Caleb had expected, maybe thirty-five, in a white shirt ironed too carefully, the way a man irons a shirt when there is no one left at home to help him do it. He read from a sheet of paper that shook in his hands. He talked about Rosa's laugh, and how she sang off-key in the car on purpose to make the girls groan. He talked about Lucia, who had wanted to be a veterinarian, and Maria, who had just learned to tie her shoes and made everyone watch her do it. He described a pink bicycle still leaning against the garage, a kitchen that no longer made any sound, three toothbrushes he could not bring himself to throw away. He did not look at Caleb once.

Caleb heard every word, and something cracked inside him that his rehearsed speech could not cover. When the judge asked if the defendant wished to speak, he stood and said the lines he had practiced—*I'm sorry, I made a mistake, I'm not a bad person*—and even as he said them he could hear how thin they were, like paper held up against a flood. He sat down with his face burning.

The judge sentenced him to sixteen years in the Arizona State Prison. Caleb's mother made a sound in the second row that he would hear in his

sleep for years. Sethar sat in the empty jury box and smirked. Around Roberto stood three comforters so bright that anyone with eyes to see would have had to look away. And Abilene stood behind Caleb with a hand of light on his shoulder, while the Spirit spoke to a man who still could not hear it.

Depression: The Second Year

The bus to the state prison left before sunrise. Caleb rode it with his ankles shackled to the floor, watching the desert slide past the wire-mesh window in shades of rust and ash. When the prison rose out of the flat land—gray walls, gray towers, coils of razor wire glinting in the first light—he felt something close inside him like a door.

Only someone who has been inside can fully understand the coldness of such a place. It is not only the temperature, though the concrete holds the cold of the night long into the morning and the steel bench burns like ice against bare skin. It is a coldness of the spirit. At intake he was stripped, searched, sprayed, and handed a bundle of clothing that had been worn by a hundred men before him. His name was taken and a number given back in its place. From that day on the guards called him by the number, and the number did not have a mother or a grandfather or a favorite song.

His cell was six feet by nine. A steel bunk bolted to the wall, a steel toilet without a lid, a narrow slit of window too high to see anything through but a strip of sky. The lights never fully went out. Every few hours through the night came the count: a flashlight beam in his face, a voice barking his number, the clank of a door down the row. The noise never stopped either—shouting, slamming, a man screaming the same word for hours, the echo of it rolling down the tier like thunder that never broke. In all that noise, there was no one to talk to. In a place crowded with two thousand men, Caleb had never been so alone.

No one touched him except to search him. No one looked him in the eye. Meals were eaten in eleven minutes under the watch of an officer in a tower. Days had no color. Weeks had no names. The only way to tell the seasons was by how hot the cell became in the afternoons.

This was the pit, and Caleb went all the way to the bottom of it.

The anger was gone now, and the bargaining was gone, and what was left was a gray, heavy nothing. He slept fourteen hours a day and woke exhausted. He stopped going to the yard. He stopped answering his mother's letters and let them pile up, unopened, under the mattress. He replayed the crash so many times that he could no longer tell whether he was remembering it or

dreaming it: the white roar, the glass, a small pink shoe on the asphalt that he had never actually seen but saw every night anyway. His thoughts ran in a closed circle, like a dog in a pen: *I killed them. I killed them. There is nothing left of me but that.* Slowly he began to believe that the world would be better if he were not in it.

There is a particular kind of despair that belongs only to the guilty. A man who has been wronged can at least hold on to his innocence; he can say, *This was done to me.* Caleb had nothing to hold. Every road his mind went down ended at the same wall: *I did this.* Not the bottle, not the pandemic, not the light, not Tyler. He had turned the key. He had pressed the pedal. Three graves in a cemetery on the west side of the city had his name written on them as surely as if he had carved it there himself. The weight of it sat on his chest when he woke and lay on top of him when he tried to sleep, heavy as the concrete of the walls. He understood now why Alma, in the scriptures, had wished he could become extinct, both soul and body, rather than stand before God with what he had done. There was no corner of his own mind where he could hide from himself.

Sethar did not need to scream anymore. It sat on the end of the bunk and spoke in a soft, reasonable voice, almost kind. *You're right. You're nothing. Your mother would be better off. Roberto would be better off. Even God is done with you. It's over. Just let it be over.*

It was the most dangerous voice Abilene had ever heard, because it sounded like mercy. And Abilene did something he had not done since Babylon. He did not wait for the lull. He called for help.

The company answered. A comforter came and sat on the cold floor of the cell through the long nights, so that the darkness in that small room was never quite overwhelming. And Abilene went to the prison chaplain, an old man named Brother Ellis who walked the tiers every Thursday with a canvas bag of paperback scriptures, and Abilene guided the old man's steps down Caleb's tier, until the chaplain stopped, for no reason he could name, outside Caleb's door. There the Spirit spoke one name to his heart: *Caleb.*

The next Thursday, Brother Ellis stopped at Caleb's door and would not leave. He came back the next week, and the next. He did not preach. He talked about baseball and the weather and his grandchildren. He noticed the unopened letters, and the untouched food trays, and the look in Caleb's eyes, and he quietly made sure the prison's mental health staff noticed too. One afternoon, as he was leaving, he pressed a folded note through the slot. It said only: *You are loved. Read your mother's letters.*

That night, under the buzzing light, Caleb pulled the pile of envelopes out from under his mattress. There were forty-one of them. He opened the first one and read his mother's handwriting—*I love you, mijo. I am not ashamed of you. I pray for you every night, and I pray for that family too*—and he cried for the first time in almost a year. Not the angry crying of the solitary cell, but the kind that breaks something loose.

Abilene did not rejoice yet. But for the first time in two years, he felt the storm begin to go quiet.

Acceptance: Two Years After the Crash

It happened on an ordinary night, almost exactly two years after the crash. A thunderstorm had rolled across the desert in the afternoon, and for once the prison was quiet: the rain had cooled the concrete, the power had flickered, and the tier had fallen into an unusual hush. Rain ran down the narrow window in silver threads. Caleb lay on his bunk and listened to it, and for a long while there was no other sound at all.

In that silence, while Abilene stood watch and held his breath, the Spirit spoke the same words it had been speaking every night for seven hundred nights: *He descended below all things. There is no depth you can fall to where He has not already been. He is not afraid of this cell. He is waiting for you.*

And Caleb heard.

He did not hear a voice with his ears. What he heard sounded like his grandfather, and like his mother's letters, and like something he had known long before he was born and had simply forgotten. It did not sound strange at all. It sounded like home.

And in that silence he saw himself. Not the man in the gray prison clothes, but the whole road behind him, the way a traveler sees a valley from the top of a ridge. He would never have done it all at once. If someone had shown him at sixteen a red light, a minivan, and three small graves, and asked him to choose them, he would have run from the room. No one is led to a thing like that in a single step. He had been led there slowly, one easy step at a time, and every step had seemed too small to matter.

He remembered a time when he was truly happy. Sunday mornings in a crowded pew, his mother humming the hymns under her breath, his grandfather's old leather scriptures open across their two laps. A time before the anger. A time before a few boys and girls at church laughed at him in a

hallway, and he decided he would never give them the chance again. A time before he stopped going. A time before his mother's gentle urging—Come with me this week, mijo, just this once—had begun to grate on him like sand in a shoe.

He could see it now: the whole path, and every little thing that had led him to where he was. It was like a trail of breadcrumbs, scattered so far apart that he had never noticed he was following them—from that long-ago time when his life was happy, through every slight and grudge and empty Sunday, through the first can and the closed blinds, the party and the keys in his hand, all the way to this cell. Not one of them had looked like a road to ruin. Every one of them had been a step on it. And now, at last, he saw it all for what it was.

He sat up. For a long moment he did not move. Then he did something he could not have explained, something that seemed to come not from his mind but from somewhere deeper, a memory older than his own life. His arm rose, almost on its own, to the square. *In the name of Jesus Christ,* he whispered, and then, louder, *I command all darkness to leave this place.* His voice broke. His arm trembled. But he said the words, and he did not lower his arm until he had finished.

Sethar hissed and was gone. The whole company was released at once: the warriors drove the dark from the corners of the room, the comforters filled it, and the healers began a work that would take years. Caleb did not see any of them. He only felt the cell grow warm, as if someone had opened a door onto sunlight.

Then he knelt on the cold concrete and prayed. He did not bargain. He did not ask for his sentence to be shortened. He told God the truth—all of it, without a single excuse—and asked to be forgiven, and asked that Roberto Morales would somehow find peace. He prayed until the rain stopped.

Acceptance did not mean that the guilt vanished, or that the grief ended. Some mornings it still came down on him like the heat of an Arizona July. But it no longer owned him. He began to read the scriptures his mother sent, a chapter every night. He joined the prison's recovery group and sat in a circle of plastic chairs with other men who had drowned their lives in a bottle, and after a while he began to speak. He enrolled in classes. He started helping the younger inmates learn to read.

And he wrote a letter to Roberto. It took him two months and nineteen drafts. It had no excuses in it, and it asked for nothing. He sent it through the

victim services office, knowing that it might never be opened. He did not know if Roberto would ever forgive him. He knew he had no right to ask. But he was ready, now, to carry the truth of what he had done without letting it destroy him—and to spend the rest of his life making whatever he and God could make of it.

What Caleb could not yet see, Abilene already knew. Happiness was waiting for him, far down that long road—not the borrowed gold of a bottle, but the real kind, the kind that is built slowly and lasts. One day a woman would come into his life carrying her own set of circumstances, her own sorrows and her own hard-won hope. They would recognize something in each other that neither could have explained. And they would be very happy together.

Abilene stood in the corner of the cell as the storm clouds broke apart and the stars came out over the desert, cold and clean and brilliant. He wept for Rosa and Lucia and Maria, and for Roberto alone in his quiet kitchen, and for all the ruin one drowned-out voice had caused. Then, very quietly, he rejoiced. A heart that had been lost had turned toward home. The walk would be long, and much of it would be walked behind prison walls. But it had begun.

Two Hundred Generations



Abilene, The Minister — A Work of Fiction

Abilene has walked beside more than two hundred generations now. He has stood in the smoke of Babylon and the dawn light of Galilee and the hum of a courtroom in Phoenix. He has knelt beside kings and slaves, saints and thieves, and he has learned that the line between light and darkness does not run between nations or centuries. It runs through every human heart, one small choice at a time.

He has wept more times than he can count. He has been sneered at by creatures who once sang beside him, and he has watched them seem to win, again and again, because the people he loved handed them the keys. He could have stopped none of it without breaking the one law he was sent to protect.

So he has never forced a single soul. He has only watched, and carried word to the Father, and prepared the way for the Spirit to speak.

But he has also rejoiced, and his joy has been brighter than any furnace. For every Malluch who turned his face away, there was an Eliab who walked home through the night, and a Caleb who raised a trembling arm in a concrete cell. The darkness is loud, and it is patient, and it laughs. Yet it has never once put out a light that chose to keep burning.

So Abilene keeps watch. He is somewhere tonight, preparing the way for someone who does not know he is there. And if you listen very closely, in the quiet between one choice and the next, you may hear the voice he has cleared the road for.

Remember who you are. It is not too late. Go home.

Introduction — “Learn the Opposite”

Author’s Commentary

This book rests on a conviction that runs through scripture and through the teachings of latter-day prophets: that good is best understood when its opposite is understood. Lehi taught his son Jacob that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.” Jedediah M. Grant went further, saying that no one could fully understand the power of God without learning its opposite. Brigham Young counseled the Saints to study not only good and its effects, but also evil and its consequences.

This is not an invitation to fascination with darkness; the prophets warn plainly against that. It is an invitation to recognize darkness, so that it can be refused. The chapters that follow set the adversary’s origins, methods, and limits beside the power, patience, and mercy of God, drawing on scripture and on the words of latter-day Church leaders, so that each may be seen more clearly against the other.

Jedediah M. Grant

I have thought that no Saint could fully understand the power of God unless he learn the opposite. I am not myself acquainted with any happiness that I have not learned the opposite of. … I am of opinion that all Saints sooner or later will have to learn the opposite to good, they will have to partake of the bitter in order to properly appreciate the sweet, they will have to be impressed with pain that they may appreciate pleasure.

— Jedediah M. Grant, “The Power of God and the Power of Satan,” 19 February 1854, Journal of Discourses 2:11–12

Brigham Young

It is your duty to study to know everything upon the face of the earth, in addition to reading those books. We should not only study good, and its effects upon our race, but also evil, and its consequences.

— Brigham Young, "Organization and Development of Man," 6 February 1853, Journal of Discourses 2:94

Elder John A. Widtsoe

First, there is "an opposition in all things." If there be a south, there must be a north; if there be light, there must also be the possibility of darkness; if a right side, also a left side; if activity, also quiescence; if good, there must be its opposite, which is evil. ... It is because of this eternal "opposition" that man is [able] to choose, thus doing good or evil.

Whatever conforms to the plan of God for His earth children is good; whatever is in opposition to the plan is evil. That is a simple, plain definition of evil.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 53, "What Is Evil?"

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

I. A Summer Cottage in Babylon — Favorite Sins



Author's Commentary

Before we look at the adversary's origins and methods, it is worth looking at ourselves. Most of us are not in open rebellion against God. We have made covenants, and we mean to keep them. Yet many of us carry a quiet exception: a habit, an appetite, a resentment, or a pleasure that we have not quite been willing to give up. Elder Neal A. Maxwell called it keeping a summer cottage in Babylon—living, for the most part, in Zion, while holding on to a place we can return to when no one is looking.

This chapter comes first because the rest of the book depends on it. Every method the adversary uses works best on a heart that is divided. He does not need us to give him everything; a single favorite sin is enough to keep a door open. The opposite is the whole-souled offering of the king who said, "I will give away all my sins to know thee."

"Remember Lot's Wife" — Looking Back Longingly



Author's Commentary

The angels commanded Lot's family to flee Sodom and not look back. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt, and the Savior later gave a three-word warning to His disciples: "Remember Lot's wife." Elder Jeffrey R. Holland observed that her problem was not merely that she looked back, but that in her heart she wanted to go back.

Genesis 19:17; 19:26

19:17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

19:26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Luke 17:32

32 Remember Lot's wife.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Just what did Lot's wife do that was so wrong? As a student of history, I have thought about that and offer a partial answer. Apparently, what was wrong with Lot's wife was that she wasn't just looking back; in her heart she wanted to go back. It would appear that even before she was past the city limits, she was already missing what Sodom and Gomorrah had offered her. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once said, such people know they should have their primary residence in Zion, but they still hope to keep a summer cottage in Babylon.

It is possible that Lot's wife looked back with resentment toward the Lord for what He was asking her to leave behind. … So it isn't just that she looked back; she looked back longingly. In short, her attachment to the past outweighed her confidence in the future. That, apparently, was at least part of her sin.

— Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Best Is Yet to Be," Ensign, January 2010 (Brigham Young University devotional, 13 January 2009)



Luke 9:62

62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"A Summer Cottage in Babylon" — The Divided Residence



Author's Commentary

Scripture uses Babylon as the name for the world in its pride and wickedness. To keep a summer cottage there is to try to serve two masters—a thing the Savior said cannot be done. The trouble with a divided residence is not only the time spent away from Zion; it is that the heart never fully settles anywhere.

Elder Larry W. Gibbons

In the priesthood leadership session of a regional conference, we sang the hymn "Ye Elders of Israel." The chorus contains a line "O Babylon, O Babylon, we bid thee farewell." Following the singing, Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke and expressed the thought that bidding Babylon farewell is actually one of our challenges, that too many of us like to keep a summer cottage there.

— Larry W. Gibbons, "Wherefore, Settle This in Your Hearts," general conference, October 2006 (Ensign, November 2006)

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

To come to Zion, it is not enough for you or me to be somewhat less wicked than others. We are to become not only good but holy men and women. Recalling Elder Neal A. Maxwell's phrase, let us once and for all establish our residence in Zion and give up the summer cottage in Babylon.

— D. Todd Christofferson, "Come to Zion," general conference, October 2008 (Ensign, November 2008)

Matthew 6:24

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“The Sin Which Doth So Easily Beset Us” — Favorite Sins

Author’s Commentary

A favorite sin is rarely the worst thing we could do. It is usually small, familiar, and defended—the sin we excuse because it seems harmless, or because we have made peace with it. Nephi foresaw a people who would say that God “will justify in committing a little sin.” Paul’s counsel was to lay aside the sin that so easily besets us, and the Lord warned that sins forsaken and then taken up again bring the former sins back with them.

Hebrews 12:1

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Nephi 28:7–8

7 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.

8 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.

— *The Book of Mormon*



D&C 82:7

7 And now, verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, will not lay any sin to your charge; go your ways and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

"Go Ye Out from Babylon" — The Call to Leave



Author's Commentary

The invitation to leave Babylon is repeated in both the ancient and modern scriptures. It is not a call to leave the world physically, but to leave its sins completely—to stop visiting the cottage, and finally to give up the key.

D&C 133:14

14 Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

REVELATION 18:4

4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"I Will Give Away All My Sins" — The Opposite

AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY

The opposite of a favorite sin is a complete offering. When Aaron taught the father of King Lamoni, the king did not ask what he could keep; he offered to give away his kingdom, and then all his sins, to know God. His people later buried their weapons deep in the earth as a testimony that they would never take them up again. By contrast, the rich young man who had kept the commandments from his youth went away sorrowful when asked for the one thing he could not part with.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught that overcoming the world includes being willing to "give away" even our favorite sins—and that this does not mean becoming perfect in this life, but loving God and His Son more than anyone or anything else.



Alma 22:15–18

15 And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.

16 But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.

17 And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

18 O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 24:17–19

17 And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords, and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man′s blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth.

18 And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man′s blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness they would labor abundantly with their hands.

19 And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace.

— The Book of Mormon

Matthew 19:20–22

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

President Russell M. Nelson

It means overcoming the temptation to care more about the things of this world than the things of God. It means trusting the doctrine of Christ more than the philosophies of men. It means delighting in truth, denouncing deception, and becoming "humble followers of Christ." It means choosing to refrain from anything that drives the Spirit away. It means being willing to "give away" even our favorite sins.

Now, overcoming the world certainly does not mean becoming perfect in this life, nor does it mean that your problems will magically evaporate—because they won't. And it does not mean that you won't still make mistakes. But overcoming the world does mean that your resistance to sin will increase. Your heart will soften as your faith in Jesus Christ increases. Overcoming the world means growing to love God and His Beloved Son more than you love anyone or anything else.

— Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," general conference, October 2022 (Liahona, November 2022)

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

II. The Rebellion in Heaven



Author's Commentary

Before we can study the methods of the adversary, we must ask where he came from. The scriptures agree that evil did not begin on earth. It began in heaven, among beings who stood in the presence of God, and it began with a choice.

This chapter gathers what is written about that first rebellion: why a loving God would permit it, what the heavenly home of the rebels was like, how they fell and where they went, what power they still hold, and why they labor against the children of men.

"Because of Their Agency" — Freedom over Subjugation



Author's Commentary

A God who wanted only obedience could have made obedience certain. Instead the scriptures describe a Father who gave His children the power to choose, knowing that some would choose against Him. The Lord told Joseph Smith plainly that a third part of the hosts of heaven turned away "because of their agency." Rebellion was the risk of freedom, and God accepted that risk rather than rule by compulsion.

Lehi explains why: without opposition there could be no choosing, and without choosing there could be no righteousness, no joy, and no growth. The same principle governs heaven's own authority, which may be exercised "only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned," and whose dominion flows "without compulsory means."

Abraham 3:22–26

22 Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;

23 And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.

24 And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;

25 And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;

26 And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*

2 Nephi 2:14–16

14 And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon.

15 And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

16 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.

— The Book of Mormon



D&C 29:35–39

35 Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.

36 And it came to pass that Adam, being tempted of the devil—for, behold, the devil was before Adam, for he rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency;

37 And they were thrust down, and thus came the devil and his angels;

38 And, behold, there is a place prepared for them from the beginning, which place is hell.

39 And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 121:41–42; 121:46

121:41 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;

121:42 By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

121:46 The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

"A Son of the Morning" — The Home from Which They Fell

Author's Commentary

The rebels did not fall from ignorance. They fell from the presence of God. Job describes the premortal morning when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." The Doctrine and Covenants calls Lucifer "an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God," a son of the morning. Ezekiel's lament over the king of Tyre, which many readers have long applied to the fallen one, pictures a being "perfect in beauty," set upon "the holy mountain of God," perfect in his ways "till iniquity was found in thee."

The scriptures paint a picture of height and glory. Theirs was an environment of light, order, song, and nearness to God. That such beings could still rebel is the clearest evidence that knowledge alone does not make the heart obedient.

Job 38:4–7

4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 76:25–27

25 And this we saw also, and bear record, that an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God, who rebelled against the Only Begotten Son whom the Father loved and who was in the bosom of the Father, was thrust down from the presence of God and the Son,

26 And was called Perdition, for the heavens wept over him—he was Lucifer, a son of the morning.

27 And we beheld, and lo, he is fallen! is fallen, even a son of the morning!

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Ezekiel 28:12–17

12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and

perfect in beauty.

13 Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

15 Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.

16 By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.

17 Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Give Me Thine Honor" — The Rebellion



Author's Commentary

Restored scripture places the rebellion in a council. The Father presented His plan, the Beloved Son offered Himself and gave the glory to the Father, and Lucifer offered to redeem all mankind so that not one soul would be lost, if the honor were given to him. His plan required that agency be destroyed, and when it was rejected he rebelled.

Moses 4:1–4

1 And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.

2 But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

3 Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

4 And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.

— The Pearl of Great Price

Abraham 3:27–28

27 And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first.

28 And the second was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him.

— The Pearl of Great Price

Author's Commentary

At the grand council there must have been conspiracy; there must have been preparation. An alternate plan was presented, and it must have had the support of many. Those who supported it must have been planning it for some time. It was not all conceived by Satan in a single moment, or if it was, he had much time to sell it and to find those who would support it. Hence, when he was denied, they were already willing to follow him as he was cast down.

The scriptures bear this out. Isaiah records that Lucifer had said "in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne," a purpose formed and nursed long before it was spoken. Abraham notes that when the Lord chose the Son, the other "was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him." They did not need to be persuaded that day; they were ready. The Lord told Joseph Smith that Satan "turned away" a third part of the hosts of heaven, a phrase that describes a long work of persuasion, and John saw not a sudden riot but a war, with "the dragon ... and his angels" organized against Michael and his angels. In this light, the rebellion in heaven was the first secret combination: a plan conceived in the dark, built on promises of honor, sealed by loyalty to one who would rule, and revealed only when it was ready. Chapter IX traces how the same pattern was carried to the earth.

Revelation 12:7–9

7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Elder John A. Widtsoe

Lucifer, son of the morning, through diligent search for truth and the use of it, had become one of the foremost in the assembly of those invited to undertake the experiences of earth. But, in that Great Council, his personal ambition and love of power overcame him. He pitted his own plan and will against the purposes of God. ... He was no longer Lucifer, bearer of truth, who walked in light, but Satan, teacher of untruth, who slunk in darkness.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 54, "Is There a Personal Devil?"

"The Third Part of the Stars" — The Great Ones Who Followed Him



Author's Commentary

It would be naive of us to think that Lucifer was the only great one who fell. He was "an angel of God who was in authority," and authority implies others beneath it. John saw the dragon's tail draw "the third part of the stars of heaven," and in scripture stars often stand for the noble and great.

The scriptures also hint that some of these great ones still hold positions of influence. When Daniel prayed, the answering angel was withstood for twenty-one days by "the prince of the kingdom of Persia," until Michael came to help him. This was not a human king but a spiritual power set over a nation. Paul warned that our wrestle is against "principalities" and "powers" and "the rulers of the darkness of this world," titles of rank, and Isaiah foresaw the day when the Lord would "punish the host of the high ones that are on high." If many noble and great spirits chose the Father's plan, it is reasonable to believe that many great and capable spirits chose to follow Satan, and that their gifts did not vanish when they fell. They now serve his purposes with the same intelligence and ability they once had. This is one reason the adversary's works so often appear in the highest places of power, the subject of Chapter XII.

Revelation 12:3–4

3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Daniel 10:12–13; 10:20

10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

10:13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty

days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

10:20 Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Isaiah 24:21

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Colossians 2:15

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“Cast Out into the Earth” — Where They Went

Author’s Commentary

All the witnesses agree that the rebels were cast down, but they describe the place in different ways. Jesus saw Satan “as lightning fall from heaven.” John saw him cast into the earth, “and his angels were cast out with him.” Peter and Jude speak of angels held in “chains of darkness.” Jacob teaches that had there been no Atonement we too would have become “angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God.”

Luke 10:17–20

17 And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

20 Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Revelation 12:12–13

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Peter 2:4

4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Jude 1:6

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Nephi 9:8–9

8 O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more 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.

9 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; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

— *The Book of Mormon*



THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH

Some seek to excel. And this was the case with Lucifer when he fell. He sought for things which were unlawful. Hence he was sent down, and it is said he drew many away with him; and the greatness of his punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle. … The devil steals a tabernacle because he has not one of his own: but if he steals one, he is always liable to be turned out of doors.

— *Joseph Smith, discourse of 14 May 1843, History of the Church 5:387–88*

“The Prince of the Power of the Air” — What Power They Have

Author’s Commentary

The adversary’s power is real, but it is borrowed and bounded. He can tempt, entice, deceive, and afflict; the Gospels show evil spirits taking hold of men. Yet in every account his power stops where the agency of a faithful person begins. Moses commanded him to depart in the name of the Only Begotten, and he departed. Helaman taught that those built upon the rock of Christ cannot be dragged down. Paul promised that no temptation comes beyond what we are able to bear.

Ephesians 2:2; 6:11–13

2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Moses 1:12–22

12 And it came to pass that when Moses had said these words, behold, Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man, worship me.

13 And it came to pass that Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?

14 For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee in the natural man. Is it not so, surely?

15 Blessed be the name of my God, for his Spirit hath not altogether withdrawn from me, or else where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God; for God said unto me: Worship God, for him only shalt thou serve.

16 Get thee hence, Satan; deceive me not; for God said unto me: Thou art after the similitude of mine Only Begotten.

17 And he also gave me commandments when he called unto me out of the burning bush, saying: Call upon God in the name of mine Only Begotten, and worship me.

18 And again Moses said: I will not cease to call upon God, I have other things to inquire of him: for his glory has been upon me, wherefore I can judge between him and thee. Depart hence, Satan.

19 And now, when Moses had said these words, Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me.

20 And it came to pass that Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell. Nevertheless, calling upon God, he received strength, and he commanded, saying: Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship, which is the God of glory.

21 And now Satan began to tremble, and the earth shook; and Moses received strength, and called upon God, saying: In the name of the Only Begotten, depart hence, Satan.

22 And it came to pass that Satan cried with a loud voice, with weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; and he departed hence, even from the presence of Moses, that he beheld him not.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*



D&C 93:36–39

36 The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.

37 Light and truth forsake that evil one.

38 Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.

39 And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

Helaman 5:12

12 And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

— The Book of Mormon

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Worship the Image of God" — The Refusal to Bow to Adam

Author's Commentary

These mighty fallen angels refused to glorify Adam. They would not bow in reverence before the one God had placed over the earth.

This refusal implies something remarkable about Adam. Restored scripture reveals that Adam was Michael before he received a body of flesh and bone: "Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days." In

the light of latter-day revelation, the rebels were refusing to honor the very one who would lead the hosts of heaven against them. Adam will be exalted and made a ruler over them, and so may we, his children, who may eventually become as God. Paul asked, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" and Hebrews teaches that though man was made "a little lower than the angels," all things are to be put "in subjection under his feet." The Doctrine and Covenants says of the faithful, "they are gods, even the sons of God," and foretells the final battle in which Michael will gather his armies and the devil and his hosts will be "cast away into their own place."

For this reason they seek to destroy us. Those who would not bow to Adam cannot bear to see his children rise above them, and every soul they turn away is one fewer who will judge them. Their war against the human family is, at its root, a war against our destiny.



D&C 27:11

11 And also with Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days;

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



D&C 107:53–56

53 Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing.

54 And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the prince, the archangel.

55 And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever.

56 And Adam stood up in the midst of the congregation; and, notwithstanding he was bowed down with age, being full of the Holy Ghost, predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

Hebrews 2:6–8

6 But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

8 Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

1 Corinthians 6:2–3

2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Romans 8:16–18

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 76:58–60

58 Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—

59 Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

60 And they shall overcome all things.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 88:112–115

112 And Michael, the seventh angel, even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven.

113 And the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies.

114 And then cometh the battle of the great God; and the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all.

115 For Michael shall fight their battles, and shall overcome him who seeketh the throne of him who sitteth upon the throne, even the Lamb.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

"That All Men Might Be Miserable" — Why They Seek to Influence Men

Author's Commentary

Why should fallen spirits care what men do? The scriptures give several answers that fit together. They are at war with the plan they rejected, and so with everyone who keeps it; John saw the dragon go "to make war with the remnant" of the woman's seed. They seek "to destroy the souls of men." They envy what they lost and what man was given. And having chosen misery, the adversary seeks company in it.

There is one more clue. The spirits in the Gospels begged to enter even a herd of swine rather than be cast out. Having no bodies of their own, they seem drawn to those who do. Every one of the methods in the next chapter serves these ends.

D&C 10:22–27

22 Satan stirreth them up, that he may lead their souls to destruction.

23 And thus he has laid a cunning plan, thinking to destroy the work of God; but I will require this at their hands, and it shall turn to their shame and condemnation in the day of judgment.

24 Yea, he stirreth up their hearts to anger against this work.

25 Yea, he saith unto them: Deceive and lie in wait to catch, that ye may destroy; behold, this is no harm. And thus he flattereth them, and telleth them that it is no sin to lie that they may catch a man in a lie, that they may destroy him.

26 And thus he flattereth them, and leadeth them along until he draggeth their souls down to hell; and thus he causeth them to catch themselves in their own snare.

27 And thus he goeth up and down, to and fro in the earth, seeking to destroy the souls of men.

— The Doctrine and Covenants



D&C 76:28–29

28 And while we were yet in the Spirit, the Lord commanded us that we should write the vision; for we beheld Satan, that old serpent, even the devil, who rebelled against God, and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ—

29 Wherefore, he maketh war with the saints of God, and encompasseth them round about.

— The Doctrine and Covenants



Revelation 12:17

17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Peter 5:8–9

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mark 5:6–13

6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Moses 4:6

6 And Satan put it into the heart of the serpent, (for he had drawn away many after him,) and he sought also to beguile Eve, for he knew not the mind of God, wherefore he sought to destroy the world.

— The Pearl of Great Price

President Harold B. Lee

There are three things that Satan sets out to do. First, he plans to destroy the agency of man. That was the issue in the contest which resulted in his expulsion with the third of the hosts of heaven. ... Likewise in that nation where representative government has given way to the will of dictatorships, there you may see the power of Satan, or the "prince of this world," reigning in great demonstration.

Satan's second purpose is to possess the bodies of Adam and his posterity. ... The third purpose of Satan, which is described carefully and accurately in the scriptures, was to make captive the souls of men (see Alma 34:35; 2 Nephi 26:22).

— Harold B. Lee, The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1996), 37–38

President Wilford Woodruff

There are no persons upon the earth that the evil spirits labor so hard with as with men bearing the Holy Priesthood—men, women and children under the covenant. These are the people whom they labor to destroy.

— Wilford Woodruff, conjoint meeting of the Relief Society and Young Ladies' associations, Weber Stake, Deseret Weekly, 24 February 1894

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

III. The Methods of the Adversary



Author's Commentary

Lehi taught his son Jacob that "it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). Before we can see clearly the character of a loving and longsuffering God, it helps to see plainly the methods of the one who opposes Him.

The scriptures do not leave the adversary's ways hidden. The Bible names him the father of lies and the accuser of the brethren. The Book of Mormon shows how he flatters, lulls, and binds. This chapter gathers those witnesses, one method at a time.

"Who Is Higher Than I?" — Pride



Author's Commentary

Every account of the adversary begins with the same desire: to rise above his appointed place. His first method is the one that first undid him.



Isaiah 14:12–15

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



2 Nephi 2:17–18

17 And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

18 And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

— The Book of Mormon

“The Father of Lies” — Deception



Author’s Commentary

Having fallen by pride, he works by deceit. He seldom comes as what he is. He comes as a messenger of light, as a trusted voice, or as a sign that seems to prove itself.

John 8:44

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Corinthians 11:13–15

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Nephi 9:9

9 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; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

— The Book of Mormon

Elder Orson Pratt

The devil can adapt himself to the belief of any person. ... If he could get you to swallow down one or two great lies that would effect your destruction ... he would not mind how many truths you might believe. He would be willing that you should believe a great many things absolutely true if he could only deceive you and lead you astray.

— Orson Pratt, "Revelations and Manifestations of God and of Wicked Spirits," 19 December 1869, Journal of Discourses 13:72–73

"All Is Well in Zion" — Flattery and False Security

Author's Commentary

Not everyone can be moved to open rebellion. Some he stirs to anger; others he quiets to sleep, or persuades that there is no danger at all.

2 Nephi 28:19–23

19 For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger, and perish;

20 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

21 And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

22 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.

23 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.

— The Book of Mormon



1 Thessalonians 5:2–6

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“When I Show Them the Money of This World” — The Lure of the World

Author’s Commentary

The adversary’s most practical tools are the good things of the earth turned from their purpose: wealth, beauty, fine clothing, food and drink.

3 Nephi 6:15–16

15 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.

16 And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity; therefore they had enjoyed peace but a few years.

— *The Book of Mormon*

1 John 2:15–17

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

“If Thou Be the Son of God” — The Temptations in the Wilderness

Author’s Commentary

When the adversary came to the Savior Himself, he used the same three doors: appetite, display, and power. Each was answered with the word of God.

Matthew 4:1–11

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down

and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Elder Neal A. Maxwell

If we entertain temptations, soon they begin entertaining us! Turning these unwanted lodgers away at the doorstep of the mind is one way of giving "no heed."

— Neal A. Maxwell, "Overcome ... Even as I Also Overcame," general conference, April 1987 (Ensign, May 1987)

"Give Me the Portion That Falleth to Me" — Instant Gratification



Author's Commentary

One of the adversary's most effective offers is simply this: have it now. The reward without the labor, the harvest without the planting, the prize without the preparation. It is the same offer he made in the wilderness when he urged the Savior to turn stones into bread, and it runs directly against the way God works, which is "line upon line, precept upon precept," seed before harvest, and patience before fruit.

Esau is the scriptures' plainest example. Faint with hunger, he traded a lifelong birthright for a single meal, and afterward found no place to undo it.

Genesis 25:29–34

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Hebrews 12:16–17

16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Author's Commentary

The prodigal son's story begins with the same impatience. He did not wait for his inheritance to come in its time; he asked for it at once, and spent it just as quickly.

Luke 15:11–13

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 13:11; 20:21; 28:20

13:11 Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

20:21 An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

28:20 A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Author's Commentary

God's way is the opposite. Alma compares the word to a seed that must be planted, nourished "with great diligence, and with patience," and waited upon before it bears fruit. Nephi records that the Lord gives "line upon line," and James points to the farmer who waits for the early and the latter rain. None of these can be hurried, and none can be faked.

Alma 32:37–43

37 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.

38 But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

39 Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.

40 And thus, if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life.

41 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.

42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above

all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.

43 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

— *The Book of Mormon*



2 Nephi 28:30

30 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.

— *The Book of Mormon*



James 5:7–8

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Author's Commentary

The same contrast plays out in ordinary life. A high school student facing a hard test can study for weeks, or copy a friend's answers in a few minutes. Cheating may bring the same grade, but it brings none of the knowledge the grade was meant to measure. The next lesson builds on the one that was skipped, and one day the student sits an examination where there is no one to copy from. The grade was only ever a sign of the learning; the adversary persuades us to seize the sign and leave the substance behind.

The pattern appears in money as well. Buying now and paying later on credit, or chasing a scheme that promises to make one rich overnight, offers the reward before the work. The bill still comes, usually larger than the price, just as the proverb warns that an inheritance "gotten hastily at the beginning" is not blessed at the end.

It appears in the body, too. An athlete can train patiently for years, or reach for a shortcut that builds the look of strength without the substance, often at the cost of health and honor. A musician cannot borrow another's years of practice on the night of the performance.

The parable of the ten virgins makes the point with oil. Preparation cannot be borrowed at the last moment, because it was never a thing to be handed over; it was a life that had to be lived.

Matthew 25:1–13

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Hyrum G. Smith, Presiding Patriarch

The adversary's agencies, in their promptings, are usually of an urging, crowding, hurrying nature, while the Spirit of the Lord and his agencies are always of a quiet, sweet, peaceful and convincing character. ... The spirit of conviction, of peace and of charity ... is not in a hurry, but has time to decide, time to weigh, time to consider; does not act in haste, but in calm deliberation.

— Hyrum G. Smith, Presiding Patriarch, Conference Report, October 1931, 27

“The Father of Contention” — Anger and Division

Author’s Commentary

Where he cannot destroy by force, he divides. Contention, anger, and envy are his work, and the Savior named him as their father. James sets the two kinds of wisdom side by side.

3 Nephi 11:29–30

29 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.

30 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.

— The Book of Mormon

James 3:14–18

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"A Flaxen Cord" — Gradual Captivity



Author's Commentary

His snares tighten slowly. Nephi described the adversary leading men "by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever." Consider what a flaxen cord is. It is a single thread of flax, so soft and so lightweight that it seems to float in the air. It weighs nothing. It restrains nothing. Anyone could snap it without effort, and no one would think to fear it. It is insignificant and inconsequential.

But the cord does not stay single. It wraps itself around its captive, over and over again, each turn as light as the first and each one just as easy to dismiss. Yet with every turn the strands press against one another and draw strength from one another, until the cord is strengthened in itself and becomes a chain that binds. By the time its weight is finally felt, it can no longer be broken by the one it holds. What began as a thread has become a chain, and those who harden their hearts lose light by degrees.

2 Nephi 26:22

22 And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Alma 12:10–11

10 And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

11 And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.

— *The Book of Mormon*

2 Timothy 2:24–26

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;
26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Brigham Young

They will begin by doing some evil thing out of sight, and say, "O, it is nothing, it is a mere trifle, and the Lord is merciful, and forgiveth sin." The sins which are considered trifles lay the foundation for greater evils, and expose men to be tempted, and buffeted by Satan, and they will be overcome little by little.

— *Brigham Young, 17 April 1853, Journal of Discourses 2:121*

"Past Feeling" — The Silencing of Conscience



Author's Commentary

The flaxen cord leads somewhere. Its end is a heart that can no longer feel. Laman and Lemuel had seen an angel and heard the Lord's voice, yet Nephi told them they were "past feeling," so that they "could not feel his words." Moroni described a whole people "without principle, and past feeling," and Paul warned of those who, "being past feeling," gave themselves over to every uncleanness. This may be the adversary's quietest method: he need not argue with a conscience he has taught to sleep. Its opposite is the still small voice, and the tender heart that can still be pricked.

1 Nephi 17:45

45 Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; wherefore, he has spoken unto you like unto the voice of thunder, which did cause the earth to shake as if it were to divide asunder.

— The Book of Mormon

Moroni 9:20

20 And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites.

— The Book of Mormon

Ephesians 4:17–19

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“He Must Not Pray” — The Silencing of Prayer

Author’s Commentary

If prayer is the line that keeps the soul in contact with heaven, it is no surprise that the adversary works to cut it. Nephi is explicit: “the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.” He rarely forbids prayer outright. He suggests that we are too busy, too tired, too unworthy, or too far gone for it to matter, or that God already knows and need not hear it from us.

The opposite is just as plain. The Savior taught the Nephites to “watch and pray always” precisely because the devil desires to sift us as wheat, and He taught His disciples in Gethsemane that prayer is the defense against entering into temptation. Where the adversary says “do not pray,” the Lord says “pray always, and not faint.”

2 Nephi 32:8–9

8 And now, my beloved brethren, I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts; and it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing. For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.

9 But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

— The Book of Mormon

3 Nephi 18:15–18

15 Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

16 And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you.

17 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto his disciples, he turned again unto the multitude and said unto them:

18 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 34:38–39

38 That ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you.

39 Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing.

— The Book of Mormon

Matthew 26:40–41

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Luke 18:1

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

James 4:7–8

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“The Accuser of Our Brethren” — Accusation

Author’s Commentary

Having led men into sin, he turns to accuse them. The same voice that entices before the fall condemns after it.

Zechariah 3:1–2

1 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Revelation 12:7–12

7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God

day and night.

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"No More Worthy to Be Called Thy Son" — The Feeling of Being Unworthy

Author's Commentary

The accuser does not stop at condemning sin; he turns it into a verdict on the sinner. His whisper is that we have lost our place in the Father's house. The prodigal son rehearsed that very speech, but the father ran to meet him before it was finished. Nephi felt the same weight, and answered it by refusing to give the enemy any more room in his heart.

Luke 15:17–24

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck,

and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



2 Nephi 4:17–19

17 Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

18 I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.

19 And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

— The Book of Mormon



2 Nephi 4:26–30

26 O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

27 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?

28 Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

29 Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

30 Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

— The Book of Mormon



Romans 8:33–39

33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“My Grace Is Sufficient” — The Feeling of Not Being Good Enough



Author’s Commentary

A second whisper follows the first: that we will never be enough, that our weakness disqualifies us. The scriptures answer that weakness is not the enemy’s proof but the Lord’s invitation. It is given that we may be humble, and His grace is sufficient for it.



Ether 12:26–27

26 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

27 And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

— The Book of Mormon



2 Corinthians 12:7–10

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Moroni 10:32–33

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and 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; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

— The Book of Mormon

“Curse God, and Die” — The Notion That We May as Well Give Up

Author’s Commentary

When pride and flattery fail, the adversary turns to weariness. Job’s trials came from his hand, and the counsel that followed was simply to give up. Mormon saw the same spirit overtake the Nephites: their sorrow was “not unto repentance,” and instead of coming to Jesus with broken hearts they “did curse God, and wish to die.” Moroni names despair as the fruit of iniquity; Paul and Nephi answer with the patience that does not faint and the hope that presses forward.

Job 2:7–10

7 So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

8 And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.

9 Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.

10 But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mormon 2:12–15

12 And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would again become a righteous people.

13 But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.

14 And they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but they did curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives.

15 And it came to pass that my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land. And thus three hundred and forty and four years had passed away.

— The Book of Mormon

Moroni 10:22

22 And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity.

— The Book of Mormon

Galatians 6:9

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

2 Nephi 31:20

20 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.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"Racked with Eternal Torment" — The Notion That There Is No Forgiveness and No Way Out

Author's Commentary

His last lie to the sinner is that the door has closed. Alma knew that torment, and found it broken the moment he remembered Jesus Christ. Isaiah and the Lord's words to Alma's father promise forgiveness as often as there is repentance.

Alma 36:12–21

12 But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

13 Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

14 Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

15 Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

16 And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

17 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

18 Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: 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.

19 And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

20 And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

21 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.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Isaiah 1:16–18

16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mosiah 26:29–30

29 Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also.

30 Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.

— The Book of Mormon

“Miserable Like unto Himself” — The End He Seeks

Author’s Commentary

In the end every method serves one purpose. He does not seek to share a kingdom, but his misery; he “persuadeth no man to do good.” Here the opposition becomes plain, for that which is of God “inviteth and enticeth to do good continually.” And the Lord will not leave Adam in the wolf’s mouth.

2 Nephi 2:27

27 Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. 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; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Moroni 7:12–17

12 Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.

13 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

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

devil.

15 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.

16 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.

17 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.

— *The Book of Mormon*

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

IV. The Power of Evil Displayed — and Its Limits



Author's Commentary

The scriptures do not treat the adversary as a figure of speech. They record real displays of his power: counterfeit miracles, bodies bound and afflicted, attempted curses, and open claims to be greater than God. Yet one pattern runs through every account. His power is permitted and bounded, and each time it is displayed, a greater power answers it: Aaron's rod swallows the magicians' rods, the Savior commands the unclean spirit, Moses casts Satan out, and Balaam cannot curse whom God has blessed.

In this chapter the opposition is not only between good and evil, but between two kinds of power: one that imitates, binds, and destroys, and one that creates, looses, and heals.

"This Is the Finger of God" — Counterfeit Miracles



Author's Commentary

The adversary's first display of power is imitation. Pharaoh's magicians matched Aaron's signs until they could not, and then confessed, "This is the finger of God." Simon the sorcerer so amazed Samaria that the people called him "the great power of God." The Savior and Paul both warned that the last days would bring "signs and lying wonders." The Book of Mormon records a time when "the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land," and latter-day revelation describes the devil appearing "as an angel of light" and gives a way to detect him.



EXODUS 7:10–12; 7:20–22; 8:6–7; 8:16–19

7:10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

7:11 Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.

7:12 For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

7:20 And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.

7:21 And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

7:22 And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.

8:6 And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt.

8:7 And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

8:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

8:17 And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

8:18 And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast.

8:19 Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Acts 8:9–13

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Acts 16:16–18

16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Matthew 24:24

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Revelation 13:13–14

13:13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

13:14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Mormon 1:18–19

18 And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest

the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again.

19 And it came to pass that there were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite.

— The Book of Mormon

D&C 128:20

20 And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed. A voice of the Lord in the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county, declaring the three witnesses to bear record of the book! The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light! The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times!

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 129:4–8

4 When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you.

5 If he be an angel he will do so, and you will feel his hand.

6 If he be the spirit of a just man made perfect he will come in his glory; for that is the only way he can appear—

7 Ask him to shake hands with you, but he will not move, because it is

contrary to the order of heaven for a just man to deceive; but he will still deliver his message.

8 If it be the devil as an angel of light, when you ask him to shake hands he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



President Joseph F. Smith

The devil himself can appear like an angel of light. False prophets and false teachers have arisen in the world. There is perhaps no gift of the Spirit of God more easily imitated by the devil than the gift of tongues.

— *Joseph F. Smith, Conference Report, April 1900, 41; Gospel Doctrine*

"Whom Satan Hath Bound" — Affliction of the Body



Author's Commentary

Scripture also records the adversary afflicting the body. With God's permission Satan struck Job "with sore boils." Jesus healed a woman bowed together for eighteen years, "whom Satan hath bound," and cast out spirits that made men mute and blind, that threw a boy into the fire and the water, and that gave a man such strength that no chains could hold him. An evil spirit troubled King Saul. When Joseph Smith first knelt to pray, he was seized by a power that bound his tongue and brought thick darkness, until a pillar of light delivered him.

In every case the affliction is answered by a greater power. Peter summarized the Savior's ministry as "healing all that were oppressed of the devil," and King Benjamin prophesied that the Lord would "cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men."

Job 1:12; 2:6–7

1:12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

2:6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

2:7 So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Luke 13:11–16

11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

13 And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

14 And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Matthew 12:22

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Mark 5:2–5

2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mark 9:17–27

17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;

18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.

20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.

22 And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.

26 And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.

27 But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Samuel 16:14–16; 16:23

16:14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from

the LORD troubled him.

16:15 And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee.

16:16 Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.

16:23 And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Joseph Smith—History 1:15–17

15 After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

16 But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

17 It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!

— The Pearl of Great Price



Acts 10:38

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Mosiah 3:5–6

5 For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty 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.

6 And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

— The Book of Mormon

3 Nephi 7:19

19 And in the name of Jesus did he cast out devils and unclean spirits; and even his brother did he raise from the dead, after he had been stoned and suffered death by the people.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"How Shall I Curse, Whom God Hath Not Cursed?" — Curses

Author's Commentary

The clearest limit on the power to curse is the story of Balaam. Balak, king of Moab, hired the prophet to curse Israel, believing that "he whom thou cursest is cursed." Three times Balaam opened his mouth, and three times the curse became a blessing. "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?" Moses later reminded Israel that the Lord "turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee."

The Book of Mormon shows the other side. When the Nephites turned to wickedness, their treasures became "slippery," so that they could not keep them. That curse did not come from the adversary but from the Lord, as the fruit of their own choices. A curse may come by righteous judgment; it cannot be laid by evil upon those whom God protects.

Numbers 22:5–6; 22:12; 23:7–8; 23:20

22:5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him,

saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

22:6 Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.

22:12 And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

23:7 And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.

23:8 How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?

23:20 Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Deuteronomy 23:5

5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Helaman 13:34–36

34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle.

35 Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land.

36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"Shewing Himself That He Is God" — Claiming to Be Greater Than God

Author's Commentary

The adversary's boldest display is the claim to divinity itself. In Chapter II we saw him demand that Moses worship him as the Only Begotten, and rant until the earth shook. He offered the Savior all the kingdoms of the world for a single act of worship. Daniel saw a power that "magnified himself even to the prince of the host," Paul foresaw one who would sit "in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God," and John heard the world cry, "Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?"

Each claim ends the same way. The Savior answered, "Get thee hence, Satan," and the devil left him. Paul adds that the man of sin will be consumed "with the spirit of his mouth, and ... the brightness of his coming."

Matthew 4:8–11

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Daniel 8:9–12

9 And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.

10 And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them.

11 Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down.

12 And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Thessalonians 2:3–10

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Revelation 13:4

4 And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Thou Shalt Not Tempt the Lord Thy God" — Provoking the Adversary



Author's Commentary

When Satan set the Savior on the pinnacle of the temple and urged Him to throw Himself down, he quoted scripture to prove that the angels would catch Him. Jesus answered with Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." To tempt God is to demand that He prove Himself on our terms. Faith trusts Him without staging a test.

Can a person tempt the devil? Scripture never uses that phrase, but it describes three ways of inviting his power. The first is to seek him out. The

law forbade divination, necromancy, and familiar spirits, and Saul, who consulted the witch of Endor rather than the Lord, lost his kingdom and his life. The second is to challenge him without authority. The seven sons of Sceva tried to use the name of Jesus as a formula, and the spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" and overpowered them. By contrast, even Michael the archangel would not rail against the devil, but said only, "The Lord rebuke thee." The third is to demand signs: "an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign," and "he that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation." Korihor demanded a sign, received one, and confessed that the devil had deceived him.

The scriptures also suggest when the adversary's power shows itself most openly: when he is invited, when he is presumptuously provoked, and when his hold is being broken. Satan raged as Moses cast him out; darkness fell on Joseph Smith the moment he began to pray; the spirit "cried, and rent him sore" as it left the boy. The first two are warnings. The last is a comfort, for opposition often grows strongest just before it is overcome. The faithful neither test God nor provoke the devil. They submit to God and resist the adversary, and "he will flee from you."

Deuteronomy 6:16

16 Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 4:5–7

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Deuteronomy 18:10–12

10 There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch,

11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

12 For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



1 Chronicles 10:13–14

13 So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it;

14 And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Acts 19:13–16

13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Jude 1:9

9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Peter 2:10–11

10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

11 Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Matthew 12:38–39

38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

D&C 63:7–12

7 And he that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation.

8 Verily, I say unto you, there are those among you who seek signs, and there have been such even from the beginning;

9 But, behold, faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe.

10 Yea, signs come by faith, not by the will of men, nor as they please, but by the will of God.

11 Yea, signs come by faith, unto mighty works, for without faith no man pleaseth God; and with whom God is angry he is not well pleased; wherefore, unto such he showeth no signs, only in wrath unto their condemnation.

12 Wherefore, I, the Lord, am not pleased with those among you who have sought after signs and wonders for faith, and not for the good of men unto my glory.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



D&C 46:7

7 But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men; for some are of men, and others of devils.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



Alma 30:48–53

48 Now Korihor said unto him: I do not deny the existence of a God, but I do not believe that there is a God; and I say also, that ye do not know that there is a God; and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe.

49 Now Alma said unto him: This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance.

50 Now when Alma had said these words, Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma.

51 And now when the chief judge saw this, he put forth his hand and wrote unto Korihor, saying: Art thou convinced of the power of God? In whom did

ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign? Would ye that he should afflict others, to show unto thee a sign? Behold, he has showed unto you a sign; and now will ye dispute more?

52 And Korihor put forth his hand and wrote, saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak; and I know that nothing save it were the power of God could bring this upon me; yea, and I always knew that there was a God.

53 But behold, the devil hath deceived me; for he appeared unto me in the form of an angel, and said unto me: Go and reclaim this people, for they have all gone astray after an unknown God. And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth, even until I have brought this great curse upon me.

— The Book of Mormon



Elder James E. Faust

It is not good practice to become intrigued by Satan and his mysteries. No good can come from getting close to evil. Like playing with fire, it is too easy to get burned. … The only safe course is to keep well distanced from him and any of his wicked activities or nefarious practices.

— James E. Faust, "The Great Imitator," general conference, October 1987 (Ensign, November 1987)

“None Else Save God” — What the Adversary Cannot Know and Cannot Do

Author’s Commentary

For all his power, the adversary is bounded. He cannot read the heart: the Lord told Oliver Cowdery that none but God knows the thoughts and intents of the heart, and Elder Francis M. Gibbons taught that while Satan can convey thoughts, he learns whether they have taken root only when they show in words or in actions. He cannot compel: the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the devil has no power over us except as we permit him.

Nor can he tempt us beyond what we are able to bear. Paul promised that God is faithful and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with every temptation make a way to escape. Alma taught the same promise and joined it to watchfulness and prayer. The Lord who gave it is the One who “knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted.” No temptation, then, can take away our power to choose. The adversary may suggest, but the deciding is always ours.

D&C 6:16

16 Yea, I tell thee, that thou mayest know that there is none else save God that knowest thy thoughts and the intents of thy heart.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Elder Francis M. Gibbons

But while Satan can convey thoughts, he does not know whether these thoughts have taken root unless they are reflected either in words or in actions.

— Francis M. Gibbons, "The Dual Aspects of Prayer," general conference, October 1991 (Ensign, November 1991)

The Prophet Joseph Smith

All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God the Devil takes power.

— Joseph Smith, 5 January 1841, in The Words of Joseph Smith, 60

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 13:28

28 But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his

holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;

— *The Book of Mormon*



D&C 62:1

1 Behold, and hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



HELAMAN 5:12

12 And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

— *The Book of Mormon*

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

V. Try the Spirits — Discerning Good from Evil

Author's Commentary

Every display of power in the previous chapter shares one aim: to be mistaken for the real thing. The Apostle John's answer was not to believe every spirit, but to try them. The Prophet Joseph Smith observed that people in every age had been unable to tell one spirit from another, because the power to detect false spirits is an intelligence that God alone can impart.

This chapter gathers what the scriptures and latter-day prophets teach about that gift: the measure given to every person by the Spirit of Christ, the test of whether a thing edifies, the safeguard of asking the Father, and the harmony of true revelation with itself.

"Believe Not Every Spirit" — The Command to Discern

1 John 4:1

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Prophet Joseph Smith — "Try the Spirits"

It is evident from the apostle's writings that many false spirits existed in their day … and that it needed intelligence which God alone could impart to detect

false spirits, and to prove what spirits were of God.

The Egyptians were not able to discover the difference between the miracles of Moses and those of the magicians until they came to be tested together. ...

One great evil is that men are ignorant of the nature of spirits; their power, laws, government, intelligence, &c., and imagine that when there is any thing like power, revelation, or vision manifested that it must be of God.

— Joseph Smith, "Try the Spirits," Times and Seasons 3 (1 April 1842): 743–44



D&C 46:7–8

7 But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men; for some are of men, and others of devils.

8 Wherefore, beware lest ye are deceived; and that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given;

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Elder John A. Widtsoe

True revelations come from the Lord. The evil one, ever vigilant in his work of destruction, tries to simulate with an evil purpose every gift of God. Therefore, he presents false doctrines of man-made commandments through the suggestions of evil spirits or evil-minded men. To protect the Saints, and to maintain truth within the Church, the power of discerning between truth and error is given to the officers of the Church.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 14, "What Shall Be Done with Personal Spiritual Manifestations?"

"That He May Know Good from Evil" — The Measure God Has Given

Author's Commentary

Mormon taught that the Spirit of Christ is given to every person, and he gave a plain test: whatever invites to do good and to believe in Christ is of God; whatever persuades to do evil and to deny Him is of the devil. The Lord added a second test in this dispensation: that which does not edify is not of God.

Moroni 7:16–17

16 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.

17 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.

— *The Book of Mormon*



D&C 50:23–24

23 And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.

24 That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

"Ask of the Father" — When a Spirit Is Not Understood



Author's Commentary

When a spirit is manifested that is not understood, the Lord's instruction is to ask the Father in the name of Jesus. The First Presidency later added a safeguard of its own: the Holy Ghost does not contradict its own revealings, and truth is always harmonious with itself.

Is it so hard to imagine that these dark spirits are real? That they really influence mankind? Make no mistake, they are all around us. They are here to deceive us. They wish to take you with them to Hell, and that is what they spend their entire time doing. Take a moment and read this chapter in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 129, all nine verses.

D&C 50:31–32

31 Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that if you behold a spirit manifested that you cannot understand, and you receive not that spirit, ye shall ask of the Father in the name of Jesus; and if he give not unto you that spirit, then you may know that it is not of God.

32 And it shall be given unto you, power over that spirit; and you shall proclaim against that spirit with a loud voice that it is not of God—

— The Doctrine and Covenants

The First Presidency, 1913

Be not led by any spirit or influence that discredits established authority and contradicts true scientific principles and discoveries, or leads away from the direct revelations of God for the government of the Church. The Holy Ghost does not contradict its own revealings. Truth is always harmonious with itself. Piety is often the cloak of error.

— Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose, "A Warning Voice," Improvement Era, September 1913, 1148–49

Elder John A. Widtsoe

Deceit is the mark of evil. Even if the evil messenger does not appear in person, the test is the same. Compare the offering with the principles of truth. The sure sign of Satan will then appear.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 19, "What Is an Angel?"

“Quick to Observe” — The Gift of Discernment

Author’s Commentary

Elder David A. Bednar taught that discernment works in four directions: it helps us detect hidden error and evil in others and, more importantly, in ourselves; and it helps us find the good concealed in others and in ourselves. Discernment, in this sense, is not suspicion. It is clear sight, and its first object is our own heart.

Elder David A. Bednar

Discernment is so much more than recognizing right from wrong. … Discerning is seeing with spiritual eyes and feeling with the heart—seeing and feeling the falsehood of an idea or the goodness in another person. …

First, as we “read under the surface,” discernment helps us detect hidden error and evil in others. Second, and more important, it helps us detect hidden errors and evil in ourselves.

— David A. Bednar, “Quick to Observe,” Ensign, December 2006

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

VI. The Stolen Tabernacle — Priesthood Power over Evil



Author's Commentary

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the greatness of Lucifer's punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle, and that the devil, lacking a body of his own, seeks to steal one—though a stolen tabernacle is always liable to be reclaimed. The scriptures record the Savior casting out unclean spirits and giving His servants power to do the same in His name.

This chapter treats that power soberly. It is not a subject for curiosity, and it is not the explanation for every affliction. Many trials of body and mind are simply part of mortality, and faith and priesthood blessings go hand in hand with the care of skilled physicians and counselors. In serious or lasting cases, the counsel of one's bishop and priesthood leaders is a safeguard; the next chapter describes the simple steps any believer may take. What the chapter affirms is the principle: the adversary's hold is borrowed, never owned, and it yields to the name of Jesus Christ.

"Take Possession of Their House" — Why Evil Spirits Seek Bodies



Author's Commentary

Alma described the spirits of the wicked as those who "chose evil works rather than good," so that "the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house." The language is of an entry permitted, not forced. As the Prophet taught, the devil has no power over us except as we permit him.

Alma 40:13

13 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.

— The Book of Mormon

"In My Name Shall They Cast Out Devils" — The Authority of Christ

Author's Commentary

The first miracle of the restored Church was the deliverance of Newel Knight in 1830. The Prophet's own account is notable for what it does not contain: no ritual, no struggle of words, only a rebuke given in the name of Jesus Christ.

Mark 16:17

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Prophet Joseph Smith — Newel Knight, 1830

I went and found him suffering very much in his mind, and his body acted upon in a very strange manner; his visage and limbs distorted and twisted in every shape and appearance possible to imagine; and finally he was caught up off the floor of the apartment, and tossed about most fearfully. …

I succeeded in getting hold of him by the hand, when almost immediately he spoke to me, and with great earnestness requested me to cast the devil out of him, saying that he knew he was in him, and that he also knew that I could cast him out. I replied, "If you know that I can, it shall be done," and then almost unconsciously I rebuked the devil, and commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from him; when immediately Newel spoke out and said that he saw the devil leave him and vanish from his sight.

This was the first miracle which was done in the Church, or by any member of it; and it was done, not by man, nor by the power of man, but it was done by God, and by the power of godliness.

— Joseph Smith, History of the Church 1:82–83; see also Joseph Smith, History, ca. June 1839–ca. 1841 [Draft 2], 40 (Joseph Smith Papers)

"This Kind Goeth Not Out but by Prayer and Fasting" — Worthiness and Power

Author's Commentary

When the disciples could not cast out a spirit, the Savior pointed them to prayer and fasting. Brigham Young taught the same lesson: priesthood authority carries the right to rebuke evil powers, but the power to do so depends on living so as to have power with God.

Mark 9:28–29

28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?

29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Brigham Young

We have been baptized by men having the authority of the holy Priesthood of the Son of God, and consequently we have power over him … and all who possess the power of the Priesthood have the power and right to rebuke those evil spirits. When we rebuke those evil powers, and they obey not, it is because we do not live so as to have the power with God, which it is our privilege to have.

— Brigham Young, 29 December 1867, Journal of Discourses 12:128

“Swept and Garnished” — Keeping the House

Author’s Commentary

The Savior’s parable is a warning about emptiness. A house that is swept and garnished but left unoccupied invites a worse return. Deliverance is not complete until the house is filled—with prayer, with scripture, with covenants kept, and with the Holy Ghost.

Luke 11:24–26

24 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.

25 And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.

26 Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

VII. Clearing Your Space — Prayer, Priesthood, and Peace

Author's Commentary

The previous chapter considered the adversary's attempts to take possession of what is not his. This chapter is simpler and more practical. It describes, in plain terms, how a believer may clear away the influence of darkness from himself and from his home, and how the Lord has provided greater help for greater need.

Begin with this understanding: evil is around us always—everywhere, every minute. The adversary and the spirits who followed him were cast out into the earth, and they have not left it. They do not keep office hours, and there is no place on earth, however ordinary or however sacred, where their influence cannot be felt. Paul wrote that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against "the rulers of the darkness of this world." That is why the Lord's counsel is not to pray occasionally, but to pray always.

The pattern moves in steps. For the ordinary oppression of darkness—the heaviness, fear, or unrest that anyone may feel—a disciple may command the darkness to leave in the name of Jesus Christ, and ask the Father to send His angels to protect and comfort. For more serious affliction, the laying on of hands in a priesthood blessing brings the power of God directly to bear. And for the most serious cases, the Lord has given the anointing with consecrated oil. None of these replaces the care of a physician or counselor when it is needed, and in serious or lasting cases the counsel of one's bishop is a safeguard. But none of them is ever out of reach.

A word about what follows. The scriptures and the words of Church leaders quoted in this chapter speak for themselves. Much of the practical counsel in these commentary blocks, however—the raised arm, the clearing of one's space, how often to do it, and the way these steps build on one another—is my own opinion and teaching, drawn from my experience and study. I offer it as such, not as an official practice of the Church.

D&C 10:5

5 Pray always, that you may come off conqueror; yea, that you may conquer Satan, and that you may escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

"In the Name of the Only Begotten, Depart Hence" — Commanding Darkness to Leave

Author's Commentary

When Satan came to Moses, Moses did not argue with him. He called upon God, received strength, and commanded him to depart in the name of the Only Begotten. The Savior did the same in the wilderness: "Get thee hence, Satan." President Spencer W. Kimball observed that the Lord did not rationalize; He positively and promptly closed the discussion.

Raising the right arm to the square and commanding darkness to leave in the name of Jesus Christ is an effective way of "clearing your space"—your mind, your room, your home. The raised arm is the same sign we use in covenant and in sustaining; it declares whose side we are on. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. This is not a formal priesthood ordinance, and it requires no special words. It is an act of faith, open to every disciple who has taken the name of Christ, and it may be used anytime and anywhere. James promised that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.

Moses 1:21

21 And now Satan began to tremble, and the earth shook; and Moses received strength, and called upon God, saying: In the name of the Only Begotten, depart hence, Satan.

— The Pearl of Great Price

President Spencer W. Kimball

Christ did not so rationalize. He positively and promptly closed the discussion, and commanded: "Get thee hence, Satan."

— Spencer W. Kimball, The Miracle of Forgiveness, 215–17; Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball (2006), chapter 10

James 4:7

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 35:9

9 And whoso shall ask it in my name in faith, they shall cast out devils; they shall heal the sick; they shall cause the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Exodus 17:11–12

11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12 But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"He Shall Bruise Thy Head" — The Power to Crush the Serpent

Author's Commentary

The first promise of the gospel was given in the Garden, before Adam and Eve were sent out into the lone and dreary world. The Lord told the serpent that the seed of the woman would bruise his head—a crushing blow—while the serpent could only bruise the heel. The head is the seat of the serpent's power; the heel is a wound that heals. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who through His death and Resurrection destroyed the works of the devil.

And the promise did not end with Him. Paul told the Saints that the God of peace would bruise Satan under their feet. When we clear our space in the name of Jesus Christ, we are not acting in our own strength. We are standing **on the promise** made in the Garden: that the power to crush the serpent's head belongs to Christ, and through Him, to those who are His.

Genesis 3:15

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Moses 4:21

21 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; and he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

— The Pearl of Great Price

Romans 16:20

20 And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

PSALMS 91:13

13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Thine Angels Have Charge over Them" — Inviting the Angels of Light

AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY

Once the darkness has been sent away, the space should not be left empty. The Savior warned that a house swept and garnished but left unoccupied invites a worse return. Having cleared your space, ask your Father in Heaven, in the name of Jesus Christ, to send His angels of light to protect and comfort you and your family. The Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer asked exactly this—that the Lord's angels would have charge over His servants—and the ancient patriarchs taught that those who do good will find the angels cleaving to them.

This is an appropriate way to obtain peace anytime, anywhere, no matter what. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland testified, God never leaves us alone.

D&C 109:22

22 And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them;

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

God never leaves us alone, never leaves us unaided in the challenges that we face.

— Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Ministry of Angels," general conference, October 2008

D&C 6:34–36

34 Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail.

35 Behold, I do not condemn you; go your ways and sin no more; perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you.

36 Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

“Lay Their Hands upon Them in My Name” — The Priesthood Blessing

Author’s Commentary

When the influence of darkness is heavier—when prayer alone does not seem to lift it, or when a family member is struggling and asks for help—a priesthood blessing given by the laying on of hands brings the power of God directly to the one in need. The Lord named the casting out of devils among the signs that follow those who believe and among the few miracles His servants are to seek. A father may bless his children, and any worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holder may give a blessing of comfort to those who request one.

D&C 42:44

44 And the elders of the church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for and lay their hands upon them in my name; and if they die they shall die unto me, and if they live they shall live unto me.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

D&C 84:66–67

66 In my name they shall do many wonderful works;

67 In my name they shall cast out devils;

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

D&C 24:13

13 Require not miracles, except I shall command you, except casting out devils, healing the sick, and against poisonous serpents, and against deadly poisons;

— The Doctrine and Covenants

General Handbook — Blessings

Usually, administering to the sick should be done at the request of the person receiving the blessing or at the request of others who are concerned. … Only worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holders may administer to the sick or afflicted.

Melchizedek Priesthood holders may give blessings of comfort and counsel to family members and to others who request them.

— General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 18.13–18.14

“Anointing Him with Oil in the Name of the Lord” — The Most Serious Cases

Author’s Commentary

For the most serious cases, the Lord has provided the anointing with consecrated oil, followed by the sealing of the anointing and a blessing. The Church reserves this ordinance for the sick and the afflicted, and the most severe spiritual affliction is affliction indeed. Mark records that the Twelve, sent out two by two, “cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.” James instructed that the elders be called to pray over the afflicted, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

Mark 6:12–13

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

13 And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

James 5:14–15

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

General Handbook — Consecrated Oil

Anointing with oil is done by one Melchizedek Priesthood holder. He puts a drop of consecrated oil on the person's head. … To seal the anointing, one or more Melchizedek Priesthood holders place their hands lightly on the person's head.

Members should not consume consecrated oil or apply it on afflicted parts of the body.

— General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 18.12–18.13

"A Refuge from the Storm" — The Temple, the Home, and Your Own Space

Author's Commentary

The temple is our shelter from evil influence. In the dedication of the first temple of this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith asked that no weapon formed against the Lord's people would prosper and that no combination of wickedness would prevail over those upon whom His name is put in His house. The Lord promised that where His house is kept undefiled, His glory and His presence will rest upon it. President Russell M. Nelson has taught that the safest place to be spiritually is living inside our temple covenants.

What the temple is in the fullest sense, our homes—and even our own personal space—can become in measure. By practicing the steps in this chapter—sending darkness away in the name of Jesus Christ, inviting the angels of the Lord to attend, calling on the priesthood when it is needed, and not suffering any unclean thing to come in—we can make our home, or a single room, a holy place: a house of prayer, a house of faith, a house of God. We should dedicate our homes to God as a permanent place of refuge. The Lord counseled His disciples to stand in holy places, and President Nelson has promised that as we make our homes centers of gospel learning, the influence of the adversary in our lives and in our homes will decrease.



D&C 87:8

8 Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, saith the Lord. Amen.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

"Stand in Holy Places" — Words and music by Julie Acor Clegg (© 2007, 2013).

The sheet music is available from the Church's music library for home and church use.

D&C 109:24–26

24 We ask thee, Holy Father, to establish the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house, to all generations and for eternity;

25 That no weapon formed against them shall prosper; that he who diggeth a pit for them shall fall into the same himself;

26 That no combination of wickedness shall have power to rise up and prevail over thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house;

— The Doctrine and Covenants

President Russell M. Nelson

Whenever any kind of upheaval occurs in your life, the safest place to be spiritually is living inside your temple covenants! … As you are true to your covenants made in the temple, you will be strengthened by His power.

— Russell M. Nelson, "The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation," general conference, October 2021

D&C 97:15–17

15 And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it;

16 Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God.

17 But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Isaiah 4:5–6

5 And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.

6 And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 115:6

6 And that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 88:119

119 Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God;

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 87:8

8 Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, saith the Lord. Amen.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

President Russell M. Nelson

I promise that as you diligently work to remodel your home into a center of gospel learning, over time your Sabbath days will truly be a delight. Your children will be excited to learn and to live the Savior's teachings, and the influence of the adversary in your life and in your home will decrease.

— Russell M. Nelson, "Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints," general conference, October 2018

“Let Him That Thinketh He Standeth Take Heed” — Why We Clear Our Space Often

Author’s Commentary

In my view, thinking that we are immune to the adversary, or strong enough to handle him on our own, is folly. Paul warned that whoever thinks he stands should take heed lest he fall, and Nephi resolved never to put his trust in the arm of flesh. We are not meant to face these forces alone. The Lord and the forces of righteousness are there to help us, and they are willing. When Moses called upon God and commanded Satan to depart in the name of the Only Begotten, the adversary began to tremble and departed. In my experience the effect is the same today: when we ask, the help is immediate.

Clearing our space is not done once and for all. As we entertain vile thoughts and indulge in sin, evil creeps back in, because in effect we have extended it a new invitation—the house swept and garnished is reoccupied, as the Savior warned, and as Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, the temptations we entertain soon begin entertaining us. Therefore, it is my teaching that we should clear our space often—daily, or at least weekly, and whenever we sense darkness returning.

At the same time, we should not become overly obsessed with this. The Lord’s own counsel is to look unto Him in every thought, and to doubt not and fear not. A disciple who keeps his covenants, prays always, and clears his space as needed can go about his life in peace, with his attention on Christ and on the good he can do.

1 Corinthians 10:12

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Nephi 4:34

34 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; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

— The Book of Mormon

"Peace I Leave with You" — Peace Anytime, Anywhere

Author's Commentary

The adversary's influence is real, but it is never greater than the Lord's. The simplest of these steps—a lifted arm, a command in the name of Jesus Christ, a prayer for angels to attend—can be done in a moment, in any place, **even silently**, by anyone who believes. The greater helps of the priesthood stand ready behind them. No one who follows this pattern needs to live in fear.

John 14:27

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 19:23

23 Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Psalms 4:8

8 I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

VIII. Blaming God

Author's Commentary

When tragedy strikes, one of the first questions the heart asks is, "Why did God do this to me?" It is an understandable question, and the scriptures never mock it. But they answer it plainly: God is not the author of confusion, nor the prescriber of pain. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights.

This chapter looks at why we are tempted to blame God, what we chose before we came here, how the adversary turns our sorrows against the very One who can heal them, and how sore trials, borne with God rather than without Him, become part of our good.

"Not the Author of Confusion" — What God Is and Is Not

Author's Commentary

The scriptures take care to separate God from the evils that befall us. James says that God tempts no man, and that every good gift comes from Him. Jeremiah's Lamentations, written from the ruins of Jerusalem, still insist that the Lord "doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Nephi testifies that God "doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world."

The Savior Himself refused the easy explanation. When men asked whether the Galileans slain by Pilate, or the eighteen crushed by the tower of Siloam, were worse sinners than others, He answered, "I tell you, Nay." When His disciples asked who had sinned, that a man was born blind, He answered, "Neither." Accidents, disease, and loss are part of a fallen world, not a verdict from heaven.

James 1:13–17

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Corinthians 14:33

33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Lamentations 3:31–33

31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Nephi 26:24

24 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.

— The Book of Mormon

Luke 13:1–5

1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things?

3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

John 9:1–3

1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



The Prophet Joseph Smith

Satan was generally blamed for the evils which we did, but if he was the cause of all our wickedness, men could not be condemned. The devil cannot compel mankind to evil, all was voluntary. ... God would not exert any compulsory means and the Devil could not.

— Joseph Smith, discourse of 16 May 1841, Times and Seasons 2 (1 June 1841): 429–30; The Words of Joseph Smith, 72



Elder John A. Widtsoe

Too many try to place the blame for their evil doing on the devil, when the fault lies within themselves. ... That leads to the principle that the devil is helpless, cannot lead men into error, unless his victims are willing. ... If one pursues truth always, seeks for help from the spirit of God, he can bid the devil get behind him knowing that the command must be heeded.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 54, "Is There a Personal Devil?"

“We Shouted for Joy” — The Life We Chose

Author’s Commentary

In the council before the creation, we listened as the plan of salvation was presented. Abraham records its purpose in the Lord’s own words: “We will go down, for there is space there, … and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” It must have sounded frightening: an imperfect world, where there would be sin and hardship, accidents and disease, pain and death. We would be separated from God’s presence and would forget where we came from.

Yet we chose to come, knowing that these hardships would touch every one of us. Job was reminded that at the foundations of the earth “all the sons of God shouted for joy.” Lehi explains why the plan required opposition, and why it was worth it: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.” Adam and Eve, looking back on their own fall, did not blame God. They blessed Him, because through it they had come to know “good and evil, and the joy of our redemption.”

2 Nephi 2:22–25

22 And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

23 And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.

24 But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

25 Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Moses 5:10–11

10 And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.

11 And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*

Elder John A. Widtsoe

Since the law of free agency is ever uppermost in the plan of salvation, the Lord who gave the law must respect it, even though He weep at the errors of His children. It would be a violation of His own plan, should He step in, and, by His undoubted power, stop warfare among the children of men. He would then have to interfere in all contention, and ultimately reduce His children to the status of the unintelligent serfdom proposed by Lucifer in the great council in the heavens.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 56, "Why Does the Lord Permit War?"

"His Heart Fretteth Against the Lord" — Examples of Blaming God

Author's Commentary

The scriptures are honest about how often God's people have blamed Him. The proverb names the pattern exactly: "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord." We ruin our own way, and then fret against God for it.

Israel murmured in the wilderness that they would rather have died in Egypt, and at the border of the promised land wanted to choose a captain and go back. When Nephi's bow broke and the family faced starvation, even faithful Lehi "began to murmur against the Lord his God," while Nephi made a new bow and asked his father where to seek food, and Lehi was humbled. Naomi, bereaved of husband and sons, asked to be called Mara, "bitter," for "the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me"; yet her story ended in a grandson in the line of David. In besieged and starving Samaria, the word came to Elisha, "This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" The answer came the very next day.

Job stands as the opposite. Having lost his children and his wealth in a single day, he fell to the ground and worshipped: “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.”



Proverbs 19:3

3 The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Exodus 16:2–3

16:2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

16:3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Numbers 14:1–4

1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron:

and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



1 Nephi 16:18–25

18 And it came to pass that as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow, which was made of fine steel; and after I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food.

19 And it came to pass that we did return without food to our families, and being much fatigued, because of their journeying, they did suffer much for the want of food.

20 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness; and also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God; yea, and they were all exceedingly sorrowful, even that they did murmur against the Lord.

21 Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow, and their bows having lost their springs, it began to be exceedingly difficult, yea, insomuch that we could obtain no food.

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did speak much unto my brethren, because they had hardened their hearts again, even unto complaining against the Lord their God.

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones. And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food?

24 And it came to pass that he did inquire of the Lord, for they had humbled themselves because of my words; for I did say many things unto them in the energy of my soul.

25 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father; and he was truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord, insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow.

— The Book of Mormon



Ruth 1:20–21

20 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



2 Kings 6:33

33 And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Job 1:20–22

20 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,

21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"He Will Curse Thee to Thy Face" — The Adversary's Aim

Author's Commentary

The book of Job pulls back the curtain on why the adversary afflicts. His purpose was never merely to make Job suffer. It was to turn Job against God: "Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." That is the adversary's design in every tragedy. He cannot always cause our pain, but he is quick to interpret it, whispering that God has abandoned us, that God is unfair, that God caused it.

Nephi warned that in the last days the devil would "stir them up to anger against that which is good." John saw men who, under the plagues of the last days, "blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds." And Mormon watched his people "curse God, and wish to die." When the adversary succeeds, the very trial that could have drawn us to God drives us away from the only One who can heal it.

Job 1:8–11; 2:3–5

1:8 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

1:9 Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

1:10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

1:11 But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

2:3 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.

2:4 And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

2:5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Nephi 28:20

20 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

— The Book of Mormon

Revelation 16:9–11

9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Walking in the Light of Your Own Fire" — Why We Walk Alone

Author's Commentary

What makes a person walk into the wilderness alone, rather than seek God's help after tragedy strikes? The scriptures suggest several reasons. One is pride: the wish to carry our own burden, to kindle our own fire and walk by its sparks, rather than trust the Lord in the dark. Another is resentment, the belief that God has already failed us, so that calling on Him feels pointless. A third is simple forgetfulness. Helaman observed that unless the Lord chastens His people they will not remember Him, and the Lord told Joseph Smith that "in the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me."

Jeremiah described the result: the people forsook "the fountain of living waters" and dug for themselves "broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Grief carried alone does not grow lighter. It only grows heavier, and the adversary is glad of it.

Isaiah 50:10–11

10 Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Helaman 12:2–3

2 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.

3 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.

— The Book of Mormon

D&C 101:7–8

7 They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.

8 In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Jeremiah 2:13

13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience" — Trials for Our Good

Author's Commentary

The scriptures do not promise a life without sore trials, but they do promise that trials borne with God become part of our good. From Liberty Jail, after months of suffering, Joseph Smith received the words: "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." Lehi told his son Jacob, born in the wilderness, that God "shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain." Paul called his afflictions "light" and "but for a moment" compared to the "eternal weight of glory" they worked out. Peter compared the trial of faith to gold refined in fire; James counted it joy because it works patience; Moroni

taught that "ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith."

Nor are we asked to bear them alone. Alma testified that the Savior took upon Himself "the pains and the sicknesses of his people," that He might know "how to succor his people according to their infirmities." When Alma's people were in bondage, the Lord did not immediately remove their burdens, but promised to ease them, "that even you cannot feel them upon your backs."



D&C 122:5–9

5 If thou art called to pass through tribulation; if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea;

6 If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling to thy garments, and shall say, My father, my father, why can′t you stay with us? O, my father, what are the men going to do with you? and if then he shall be thrust from thee by the sword, and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb;

7 And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

8 The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

9 Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.

— The Doctrine and Covenants



2 Nephi 2:2

2 Nevertheless, Jacob, my firstborn in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.

— The Book of Mormon



2 Corinthians 4:17–18

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Hebrews 12:5–11

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



JAMES 1:2–4

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Peter 1:6–7

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Ether 12:6

6 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; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 7:11–12

11 And 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.

12 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.

— The Book of Mormon

Mosiah 24:13–15

13 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

14 And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

15 And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.

— The Book of Mormon

Brigham Young

Neither you nor I would ever be prepared to be crowned in the celestial kingdom of our Father and our God, without devils in this world.

— Brigham Young, 28 June 1857, Journal of Discourses 4:373

Elder John A. Widtsoe

Our Father in heaven makes use of the evil designs of the devil. God allows His fallen son to tempt the children of men, so that they may more deliberately choose between good and evil. The Lord could banish Satan and his angels from earth, and remove temptation from men, but in His wisdom He permits His wayward bodiless children to come upon earth. Thus, despite their intentions, the followers of Satan are so used as to help accomplish the divine purpose. Whether understood by the evil one or not, in his efforts among mankind he is made an instrument to secure the very plan that he opposed in the Great Council.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 261

"Counsel with the Lord" — Calling upon Him

Author's Commentary

Here the opposition in this chapter becomes plain. The adversary uses our tragedies to persuade us to blame God; the Lord uses the same tragedies to invite us to call upon Him. Job, who lost everything and blamed nothing, received "twice as much as he had before." Alma, who had been "supported under trials and troubles of every kind," counseled his son to "cry unto God for all thy support." And the Savior's invitation stands open to every grieving heart: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Alma 36:27

27 And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 37:36–37

36 Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

37 Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

— The Book of Mormon

Isaiah 43:2

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 11:28–30

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Job 42:10–12

10 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

11 Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

12 So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

IX. Secret Combinations

Author's Commentary

Of all the adversary's works, none is described with more alarm in the Book of Mormon than the secret combination: a band of men bound together by oaths, sworn to keep one another's secrets, and organized to murder and get gain. Moroni wrote that whatever nation upholds such combinations "shall be destroyed," and that they are "built up by the devil, who is the father of all lies." The pattern appears in every book of scripture: in the Book of Moses and the Book of Mormon, in the Bible, and in the Doctrine and Covenants.

This chapter traces the secret combination from its first founder to its modern forms, and ends with its opposite: the light that brings every hidden work into the open.

"Swear unto Me by Thy Throat" — The First Secret Combination

Author's Commentary

The Book of Moses records the founding. Cain "loved Satan more than God," and Satan asked him to swear: "Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die." The oath was secret, sealed by a threat of death, and its purpose was plain. Cain said, "Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain." He killed his brother for his flocks, and "gloried in that which he had done."

Genesis gives the same murder in brief. Every element of the later combinations is already here: a secret, an oath, a promise of gain, and a murder.

Moses 5:18–33

18 And Cain loved Satan more than God. And Satan commanded him, saying: Make an offering unto the Lord.

19 And in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

20 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering;

21 But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect. Now Satan knew this, and it pleased him. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

22 And the Lord said unto Cain: Why art thou wroth? Why is thy countenance fallen?

23 If thou doest well, thou shalt be accepted. And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door, and Satan desireth to have thee; and except thou shalt hearken unto my commandments, I will deliver thee up, and it shall be unto thee according to his desire. And thou shalt rule over him;

24 For from this time forth thou shalt be the father of his lies; thou shalt be called Perdition; for thou wast also before the world.

25 And it shall be said in time to come—That these abominations were had from Cain; for he rejected the greater counsel which was had from God; and this is a cursing which I will put upon thee, except thou repent.

26 And Cain was wroth, and listened not any more to the voice of the Lord, neither to Abel, his brother, who walked in holiness before the Lord.

27 And Adam and his wife mourned before the Lord, because of Cain and his brethren.

28 And it came to pass that Cain took one of his brothers' daughters to wife, and they loved Satan more than God.

29 And Satan said unto Cain: Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; and swear thy brethren by their heads, and by the living God, that they tell it not; for if they tell it, they shall surely die; and this that thy father may not know it; and this day I will deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands.

30 And Satan sware unto Cain that he would do according to his commands. And all these things were done in secret.

31 And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain. Wherefore Cain was called Master Mahan, and he gloried in his wickedness.

32 And Cain went into the field, and Cain talked with Abel, his brother. And it came to pass that while they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him.

33 And Cain gloried in that which he had done, saying: I am free; surely the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands.

— The Pearl of Great Price



Genesis 4:8–11

8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

9 And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“Handed Down Even from Cain” — Oaths Passed Through Generations

Author’s Commentary

The secret did not die with Cain. Lamech entered into the same covenant with Satan and became Master Mahan in his turn, killing Irad for revealing it. Mormon traced the Gadianton oaths back to the same source: they were “put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents,” who “did plot with Cain.” Ether records that the daughter of Jared searched out “the record which our fathers brought across the great deep” to revive the oaths of old, and Alma commanded his son Helaman to keep the details of these oaths from the people, lest they learn them again.

Moses 5:47–55

47 And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah: Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech; for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.

48 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech shall be seventy and seven fold;

49 For Lamech having entered into a covenant with Satan, after the manner of Cain, wherein he became Master Mahan, master of that great secret which was administered unto Cain by Satan; and Irad, the son of Enoch, having known their secret, began to reveal it unto the sons of Adam;

50 Wherefore Lamech, being angry, slew him, not like unto Cain, his brother Abel, for the sake of getting gain, but he slew him for the oath′s sake.

51 For, from the days of Cain, there was a secret combination, and their works were in the dark, and they knew every man his brother.

52 Wherefore the Lord cursed Lamech, and his house, and all them that had

covenanted with Satan; for they kept not the commandments of God, and it displeased God, and he ministered not unto them, and their works were abominations, and began to spread among all the sons of men. And it was among the sons of men.

53 And among the daughters of men these things were not spoken, because that Lamech had spoken the secret unto his wives, and they rebelled against him, and declared these things abroad, and had not compassion;

54 Wherefore Lamech was despised, and cast out, and came not among the sons of men, lest he should die.

55 And thus the works of darkness began to prevail among all the sons of men.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*



Helaman 6:21–30

21 But behold, Satan did stir up the hearts of the more part of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed, that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings.

22 And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band, who had taken this covenant.

23 And thus they might murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God.

24 And whosoever of those who belonged to their band should reveal unto the world of their wickedness and their abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness, which had been given by Gadianton and Kishkumen.

25 Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma

commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction.

26 Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit—

27 Yea, that same being who did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel it should not be known unto the world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers from that time forth.

28 And also it is that same being who put it into the hearts of the people to build a tower sufficiently high that they might get to heaven. And it was that same being who led on the people who came from that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abominations over all the face of the land, until he dragged the people down to an entire destruction, and to an everlasting hell.

29 Yea, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianton to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time.

30 And behold, it is he who is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men.

— The Book of Mormon

Ether 8:15–18

15 And it came to pass that thus they did agree with Akish. And Akish did administer unto them the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning.

16 And they were kept up by the power of the devil to administer these oaths unto the people, to keep them in darkness, to help such as sought power to gain power, and to murder, and to plunder, and to lie, and to

commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms.

17 And it was the daughter of Jared who put it into his heart to search up these things of old; and Jared put it into the heart of Akish; wherefore, Akish administered it unto his kindred and friends, leading them away by fair promises to do whatsoever thing he desired.

18 And it came to pass that they formed a secret combination, even as they of old; which combination is most abominable and wicked above all, in the sight of God;

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 37:27–32

27 And now, my son, I command you that ye retain all their oaths, and their covenants, and their agreements in their secret abominations; yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall keep from this people, that they know them not, lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and be destroyed.

28 For behold, there is a curse upon all this land, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe; therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed.

29 Therefore ye shall keep these secret plans of their oaths and their covenants from this people, and only their wickedness and their murders and their abominations shall ye make known unto them; and ye shall teach them to abhor such wickedness and abominations and murders; and ye shall also teach them that these people were destroyed on account of their wickedness and abominations and their murders.

30 For behold, they murdered all the prophets of the Lord who came among them to declare unto them concerning their iniquities; and the blood of those whom they murdered did cry unto the Lord their God for vengeance upon those who were their murderers; and thus the judgments of God did come upon these workers of darkness and secret combinations.

31 Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe.

32 And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; trust not those secret plans unto this people, but teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"That I May Murder and Get Gain" — The Motive

Author's Commentary

Behind every secret combination lies the same motive: to take by violence and deceit what cannot be gained by honest labor. Proverbs describes the invitation exactly: "Come with us, let us lay wait for blood … cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse … so are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof."

Jezebel arranged false witnesses under the king's seal so that Naboth would be stoned and his vineyard seized. Judas asked the chief priests, "What will ye give me?" and they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

Proverbs 1:10–19

10 My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

11 If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause:

12 Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit:

13 We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil:

14 Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse:

15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:

16 For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.

17 Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.

18 And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.

19 So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



1 Kings 21:7–16

7 And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth.

9 And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people:

10 And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

11 And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them.

12 They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people.

13 And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died.

14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead.

15 And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead.

16 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Matthew 26:14–16

14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,

15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“They Bound Themselves Under a Curse” — The Oath

Author’s Commentary

What distinguishes a secret combination from ordinary crime is the oath. More than forty men in Jerusalem “bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.” The Gadianton robbers had “their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words,” so that a member might know his brother in the band. Akish and his kinsmen swore “by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads” to be faithful to him and to keep his secrets.

The oath turns a sin into a prison. Once sworn, a member cannot withdraw without becoming the next victim, as Irad learned.

Acts 23:12–15

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Ether 8:13–14

13 And it came to pass that Akish gathered in unto the house of Jared all his kinsfolk, and said unto them: Will ye swear unto me that ye will be faithful unto me in the thing which I shall desire of you?

14 And it came to pass that they all sware unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads, that whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired should lose his head; and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them, the same should lose his life.

— The Book of Mormon



The Prophet Joseph Smith

I would further suggest the impropriety of the organization of bands or companies, by covenant or oaths, by penalties or secrecies; but let the time past of our experience and sufferings by the wickedness of Doctor Avard suffice and let our covenant be that of the Everlasting Covenant, as is contained in the Holy Writ and the things that God hath revealed unto us. Pure friendship always becomes weakened the very moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy.

— Joseph Smith, letter from Liberty Jail, March 1839, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 146; also quoted in John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (1943), no. 45

“Their Works Are in the Dark” — Secrecy and Concealment

Author’s Commentary

Secret combinations cannot survive in the light, so they live in the dark. Isaiah pronounced a woe upon those “that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us?” Ezekiel was shown the elders of Israel worshipping in hidden chambers, saying, “The Lord seeth us not.” When the tomb was found empty, the chief priests “gave large money unto the soldiers” to spread a lie. The Lord warned the early Saints that “the enemy in the secret chambers seeketh your lives,” and spoke of “the hidden things of darkness” that would yet be brought to light.

Isaiah 29:15

15 Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Ezekiel 8:12

12 Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 28:11–15

11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 38:13; 38:28–29

38:13 And now I show unto you a mystery, a thing which is had in secret chambers, to bring to pass even your destruction in process of time, and ye knew it not;

38:28 And again, I say unto you that the enemy in the secret chambers seeketh your lives.

38:29 Ye hear of wars in far countries, and you say that there will soon be great wars in far countries, but ye know not the hearts of men in your own land.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 123:13

13 Therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven—

— The Doctrine and Covenants

"To Overthrow the Freedom of All Lands" — Combinations and Nations

Author's Commentary

In the Book of Mormon, secret combinations are not merely private sins; they bring down nations. Kishkumen and Gadianton plotted to murder the chief judge, and Mormon concluded that Gadianton "did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi." In the days of Lachoneus the combinations overthrew the government and broke the people into tribes. Moroni, who watched his own civilization end, wrote directly to the latter days: whoever builds up such combinations "seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries," and he commanded that when we see these things come among us, we should "awake to a sense of [our] awful situation." The Lord Himself warned of "evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days."



Helaman 2:3–14

3 But behold, Kishkumen, who had murdered Pahoran, did lay wait to destroy Helaman also; and he was upheld by his band, who had entered into a covenant that no one should know his wickedness.

4 For there was one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery; therefore he became the leader of the band of Kishkumen.

5 Therefore he did flatter them, and also Kishkumen, that if they would place him in the judgment-seat he would grant unto those who belonged to his band that they should be placed in power and authority among the people; therefore Kishkumen sought to destroy Helaman.

6 And it came to pass as he went forth towards the judgment-seat to destroy Helaman, behold one of the servants of Helaman, having been out by night, and having obtained, through disguise, a knowledge of those plans which had been laid by this band to destroy Helaman—

7 And it came to pass that he met Kishkumen, and he gave unto him a sign; therefore Kishkumen made known unto him the object of his desire, desiring that he would conduct him to the judgment-seat that he might murder Helaman.

8 And when the servant of Helaman had known all the heart of Kishkumen, and how that it was his object to murder, and also that it was the object of all those who belonged to his band to murder, and to rob, and to gain power, (and this was their secret plan, and their combination) the servant of Helaman said unto Kishkumen: Let us go forth unto the judgment-seat.

9 Now this did please Kishkumen exceedingly, for he did suppose that he should accomplish his design; but behold, the servant of Helaman, as they were going forth unto the judgment-seat, did stab Kishkumen even to the heart, that he fell dead without a groan. And he ran and told Helaman all the things which he had seen, and heard, and done.

10 And it came to pass that Helaman did send forth to take this band of robbers and secret murderers, that they might be executed according to the law.

11 But behold, when Gadianton had found that Kishkumen did not return he feared lest that he should be destroyed; therefore he caused that his band

should follow him. And they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way, into the wilderness; and thus when Helaman sent forth to take them they could nowhere be found.

12 And more of this Gadianton shall be spoken hereafter. And thus ended the forty and second year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

13 And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi.

14 Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written.

— The Book of Mormon



3 Nephi 7:1–6

1 Now behold, I will show unto you that they did not establish a king over the land; but in this same year, yea, the thirtieth year, they did destroy upon the judgment-seat, yea, did murder the chief judge of the land.

2 And the people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; and thus they did destroy the government of the land.

3 And every tribe did appoint a chief or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes.

4 Now behold, there was no man among them save he had much family and many kindreds and friends; therefore their tribes became exceedingly great.

5 Now all this was done, and there were no wars as yet among them; and all this iniquity had come upon the people because they did yield themselves unto the power of Satan.

6 And the regulations of the government were destroyed, because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets.

— The Book of Mormon

Ether 8:19–25

19 For the Lord worketh not in secret combinations, neither doth he will that man should shed blood, but in all things hath forbidden it, from the beginning of man.

20 And now I, Moroni, do not write the manner of their oaths and combinations, for it hath been made known unto me that they are had among all people, and they are had among the Lamanites.

21 And they have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.

22 And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them and yet he avenge them not.

23 Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be.

24 Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this secret combination which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain; for they cry from the dust for vengeance upon it, and also upon those who built it up.

25 For it cometh to pass that whoso buildeth it up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries; and it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people, for it is built up by the devil, who is the father of all lies; even that same liar who beguiled our first parents, yea, even that same liar who hath caused man to commit murder from the beginning; who hath hardened the hearts of men that they have murdered the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out from the beginning.

— The Book of Mormon



D&C 89:4

4 Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation—

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Scenarios — Secret Combinations Today



Author's Commentary

The names have changed, but the pattern of Master Mahan is easy to recognize in the modern world. A few scenarios show how the same four elements, secrecy, an oath, gain, and violence, still work together.

A young man is invited into a gang. Membership requires an initiation, often a crime committed in front of witnesses, and a vow of loyalty. From that moment the gang holds his secret, and leaving means betrayal. The organization profits from drugs or theft, and anyone who talks becomes a target. This is Lamech and Irad in a modern street.

A company discovers that one of its products is dangerous. Rather than recall it, a small group of executives agrees to keep the reports quiet. Employees

who know are bound by agreements and threatened with ruin if they speak. The profits continue while people are harmed. No one is murdered with a stone in a field, yet the combination still trades lives for gain.

Officials in a city accept payments from a criminal enterprise in exchange for looking away. Those who refuse are pushed out; those who investigate are threatened. The people's government is quietly replaced by a hidden one, as in the days of the Gadianton robbers, and the freedom of the land erodes.

The pattern also appears on a smaller scale: a group of friends who pledge silence to cover a cruel act, or an online group that lures its victims into compromising situations and then extorts them with the threat of exposure. Wherever secrecy, a binding pledge, and gain at another's expense come together, the spirit of Master Mahan is at work.

"Brought to Light" — The Opposite



Author's Commentary

The opposite of a secret combination is not merely the absence of crime but the presence of light. The Lord's covenants are made openly, before witnesses, to bind His children to Him and to one another's good, never to one another's harm. The Savior taught that "there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed," and that "he that doeth truth cometh to the light." The Lord declared that "the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed."

The Book of Mormon even records how a secret combination was destroyed. When the Nephites tried to fight the Gadianton band with force, they failed; but the Lamanites "did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites." Alma had already promised that the Lord would "bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works." Darkness cannot survive the light, and a combination cannot survive the truth.

John 3:19–21

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Luke 12:2–3

2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.

3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 1:3

3 And the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Alma 37:25

25 I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations; and except they repent I will destroy them from off the face of the earth; and I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations, unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land.

— The Book of Mormon

Helaman 6:37–40

37 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.

38 And it came to pass on the other hand, that the Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all the land of the Nephites, and had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils, and to join with them in their secret murders and combinations.

39 And thus they did obtain the sole management of the government, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God.

40 And thus we see that they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction.

— The Book of Mormon

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

X. From One Soul to a Nation

Author's Commentary

The adversary's war is fought one soul at a time, but it does not end with one soul. A person who is lost affects a family; families that fail weaken a community; communities that forget God elect corrupt rulers; and a nation of such states ripens for destruction. The Book of Mormon traces this descent more fully than any other record, and it ends with an entire civilization destroyed.

At each level the adversary uses two strategies. He may lead a person away, openly into sin and rebellion. Or he may simply neutralize him: leave him in the Church and in the family, but lukewarm, distracted, busy with the cares of the world, doing no harm but no good either. A neutralized father or mother may do almost as much damage to a family as one who leaves, because the children are left without a living example.

"Satan Hath Desired to Have You" — The Individual

Author's Commentary

The Savior warned Peter that Satan desired to "sift [him] as wheat," and in the same breath told him, "I have prayed for thee." The parable of the sower shows both strategies at work on the individual. Some seed is snatched away by "the wicked one" before it can take root; that is the soul led away. Other seed springs up among thorns, and "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful"; that is the soul neutralized. The Lord's rebuke of the lukewarm church at Laodicea, and His counsel to be "anxiously engaged in a good cause," show which of the two He finds harder to reach.

Luke 22:31–32

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 13:3–8; 13:18–23

13:3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

13:4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

13:5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

13:6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

13:7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

13:8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when

tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Revelation 3:15–17

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



D&C 58:26–29

26 For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

27 Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

28 For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

29 But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.

— The Doctrine and Covenants



Hebrews 3:12–13

12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Remember Your Children" — The Family



Author's Commentary

When the individual falls, the family pays. David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah brought the word of the Lord: "the sword shall never depart from thine house," and the rest of his life saw violence among his own children. Jacob rebuked the Nephite men whose unfaithfulness had broken "the hearts of their tender wives" and lost "the confidence of their children," and he warned them to "remember your children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set." Even in Lehi's family, two sons who murmured and were led away divided the family for generations.

The Lord names the adversary's method with the family precisely: "that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth ... because of the tradition of their fathers." King Benjamin and the Doctrine and Covenants lay the opposite duty on parents: to teach their children, so that they do not "serve the devil, who is the master of sin."

2 Samuel 12:9–10

9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Jacob 2:31–35

31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.

32 And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.

33 For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts.

34 And now behold, my brethren, ye know that these commandments were given to our father, Lehi; wherefore, ye have known them before; and ye have come unto great condemnation; for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done.

35 Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.

— The Book of Mormon



Jacob 3:10

10 Wherefore, ye shall remember your children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set before them; and also, remember that ye may, because of your filthiness, bring your children unto destruction, and their sins be heaped upon your heads at the last day.

— The Book of Mormon



1 Nephi 2:11–12

11 Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart.

12 And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Mosiah 4:14–15

14 And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

15 But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.

— *The Book of Mormon*



D&C 93:39–40

39 And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers.

40 But I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

D&C 68:25

25 And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Elder John A. Widtsoe

The powers of darkness are ever active to push mankind into evil paths. Often, we are tempted to do foolish things. In the family little things may lead to discord. To create unhappiness is the aim of the adversary of righteousness. ... Under the influence of the memory of the temple ceremony, family differences are swallowed up in peace; hate is transmuted into love; fear, into courage; and evil is rebuked and cast out.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations, 297–301, "Why Marry in the Temple?" (as cited in the Church's Eternal Marriage Student Manual)

"Inherited Lies" — The Traditions of the Fathers

Author's Commentary

The adversary's influence does not end with a single life. The Lord told Joseph Smith that the wicked one takes away light and truth "because of the tradition of their fathers," and from Liberty Jail the Prophet described a spirit that had "riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the

hearts of the children." King Benjamin knew that, without the records kept by the hand of God, his own people would have dwindled in the incorrect traditions of their fathers.

What one generation accepts without question, the next may inherit as truth. The remedy the Lord gave is the same in every age: to bring up children in light and truth, and to pray always, lest that wicked one have power in us.



D&C 93:49

49 What I say unto one I say unto all; pray always lest that wicked one have power in you, and remove you out of your place.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



D&C 123:7–8

7 It is an imperative duty that we owe to God, to angels, with whom we shall be brought to stand, and also to ourselves, to our wives and children, who have been made to bow down with grief, sorrow, and care, under the most damning hand of murder, tyranny, and oppression, supported and urged on and upheld by the influence of that spirit which hath so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion, and has been growing stronger and stronger, and is now the very mainspring of all corruption, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity.

8 It is an iron yoke, it is a strong band; they are the very handcuffs, and chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

Mosiah 1:5

5 I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"Another Generation ... Which Knew Not the Lord" — The Community

Author's Commentary

A community is only as strong as the families that fill it. Within one generation of Joshua, "there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord," and the book of Judges ends with the verdict, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." The Book of Mormon records the same fall among "the rising generation" in the days of Mosiah. Before the Savior's coming, Satan went about "spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land." In 3 Nephi the people divided into ranks by riches and learning; two centuries after the Savior's visit, pride returned, and the people "began to be divided into classes."

Judges 2:10–12

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Judges 21:25

25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mosiah 26:1–4

1 Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.

2 They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ.

3 And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened.

4 And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Helaman 16:21–23

21 And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery which we cannot understand, which will keep us down to be servants to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; and thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives.

22 And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain; and they were much disturbed, for Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come.

23 And notwithstanding the signs and the wonders which were wrought among the people of the Lord, and the many miracles which they did, Satan did get great hold upon the hearts of the people upon all the face of the land.

— *The Book of Mormon*



3 Nephi 6:10–15

10 But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and

boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

11 For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

12 And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.

13 Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble; some did return railing for railing, while others would receive railing and persecution and all manner of afflictions, and would not turn and revile again, but were humble and penitent before God.

14 And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.

15 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.

— The Book of Mormon

4 Nephi 1:24–26

24 And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.

25 And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.

26 And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"The Voice of the People" — The State

Author's Commentary

When a community has lost its moral center, its government follows. Mosiah warned against wicked kings, and then warned against something more dangerous: a people who themselves choose wickedness. "If the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you." By the days of Helaman, that time had come: "they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, ... for the laws had become corrupted." Isaiah described the same condition as calling "evil good, and good evil."

Mosiah 29:16–18

16 Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

17 For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!

18 Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Mosiah 29:26–27

26 Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

27 And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Helaman 5:2

2 For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Proverbs 29:2

2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Isaiah 5:20

20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

"Satan Had Full Power" — The Nation

Author's Commentary

The final stage is the destruction of a nation. Both the Jaredite and Nephite civilizations were told that their promised land was choice above all others, on the condition that they serve God, or be swept off when they were "ripened in iniquity." Both were. At the end of the Jaredites, "the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people." Mormon, standing among his dead, wrote: "O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord!" Enoch saw the adversary's whole design in a single image: Satan with "a great chain in his hand," veiling "the whole face of the earth with darkness," looking up and laughing.

Ether 2:9–12

9 And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

10 For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off.

11 And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

12 Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written.

— The Book of Mormon

2 Nephi 1:7

7 Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever.

— The Book of Mormon

Mormon 4:5

5 But, behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Ether 15:19

19 But behold, the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed; wherefore they went again to battle.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Mormon 6:16–22

16 And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

17 O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

18 Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.

19 O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!

20 But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return.

21 And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and

these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

22 O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Moses 7:24–26

24 And there came generation upon generation; and Enoch was high and lifted up, even in the bosom of the Father, and of the Son of Man; and behold, the power of Satan was upon all the face of the earth.

25 And he saw angels descending out of heaven; and he heard a loud voice saying: Wo, wo be unto the inhabitants of the earth.

26 And he beheld Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*



Proverbs 14:34

34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

“Their Hearts Knit Together” — The Opposite

Author’s Commentary

The Lord builds in the same order the adversary destroys, but in the opposite direction: from the converted individual, to a united family, to a people of one heart. Alma the Elder commanded his people to have “their hearts knit together in unity and in love.” After the Savior’s visit there was “no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.” Enoch’s city was called Zion “because they were of one heart and one mind.” Malachi promised that the hearts of the fathers would be turned to the children. And Mormon wrote that if all men were like Moroni, “the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever.” Alma knew where the rebuilding begins: “the preaching of the word … had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword.”

Mosiah 18:21

21 And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.

— The Book of Mormon

4 Nephi 1:15–17

15 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.

16 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.

17 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.

— The Book of Mormon

Moses 7:18

18 And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.

— The Pearl of Great Price

D&C 38:27

27 Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Malachi 4:5–6

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 48:17

17 Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Alma 31:5

5 And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

— *The Book of Mormon*

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XI. The Vision of the Tree of Life



Author's Commentary

Lehi's dream of the tree of life may be the clearest picture of opposition in all of scripture. Everything in it has its opposite: the tree and the great and spacious building, the rod of iron and the mists of darkness, the strait path and the forbidden paths, the fountain of living waters and the river of filthy water, the joy of those who partake and the mocking of those who point the finger. It also shows every stage of the adversary's work that we have studied, from the lone traveler in a dark and dreary waste to multitudes lost in strange roads.

This chapter presents the dream as Lehi told it, Nephi's interpretation of it, the tree of life as other witnesses describe it, and what the dream means for us.

"A Dark and Dreary Wilderness" — The Dream



Author's Commentary

Lehi's dream begins in darkness. He follows a man in a white robe into "a dark and dreary waste," travels "for the space of many hours in darkness," and finally prays to the Lord for mercy. Only then does he see the tree, whose fruit is "desirable to make one happy." The first thing he does after tasting it is to look for his family.

1 Nephi 8:2–18

2 And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.

3 And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved.

4 But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you; for behold, methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness.

5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.

6 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him.

7 And it came to pass that as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.

8 And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.

10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

11 And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

12 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.

13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.

14 And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and

Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go.

15 And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.

16 And it came to pass that they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.

17 And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them.

18 And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"Continually Holding Fast" — The Four Multitudes

Author's Commentary

Lehi then sees the multitudes, and they fall into four groups. Some start on the path but are lost in the mists of darkness. Some reach the tree and taste the fruit, but are "ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them," and fall away. Some press forward "continually holding fast to the rod of iron" until they partake. And many never seek the tree at all, but feel their way toward the great and spacious building, where they point the finger of scorn. Lehi's final concern is for Laman and Lemuel, who would not come and partake.

1 Nephi 8:19–38

19 And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river,

and led to the tree by which I stood.

20 And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world.

21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood.

22 And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.

23 And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

24 And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

25 And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.

26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

29 And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father.

30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.

31 And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.

32 And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.

33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.

34 These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them, had fallen away.

35 And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father.

36 And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

37 And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them.

38 And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them.

— The Book of Mormon

“The Rod of Iron … Was the Word of God” — Nephi’s Interpretation

Author’s Commentary

Nephi desired to see what his father saw, and was shown both the dream and its meaning. The tree is the love of God, “the most desirable above all things” and “the most joyous to the soul.” The rod of iron is the word of God. The mists of darkness are “the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts.” The great and spacious building is “vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men,” and its fall was “exceedingly great.” The river is filthiness, and an “awful gulf” separates the wicked from the tree. When his brothers asked what the rod meant, Nephi answered that “whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, … would never perish.”

1 Nephi 11:21–25

21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

22 And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

23 And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.

24 And after he had said these words, he 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.

25 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; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

— *The Book of Mormon*



1 Nephi 11:35–36

35 And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

— *The Book of Mormon*



1 Nephi 12:16–18

16 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.

17 And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost.

18 And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever.

— The Book of Mormon



1 Nephi 15:21–36

21 And it came to pass that they did speak unto me again, saying: What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream? What meaneth the tree which he saw?

22 And I said unto them: It was a representation of the tree of life.

23 And they said unto me: What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?

24 And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.

25 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things.

26 And they said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw?

27 And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water.

28 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.

29 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.

30 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.

31 And they said unto me: Doth this thing mean the torment of the body in the days of probation, or doth it mean the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body, or doth it speak of the things which are temporal?

32 And it came to pass that I said unto them that it was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual; for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation.

33 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.

34 But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy.

35 And there is a place prepared, yea, even that awful hell of which I have spoken, and the devil is the preparator of it; wherefore the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out because of that justice of which I have spoken.

36 Wherefore, the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen.

— *The Book of Mormon*

“The Tree of Life” — Other Witnesses

Author’s Commentary

Lehi was not the only one to see the tree. It stood in the midst of Eden, and cherubim guarded the way to it after the fall. Proverbs calls wisdom “a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her,” a phrase that echoes Nephi’s “hold fast.” John saw it again by the river of the water of life, bearing fruit every month, with leaves “for the healing of the nations,” and promised the right to it to those who keep the commandments. Alma used the same image of the word planted in the heart, which grows into “a tree springing up unto everlasting life.”

Genesis 2:9

9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 3:13–18

13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Revelation 22:1–2; 22:14

22:1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

22:2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Alma 32:41–42

41 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.

42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.

— The Book of Mormon

Matthew 7:13–14

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Significance of the Dream

Author's Commentary

The dream gathers the whole of this book into one picture. The adversary's methods are all here: the mists of darkness that blind and harden; the forbidden paths and broad roads; the building of pride, raised high "in the air" with no foundation; the finger of scorn that shames people away from the fruit they have already tasted. So is his strategy from one soul to a nation. It begins with individuals losing their way in the mist, and it ends with "multitudes" in the building.

The opposites are here too. The rod runs the whole length of the path, and it is not enough to take hold of it once; the saved are those who hold it "continually." The fruit is not a reward for the strong, but the love of God

offered to anyone who will come. And the first thing that fruit produces is a desire for others to have it. Lehi, having tasted, looked for his family; the love of God always turns outward.

The most modern part of the dream may be the building. Its people are "in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers," and they are richly dressed. Scorn, fashion, and the approval of the crowd are the building's weapons, and they are aimed at people who have already partaken. Lehi's answer is the whole of the lesson: "we heeded them not."



The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XII. When Pleasure and Money Are Not Enough — The Desire to Rule



Author's Commentary

There is a point at which pleasure and wealth stop satisfying. A person who has more money than could be spent in ten lifetimes cannot eat more, sleep better, or enjoy another sunset because of it. For many who reach that point, the next and most desirable thing is power: the power to control, to shape, to influence, and to rule.

This is the oldest ambition in the book. Lucifer did not ask for pleasure or wealth; he asked for honor and for power over the souls of men. In the premortal council he sought the honor of the Father for himself: "Give me thine honor." The desire to rule is the adversary's own desire, and it is the last temptation he offered the Savior: all the kingdoms of the world.

"All Was Vanity" — The Limits of Pleasure and Wealth



Author's Commentary

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes tried everything: pleasure, wine, great works, houses, gardens, servants, silver and gold, music, "and whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them." When he looked at it all, "all was vanity and vexation of spirit." He also noticed that money does not satisfy the desire for money: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver." The Savior asked the question that ends the argument: "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11

1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

2 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:

6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

7 I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Ecclesiastes 5:10

10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 16:26

26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Timothy 6:9–10

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“Let Us Make Us a Name” — The Reach for Power

Author’s Commentary

When wealth is not enough, the reach turns toward a name and a throne. The builders of Babel wanted a tower “whose top may reach unto heaven” so that they might “make us a name.” Nebuchadnezzar looked out over his city and said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built … by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” and in that same hour he was driven out to eat grass like the oxen. In the Book of Mormon the Gadianton robbers took the judgment seats themselves, “to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world,” and in the days of Lachoneus men covenanted together to destroy the government and set up a king, “that the land should no more be at liberty.”

Genesis 11:4–8

4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Daniel 4:29–33

29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

31 While the word was in the king′s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

32 And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

33 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles′ feathers, and his nails like birds′ claws.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Helaman 7:4–5

4 And seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness, and those Gadianton robbers filling the judgment-seats—having usurped the power and authority of the land; laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him; doing no justice unto the children of men;

5 Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness; letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money; and moreover to be held in office at the head of government, to rule and do 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—

— The Book of Mormon



3 Nephi 6:27–30

27 Now it came to pass that those judges had many friends and kindreds; and the remainder, yea, even almost all the lawyers and the high priests, did gather themselves together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges who were to be tried according to the law.

28 And they did enter into a covenant one with another, yea, even into that covenant which was given by them of old, which covenant was given and administered by the devil, to combine against all righteousness.

29 Therefore they did combine against the people of the Lord, and enter into a covenant to destroy them, and to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice, which was about to be administered according to the law.

30 And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and they did covenant one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings.

— The Book of Mormon

“Unrighteous Dominion” — The Nature of Men with Power

Author’s Commentary

The Lord’s most direct teaching on power came to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail. It is not the power itself that is condemned, but its use to cover sins, to gratify pride, or “to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men.” The Lord added a sobering observation: “it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.” The desire to rule is not a temptation only for kings. It can appear in a home, a classroom, an office, or a congregation.

D&C 121:34–40

34 Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

35 Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—

36 That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

37 That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

38 Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.

39 We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

40 Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

"Desirous to Be a King" — Scenarios from Scripture

Author's Commentary

The Book of Mormon gives detailed case studies of the lust for power. Amalickiah was "desirous to be a king," and gathered to himself lower judges who were "seeking for power." When the Nephites rejected him, he went to the Lamanites, had their commander poisoned "by degrees," arranged the murder of their king, married the queen, and "by his fraud … obtained the kingdom." He then turned that kingdom against the Nephites.

Among the Jaredites, Akish, bound by the ancient oaths, had his father-in-law beheaded "as he sat upon his throne," and later starved his own son in prison; his other sons then warred against him until only thirty souls remained. King Noah taxed his people a fifth of all they possessed to support his palaces and his priests. In each case the pattern is the same: wealth was already in hand, and the reach was for the power to rule.

Alma 46:3–5

3 Now the leader of those who were wroth against their brethren was a large and a strong man; and his name was Amalickiah.

4 And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for

power.

5 And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 47:17–19

17 Now it was the custom among the Lamanites, if their chief leader was killed, to appoint the second leader to be their chief leader.

18 And it came to pass that Amalickiah caused that one of his servants should administer poison by degrees to Lehonti, that he died.

19 Now, when Lehonti was dead, the Lamanites appointed Amalickiah to be their leader and their chief commander.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 47:35

35 And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Ether 9:4–12

4 And it came to pass that Jared was anointed king over the people, by the hand of wickedness; and he gave unto Akish his daughter to wife.

5 And it came to pass that Akish sought the life of his father-in-law; and he applied unto those whom he had sworn by the oath of the ancients, and they obtained the head of his father-in-law, as he sat upon his throne, giving audience to his people.

6 For so great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people; therefore Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead.

7 And it came to pass that Akish began to be jealous of his son, therefore he shut him up in prison, and kept him upon little or no food until he had suffered death.

8 And now the brother of him that suffered death, (and his name was Nimrah) was angry with his father because of that which his father had done unto his brother.

9 And it came to pass that Nimrah gathered together a small number of men, and fled out of the land, and came over and dwelt with Omer.

10 And it came to pass that Akish begat other sons, and they won the hearts of the people, notwithstanding they had sworn unto him to do all manner of iniquity according to that which he desired.

11 Now the people of Akish were desirous for gain, even as Akish was desirous for power; wherefore, the sons of Akish did offer them money, by which means they drew away the more part of the people after them.

12 And there began to be a war between the sons of Akish and Akish, which lasted for the space of many years, yea, unto the destruction of nearly all the people of the kingdom, yea, even all, save it were thirty souls, and they who fled with the house of Omer.

— The Book of Mormon

Mosiah 11:1–7

1 And now it came to pass that Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons; therefore Noah began to reign in his stead; and he did not walk in the ways of his father.

2 For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness.

3 And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff, and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain.

4 And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom.

5 For he put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts.

6 Yea, and thus they were supported in their laziness, and in their idolatry, and in their whoredoms, by the taxes which king Noah had put upon his people; thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity.

7 Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them.

— The Book of Mormon

Scenarios — The Desire to Rule Today



Author's Commentary

A man builds a fortune so great that money no longer means anything to him. He begins to buy what money cannot otherwise purchase: influence over what others read and hear, over who is elected, over which laws are written. His goal is no longer comfort but control, to shape the world according to his will. Whether his cause is good or bad, the pattern is the one the Liberty Jail revelation warns against: power sought for its own sake, exercised by compulsion rather than by persuasion.

A leader who has risen by public trust begins to change the rules so that he cannot be removed. Critics are silenced, independent voices are pushed out, and the people slowly lose the power to choose. This is the story of Amalickiah and of the kingmen in 3 Nephi, and it is the loss of the agency for which the war in heaven was fought.

The same desire works on a smaller scale. A parent who controls every choice of a grown child, a manager who rules by fear, or a spouse who isolates and dominates the other are all exercising dominion by compulsion. The scale is small, but the spirit is the same.

"Whosoever Will Be Great Among You" — The Opposite



Author's Commentary

The Savior answered the desire to rule with the opposite pattern. "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." He knelt and washed His disciples' feet. Paul wrote that Christ "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." King Benjamin, who held all the power of the kingdom, labored with his own hands so as not to burden his people, and taught them

that “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”

In the council in heaven the same opposition was made plain. One offered to rule, and asked for the glory. The other offered to serve, and gave the glory to the Father. The Liberty Jail revelation describes the only power that heaven recognizes: power that flows “without compulsory means,” by persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love unfeigned.

Mark 10:42–45

42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.

43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

John 13:12–15

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Philippians 2:5–8

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mosiah 2:12–18

12 I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you;

13 Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you—

14 And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day.

15 Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.

16 Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

17 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.

18 Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?

— *The Book of Mormon*



The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XIII. Religion Against Agency

Author's Commentary

The war in heaven was fought over agency, and it should not surprise us that the adversary's most effective weapon on earth is sometimes religion itself. A faith that compels belief, that punishes those who leave it, that makes war to spread itself, or that refuses to live in peace with its neighbors has taken up the very plan that was rejected in the council: to save men by force. Such a religion may speak the name of God, but it serves the one who sought to destroy the agency of man.

This chapter does not name any faith. The scriptures give us a better tool than a list of names: "by their fruits ye shall know them." The test applies to every church and every people, including our own. Any community, whatever name it bears, can drift from persuasion into compulsion, and the scriptures record that this has happened among Israel, among the Nephites, and among those who bore the name of Christ.

“By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them” — The Test

Author’s Commentary

The Savior did not tell His disciples to judge a teacher by his claims, his robes, or the size of his following, but by what his teaching produces. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. Mormon taught the same principle: that which persuades men to believe in Christ and to do good is of God, and that which persuades them to do evil is of the devil. Paul listed the fruits on both sides: hatred, variance, wrath, strife, and murders on one side; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness on the other. A religion whose fruits are fear, violence, and the loss of freedom has answered the question by its own works.

Matthew 7:15–20

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Moroni 7:5

5 For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also.

— The Book of Mormon

Galatians 5:19–23

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Which Slayeth the Saints of God" — The Great and Abominable Church

Author's Commentary

Nephi saw in vision a church "most abominable above all other churches," whose founder was the devil. It is identified not by a name but by its fruits: it

"slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron." And it is identified by its desires: "the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing." The angel later told Nephi that in the end there are only two churches, "the church of the Lamb of God," and the church of the devil. John saw the same power as a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, decked with gold, "drunken with the blood of the saints," with whom "the kings of the earth" had joined themselves.

Nephi's vision describes a category more than an institution. Wherever religious power is used to bind consciences, to kill the faithful, and to gather wealth, the great and abominable church is at work, whatever it calls itself.



1 Nephi 13:4–9

4 And it came to pass that I saw among the nations of the Gentiles the formation of a great church.

5 And the angel said unto me: Behold the formation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity.

6 And it came to pass that I beheld this great and abominable church; and I saw the devil that he was the founder of it.

7 And I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing; and I saw many harlots.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church.

9 And also for the praise of the world do they destroy the saints of God, and bring them down into captivity.

— The Book of Mormon

1 Nephi 14:9–10

9 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look, and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil.

10 And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

— The Book of Mormon

Revelation 17:1–6

1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Enforced by the Sword" — Priestcraft



Author's Commentary

The Book of Mormon gives this corruption a name: priestcraft. Nephi defined it as men who "preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world." The first priestcraft among the Nephites came through Nehor, who taught that priests should be popular and supported by the people, and who, when the aged Gideon opposed him, drew his sword and killed him. Alma, as chief judge, named the danger exactly: "thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction." Ezekiel had long before condemned the shepherds of Israel who fed themselves instead of the flock, and ruled them "with force and with cruelty."



2 Nephi 26:29–31

29 He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.

30 Behold, the Lord hath forbidden this thing; wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish.

31 But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 1:2–16

2 And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.

3 And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.

4 And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

5 And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.

6 And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.

7 And it came to pass as he was going, to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of God, yea, even one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.

8 Now the name of the man was Gideon; and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.

9 Now, because Gideon withstood him with the words of God he was wroth with Gideon, and drew his sword and began to smite him. Now Gideon being stricken with many years, therefore he was not able to withstand his blows, therefore he was slain by the sword.

10 And the man who slew him was taken by the people of the church, and was brought before Alma, to be judged according to the crimes which he had committed.

11 And it came to pass that he stood before Alma and pled for himself with much boldness.

12 But Alma said unto him: Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people. And behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction.

13 And thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man, yea, a man who has done much good among this people; and were we to spare thee his blood would come upon us for vengeance.

14 Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law.

15 And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death.

16 Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Ezekiel 34:2–4

2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock.

4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Whosoever Killeth You Will Think That He Doeth God Service" — Compulsion in the Name of God

Author's Commentary

The Savior warned His disciples that the time would come when men would kill them and believe they were serving God. The scriptures show this again and again. Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image and commanded that whoever would not fall down and worship it be cast into a burning furnace. Darius's counselors had him sign a decree that no one could pray to any god but the king, so that Daniel would be thrown to the lions. Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord. Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, "made havock of the church," and later confessed, "I … compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." In Ammonihah, believing women and children were cast into the fire together with their scriptures, and in the days before the Savior's coming, corrupt judges secretly put the prophets to death.

Each of these is religion joined to power and used to compel. And each ends the same way: the three Hebrews walk unharmed in the fire, Daniel is delivered from the lions, and the persecutor Saul becomes the apostle Paul.

Daniel 3:4–6; 3:16–18

3:4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,

3:5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up:

3:6 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

3:17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

3:18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Daniel 6:6–10

6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the

den of lions.

8 Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

9 Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



John 16:2–3

2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Acts 26:9–11

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Alma 14:8–11

8 And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire.

9 And it came to pass that they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire.

10 And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.

— The Book of Mormon

3 Nephi 6:20–23

20 And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings.

21 Now there were many of the people who were exceedingly angry because of those who testified of these things; and those who were angry were chiefly the chief judges, and they who had been high priests and lawyers; yea, all those who were lawyers were angry with those who testified of these things.

22 Now there was no lawyer nor judge nor high priest that could have power to condemn any one to death save their condemnation was signed by the governor of the land.

23 Now there were many of those who testified of the things pertaining to Christ who testified boldly, who were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor of the land until after their death.

— The Book of Mormon

“Do Not Rich Men Oppress You?” — Wealth, Influence, and Religious Power

Author’s Commentary

Once religious authority is joined to great wealth, the rich are able to wield their influence and take control. James saw it in the early church: the man with a gold ring was given the good seat, the poor man was told to stand, and James asked, “Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?” Micah described a nation whose priests “teach for hire” and whose prophets “divine for money.” The Zoramites built a tall stand for their prayers, adorned themselves with costly apparel and ringlets of gold, and cast the poor out of the synagogues they had built with their own hands. In Fourth Nephi, churches were built up “to get gain,” and those churches then persecuted the true church. Moroni, looking at our day, wrote: “ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy.”

James 2:1–7

1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Micah 3:11

11 The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Alma 31:25–28

25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.

26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 32:2–5

2 And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the poor class of people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel—

3 Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness; therefore they were poor; yea, they were esteemed by their brethren as dross; therefore they were poor as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart.

4 Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon the hill Onidah, there came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom we have been speaking, of whom were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world.

5 And they came unto Alma; and the one who was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?

— *The Book of Mormon*

4 Nephi 1:27–29

27 And it came to pass that when two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches in the land; yea, there were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness.

28 And this church did multiply exceedingly because of iniquity, and because of the power of Satan who did get hold upon their hearts.

29 And again, there was another church which denied the Christ; and they did persecute the true church of Christ, because of their humility and their belief in Christ; and they did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them.

— The Book of Mormon

Mormon 8:36–39

36 And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

37 For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

38 O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies—because of the praise of the world?

> **39** Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?
>
> — *The Book of Mormon*

Recognizing the Fruits Today

Author's Commentary

Without naming any faith, we can describe the fruits by which such religions are known. They make belief a matter of law rather than conscience, and they punish those who doubt, question, or leave. They seek the power of the state to enforce their teachings, and they use that power against those who worship differently. They teach that violence against unbelievers is a service to God. They control what their members may read, hear, and say, and they silence dissent within their own ranks. Their leaders grow wealthy while their followers remain poor. They do not seek to coexist with their neighbors, but to rule over them.

These fruits can appear in any tradition, including those that bear the name of Christ, and history offers painful examples on every side. The question for each of us is not only whether another faith bears such fruit, but whether our own community, or our own heart, has begun to. The spirit that would call down fire on an unbelieving village can live in a disciple; the Savior rebuked it in two of His own apostles.

"Allow All Men the Same Privilege" — The Opposite

Author's Commentary

The Lord's way is the opposite of compulsion in every respect. When James

and John wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village that would not receive the Savior, He turned and rebuked them: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Joshua did not compel Israel; he invited them: "choose you this day whom ye will serve." Among the Nephites, "there was no law against a man's belief," and when the Nephites did go to war, they fought not "for monarchy nor power," but for their homes, their liberties, and their right to worship.

Latter-day revelation makes the principle explicit. Religion is instituted of God, and men are accountable to Him alone for its exercise; it is not just "to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed." And the Articles of Faith state it in a single line: "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may." This is the plan of the Father carried into the life of a community: freedom offered, persuasion used, and love extended even to those who choose differently.

Luke 9:51–56

51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,

52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Joshua 24:15

15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Alma 30:7–11

7 Now there was no law against a man's belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.

8 For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.

9 Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him.

10 But if he murdered he was punished unto death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished.

11 For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man's belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 43:45–47

45 Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

46 And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.

47 And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.

— *The Book of Mormon*



D&C 134:4; 134:7; 134:9

134:4 We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never

suppress the freedom of the soul.

134:7 We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy.

134:9 We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*



Articles of Faith 1:11

11 We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*



Matthew 5:43–45

43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

"That They All May Be One" — Christians United Against Evil



Author's Commentary

Among those who love Jesus Christ, too much energy is spent bickering. We point fingers over differences of understanding, argue over points of doctrine, and nit-pick the beliefs of neighbors who pray to the same Savior. Meanwhile the adversary, who is the father of contention, is pleased to see the followers of Christ fighting one another instead of him.

The Savior prayed on the night before His death that all who believe on Him might be one. When His disciples forbade a man who was casting out devils in His name because he did not follow them, the Lord rebuked them: "He that is not against us is on our part." The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and President Gordon B. Hinckley invited people of other faiths to bring all the good they have. Honest differences remain, and each of us is free to believe and to teach what we hold to be true. But we have far too much in common to fight among ourselves. Our fight is against evil, and we should stand together in it.

John 17:20–21

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mark 9:38–40

38 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.

39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.

40 For he that is not against us is on our part.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Corinthians 1:10–13

10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



The Prophet Joseph Smith

If by the principles of truth I succeed in uniting men of all denominations in the bonds of love, shall I not have attained a good object? If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation which he revealed? So do I. Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principles of union and friendship in their midst; and they will do it before the millennium can be ushered in and Christ takes possession of His kingdom.

— Joseph Smith, discourse of 9 July 1843, History of the Church 5:499; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 313



Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Surely there is a way for people of goodwill who love God and have taken upon themselves the name of Christ to stand together for the cause of Christ. … The larger and more united the Christian voice, the more likely we are to carry the day in these matters.

— Jeffrey R. Holland, "Standing Together for the Cause of Christ," address to national Christian leaders, Salt Lake City, 10 March 2011 (Ensign, August 2012)

President Gordon B. Hinckley

You bring with you all the good that you have, and then let us see if we can add to it.

— Gordon B. Hinckley, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, 17 February 1998 (Ensign, August 1998)

Ephesians 4:3–6

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Galatians 5:14–15

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

President Russell M. Nelson

Contention drives away the Spirit—every time. … Those who have "the spirit of contention" are not of Him but are "of the devil." … True disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers.

— Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," general conference, April 2023

John 13:34–35

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Author's Commentary

Let us, then, turn our weapons from one another and toward the real enemy. Let us defend the family, protect the innocent, lift the poor, and bear witness of Jesus Christ side by side with all who love Him. By this, the Savior said, shall all men know that we are His disciples: if we have love one to another.

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XIV. A Land of Liberty — The Founding of the American Republic

Author's Commentary

If the war in heaven was fought over agency, then few human documents have been written more directly in defense of it than the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights. Latter-day Saints believe that this was no accident. The Lord declared that He had "established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose." Nephi, six centuries before Christ, saw Gentiles led by the Spirit of God across the many waters and "delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations," and Jacob prophesied that this would be "a land of liberty," with "no kings upon the land."

This chapter looks at how the founders regarded God as they wrote, what they had learned from history, what kind of government they were determined to prevent, and what they warned would be required to keep what they had made. Their own words are quoted from their letters, speeches, and published essays.

“Wise Men Whom I Raised Up” — Prophecy and Purpose

Author’s Commentary

The Book of Mormon speaks of this land as a land of promise, choice above all others, and free from bondage so long as its people serve God. The Doctrine and Covenants goes further: the Lord says that the laws and Constitution of the people were established “for the rights and protection of all flesh,” so that every man might act “according to the moral agency which I have given unto him.” That phrase links the American founding directly to the council in heaven. A constitution that protects agency is, in a small way, a defense of the Father’s plan.

1 Nephi 13:12–19

12 And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

14 And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

15 And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain.

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power

of the Lord was with them.

17 And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them.

18 And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

19 And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations.

— *The Book of Mormon*



2 Nephi 10:11–14

11 And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.

12 And I will fortify this land against all other nations.

13 And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God.

14 For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Ether 2:12

12 Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written.

— *The Book of Mormon*

D&C 101:77–80

77 According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles;

78 That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

79 Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

80 And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 98:5–10

5 And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me.

6 Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land;

7 And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil.

8 I, the Lord God, make you free, therefore ye are free indeed; and the law also maketh you free.

9 Nevertheless, when the wicked rule the people mourn.

10 Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

"Endowed by Their Creator" — God in the Declaration



Author's Commentary

The Declaration of Independence rests its entire argument on God. It appeals to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," declares that men are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," appeals "to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions," and ends "with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." Its central claim is that rights come from God, not from government. Governments are instituted to secure them, and derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." A government that grants rights can take them away; a government that only secures rights given by God may not.



The Declaration of Independence

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

— The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 (National Archives transcription)



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE — CONCLUSION

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; ... And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

— The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 (National Archives transcription)

"That God Governs in the Affairs of Men" — Reverence in the Founding



AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY

The founders did not all share the same beliefs, and some held views well outside the churches of their day. But their letters and speeches show a common reverence for Providence and a deep sense of dependence on God.

When the first Continental Congress met in 1774, it opened with prayer, and John Adams wrote to his wife that the reading of the Thirty-fifth Psalm seemed "as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that Morning."

In the Constitutional Convention of 1787, when the delegates were deadlocked and near failure, the aged Benjamin Franklin rose and reminded them that "God Governs in the affairs of men," quoting the Psalm that "except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it." He proposed that the Convention open each day with prayer. The motion was never brought to a vote, but his words were recorded and have been remembered ever since. After the Constitution was completed, Madison wrote that a "man of pious reflection" could not fail to see in it "a finger of that Almighty hand." Washington, taking the oath as the first President, said that every step of the nation's progress "seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."



John Adams to Abigail Adams

Accordingly next Morning he appeared with his Clerk and in his Pontificallibus, and read several Prayers, in the established Form; and then read the Collect for the seventh day of September, which was the Thirty fifth Psalm.—You must remember this was the next Morning after we heard the horrible Rumour, of the Cannonade of Boston.—I never saw a greater Effect upon an Audience. It seemed as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that Morning.

After this Mr. Duche, unexpected to every Body struck out into an extemporary Prayer, which filled the Bosom of every Man present. I must confess I never heard a better Prayer or one, so well pronounced.

— John Adams to Abigail Adams, 16 September 1774 (Founders Online)

Benjamin Franklin in the Constitutional Convention

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that "except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.

— Benjamin Franklin, Federal Convention, 28 June 1787, in the notes of James Madison (Avalon Project)

Psalms 127:1

1 Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 10:29

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

James Madison, The Federalist No. 37

The real wonder is that so many difficulties should have been surmounted, and surmounted with a unanimity almost as unprecedented as it must have been unexpected. It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.

— The Federalist No. 37 (James Madison), January 1788 (Avalon Project)

George Washington, First Inaugural Address

No People can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs of men more than the People of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.

— George Washington, First Inaugural Address, 30 April 1789 (Founders Online)

"Horror and Disgust" — The Lessons of History

Author's Commentary

The founders were students of history, and they drew their lessons from its failures. They had read how the small republics of Greece and Italy swung between tyranny and anarchy, and how pure democracies, ruled by the passions of a majority, had "ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention." They knew the long history of kings who ruled by divine right, of standing armies used against their own people, and of offices multiplied to

"eat out their substance."

They had also learned from the history of religion. Madison observed that fifteen centuries of established churches had produced "pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution," the very fruits described in Chapter XIII. Virginia's Statute for Religious Freedom declared that "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and that the Author of our religion, though Lord of body and mind, "chose not to propagate it by coercions on either." Jefferson wrote privately that he had "sworn upon the altar of god eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

The scriptures had taught the same lessons long before. When Israel demanded a king, Samuel warned them what a king would take: their sons, their daughters, their fields, and a tenth of all they had, until they cried out because of him. Moses had commanded that any king must not multiply silver and gold to himself, nor lift his heart above his brethren. And King Mosiah, knowing both good and wicked kings, ended the Nephite monarchy altogether.



Alexander Hamilton, The Federalist No. 9

It is impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the distractions with which they were continually agitated, and at the rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy.

— The Federalist No. 9 (Alexander Hamilton), November 1787 (Avalon Project)

James Madison, The Federalist No. 10

A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.

— The Federalist No. 10 (James Madison), November 1787 (Avalon Project)

The Declaration of Independence — Grievances

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

— The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 (National Archives transcription)

James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance

Because experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of Religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.

— James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments, 1785, paragraph 7 (Founders Online)

The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom

Whereas Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do …

— Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, enacted January 1786

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush

… for I have sworn upon the altar of god eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.

— Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 23 September 1800 (Founders Online)

1 Samuel 8:10–18

10 And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king.

11 And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

12 And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

13 And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

14 And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

15 And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

16 And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

17 He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

18 And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Deuteronomy 17:14–20

14 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;

15 Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

16 But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

17 Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"The Very Definition of Tyranny" — The Government They Sought to Prevent

Author's Commentary

The founders were determined to prevent above all one thing: the accumulation of power in the same hands. Madison called it "the very definition of tyranny," whether that power belonged to one, a few, or many. Their answer was to divide it. The Constitution separates the legislative, executive, and judicial powers into three branches, each able to check the others, and divides power again between the nation and the states. It forbids titles of nobility, so that no hereditary class could rise above the people. It forbids any religious test for public office. And the Bill of Rights draws a line around the conscience, the voice, the home, and the person that no government may cross.

Madison explained the reasoning in a single famous sentence: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." Because men are not angels, and because, as the Lord told Joseph Smith, almost all men will exercise unrighteous dominion as soon as they get a little authority, power must be divided and restrained. King Mosiah had reached the same conclusion: because not all men are just, it is not wise to have a king, and so he gave the Nephites judges who could themselves be judged by higher judges, and higher judges who could be judged by a body of the lower.



James Madison, The Federalist No. 47

The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.

— The Federalist No. 47 (James Madison), February 1788 (Avalon Project)



The Constitution of the United States

Preamble. We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article I, Section 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

Article II, Section 1. The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.

Article III, Section 1. The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.

— The Constitution of the United States, 1787 (National Archives transcription)



The Constitution — Against Nobility and Religious Tests

Article I, Section 9. No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State.

Article VI. The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.

Article VII. ... done in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the States present the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven ...

— The Constitution of the United States, Article I, Section 9; Article VI; Article VII (National Archives transcription)



The Bill of Rights

Amendment I. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Amendment II. A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Amendment IV. The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Amendment IX. The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

Amendment X. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

— The Bill of Rights, Amendments I, II, IV, IX and X, ratified 1791 (National Archives transcription)



James Madison, The Federalist No. 51

But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

— The Federalist No. 51 (James Madison), February 1788 (Avalon Project)

Mosiah 29:16–17

16 Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

17 For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!

— *The Book of Mormon*

Mosiah 29:25–29

25 Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord.

26 Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

27 And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.

28 And now if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause that they may be judged of a higher judge.

29 If your higher judges do not judge righteous judgments, ye shall cause that a small number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people.

— *The Book of Mormon*

“A Republic, If You Can Keep It” — The Condition of Liberty

Author’s Commentary

The founders did not believe that a written constitution could preserve freedom on its own. Asked as he left the Convention whether the delegates had made a republic or a monarchy, Franklin is recorded as answering, “A republic … if you can keep it.” Washington warned in his Farewell Address that “the spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one,” and called religion and morality the “indispensable supports” of political prosperity. John Adams wrote that “our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People,” and that avarice, ambition, and revenge would break its strongest cords “as a Whale goes through a Net.” Madison asked the Virginia convention, “Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation.”

Their warnings echo the prophets. Mosiah taught that when the voice of the people chooses iniquity, the judgments of God follow. Moroni raised the title of liberty “in memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children.” Paul wrote that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” and counseled the free not to use their liberty “for an occasion to the flesh.” The words inscribed on the bell that rang for independence came from the law of Moses: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

Here the opposition at the heart of this book appears in the life of a nation. Liberty rests on agency, and agency rests on virtue. A free people who lose their virtue will not stay free for long, because they will choose the very dominion the founders labored to prevent. The Constitution is a fence around agency; only a righteous people can keep the gate.

James McHenry's Journal

A lady asked Dr. Franklin Well Doctor what have we got a republic or a monarchy—A republic replied the Doctor if you can keep it.

— James McHenry, journal entry, 18 September 1787 (Library of Congress)

George Washington, Farewell Address

The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create whatever the form of government, a real despotism.

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men & citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect & to cherish them.

— George Washington, Farewell Address, 19 September 1796 (Founders Online)

John Adams to the Massachusetts Militia

Because We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions unbridled by morality and Religion. Avarice, Ambition and Revenge or Galantry, would break the strongest Cords of our Constitution as a Whale goes through a Net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

— John Adams to the Massachusetts Militia, 11 October 1798 (Founders Online)

James Madison, Virginia Ratifying Convention

But I go on this great republican principle, that the people will have virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom. Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks—no form of government can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea.

— James Madison, Virginia Ratifying Convention, 20 June 1788 (Founders Online)

Alma 46:12–13

12 And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

13 And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

— The Book of Mormon

Leviticus 25:10

10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Corinthians 3:17

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Galatians 5:1; 5:13

5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

5:13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XV. The Blood of the Innocent

Author's Commentary

Of all the practices the scriptures condemn, few are described with more horror than the sacrifice of children. The Lord said of it that He "commanded them not, neither came it into [His] heart." It appears among the Canaanites, in apostate Israel, in the Egypt of Abraham's day, and at the end of the Nephite nation. It is the opposite of everything a loving Father intends for His children: the most innocent and helpless of His creations, destroyed at the hands of those who should have protected them.

This chapter gathers what the scriptures say about the destruction of children, considers why many see a modern counterpart in elective abortion, and asks why this matters so much to the adversary, what it may cost the plan of God, and what justice, and what mercy, the scriptures promise.

"Return, and Live" — A Word Before We Begin

Author's Commentary

Before we turn to the history of this sin, a word to those who carry wounds from it. Many who read this chapter will do so with pain, whether from choices they made, choices made for them, or circumstances they did not choose. The same Lord who demands justice for innocent blood offers the Atonement of His Son to every repentant heart. Through Ezekiel He asked, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? … and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" To the repentant He promises, "I, the Lord, remember them no more." Nothing in the pages that follow is meant to close that door. The way back is open, and the Savior stands at the end of it.

Ezekiel 18:21–23

21 But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

22 All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

23 Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 58:42–43

42 Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

43 By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Isaiah 43:25

25 I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“They Caused Their Sons to Pass Through the Fire” — The Ancient Witness

Author’s Commentary

The law of Moses forbade Israel to let any of its children “pass through the fire to Molech,” and pronounced death upon any who did. Yet the kings Ahaz and Manasseh did exactly that, and the people built high places in Tophet, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, “to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire.” The Psalmist wrote that they “sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,” and “the land was polluted with blood.” The valley of Hinnom became so associated with this abomination that its name, Gehenna, became a word for hell itself.

The Pearl of Great Price records that in Abraham’s youth the priests of Pharaoh offered “men, women, and children” upon their altar, and that Abraham himself was bound upon it before the Lord delivered him. The Book of Mormon closes with the same horror: the Lamanites took Nephite women and children and “did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.”

Leviticus 18:21

21 And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Leviticus 20:2–5

2 Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the

children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones.

3 And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name.

4 And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not:

5 Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Deuteronomy 12:31

31 Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 23:10

16:3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.

21:6 And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

23:10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Jeremiah 7:31

31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Psalms 106:37–38

37 Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,

38 And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Ezekiel 16:20–21

20 Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter,

21 That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Abraham 1:7–11

7 Therefore they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen in offering up their children unto these dumb idols, and hearkened not unto my voice, but endeavored to take away my life by the hand of the priest of Elkenah. The priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh.

8 Now, at this time it was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea, for the offering unto these strange gods, men, women, and children.

9 And it came to pass that the priest made an offering unto the god of Pharaoh, and also unto the god of Shagreel, even after the manner of the Egyptians. Now the god of Shagreel was the sun.

10 Even the thank-offering of a child did the priest of Pharaoh offer upon the altar which stood by the hill called Potiphar's Hill, at the head of the plain of Olishem.

11 Now, this priest had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time, who were the daughters of Onitah, one of the royal descent directly from the loins of Ham. These virgins were offered up because of their virtue; they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or of stone, therefore they were killed upon this altar, and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians.

— The Pearl of Great Price

Mormon 4:14–15; 4:21

4:14 And they did also march forward against the city Teancum, and did drive the inhabitants forth out of her, and did take many prisoners both women and children, and did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.

4:15 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and seventh year, the Nephites being angry because the Lamanites had sacrificed their women and their children, that they did go against the Lamanites with exceedingly great anger, insomuch that they did beat again the Lamanites, and drive them out of their lands.

4:21 And when they had come the second time, the Nephites were driven and slaughtered with an exceedingly great slaughter; their women and their children were again sacrificed unto idols.

— *The Book of Mormon*

"Before I Formed Thee in the Belly" — Life Before Birth

Author's Commentary

The scriptures speak of the unborn not as things but as persons known to God. The Lord told Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee." The Psalmist praised God who "covered me in my mother's womb," and whose eyes saw his substance, "yet being unperfect." When Mary greeted Elisabeth, "the babe leaped in her womb for joy." Latter-day revelation teaches that every spirit lived with God before this life, "innocent" in the beginning, and that many were chosen for their missions before they were born.

Jeremiah 1:5

5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Psalms 139:13–16

13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Luke 1:41–44

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



D&C 93:38

38 Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

A Modern Counterpart



Author's Commentary

Many believers, including the author, see in the modern practice of elective abortion a counterpart to the ancient sacrifice of children. The altar has changed, and so has the language used to describe it, but in both cases a child is given up for the sake of what the adults around it desire: in ancient times the favor of an idol, and in modern times convenience, freedom, or ease. Latter-day revelation adds a phrase that reaches beyond killing itself: "Thou shalt not … kill, nor do anything like unto it."

This is a subject on which sincere people disagree, and one that touches many lives with deep pain. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that elective abortion for personal or social convenience is contrary to the will of God, while recognizing rare circumstances such as rape, incest, serious danger to the mother's life or health, or severe defects that will not allow a baby to survive, in which it may be considered after prayer and counsel. The purpose of this chapter is not to condemn any person, but to recognize a pattern the adversary has used in every age.



D&C 59:6

6 Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Thou shalt not steal; neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

"To Devour Her Child" — Why It Matters to the Adversary



Author's Commentary

John saw the dragon standing before the woman in labor, "for to devour her child as soon as it was born." The adversary's hostility to children runs through scripture at its turning points. Pharaoh ordered every Hebrew son cast into the river, in the generation that produced Moses. Herod slew the children of Bethlehem, in the hour that produced the Christ. The pattern suggests that the adversary sees in every child a possibility he fears.

Several reasons may explain why the destruction of children is so central to his agenda. He has no body, and he rebelled against the plan that grants bodies to the spirits of God; every child who never draws a breath is a body denied. He envies man's destiny, as the refusal to bow to Adam showed, and every soul prevented from entering mortality is one fewer who will grow toward it. He works to destroy the family, and nothing wounds a family more deeply. And he corrupts the parents themselves, hardening their hearts toward their own offspring until they are, in the words of scripture, "past feeling." The ancient sacrifice of children always accompanied idolatry; the adversary demands the most precious thing, and teaches men to call it a service.

Revelation 12:4–5

4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Exodus 1:15–22

15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah:

16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.

18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?

19 And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.

20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty.

21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Matthew 2:16–18

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Moses 4:6

6 And Satan put it into the heart of the serpent, (for he had drawn away many after him,) and he sought also to beguile Eve, for he knew not the mind of God, wherefore he sought to destroy the world.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*

What It May Cost the Plan of God

Author's Commentary

Here we must speculate carefully, because the scriptures also assure us that "the works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated." No spirit is lost to God, and little children "are alive in Christ." The Prophet Joseph Smith saw that "all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven." The adversary cannot take the salvation of the innocent.

What he can do is delay and wound. A spirit may be kept from its appointed time, family, and circumstances. A mother and father may lose the joy and growth that would have come from raising that child, and the child the experience of mortal life as it was intended. A lineage may be altered, and the blessings of generations redirected. And a society that learns to destroy its most vulnerable members loses something of its own humanity, becoming less able to love and to protect. The plan continues, but the cost of the adversary's work is paid in sorrow, both on earth and, we may believe, in heaven, where the God of Enoch wept.

D&C 3:1–3

1 The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught.

2 For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

3 Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men;

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Moroni 8:8

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

— The Book of Mormon

Moroni 8:12

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

— The Book of Mormon

D&C 137:10

10 And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

"The Blood of the Innocent Shall Stand as a Witness" — Justice

Author's Commentary

The scriptures leave no doubt that heaven takes the shedding of innocent blood with the utmost seriousness. The blood of Abel cried "from the ground." Among the things the Lord hates are "hands that shed innocent blood." The Savior warned that whoever offends one of His little ones would be better off with a millstone about his neck, and added that "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father." Of Manasseh, who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, it is written that "the Lord would not pardon" the nation for it. Jeremiah foretold that Tophet would be called "the valley of slaughter." When Alma was forced to watch the believers of Ammonihah burn with their children, he was told that the Lord allowed it so that His judgments would be just, and "the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them ... at the last day." John saw the souls of the slain beneath the altar crying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?"

Genesis 4:10

10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 6:16–17

16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:

17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 18:6; 18:10

18:6 But whoso 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.

18:10 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.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Kings 24:3–4

3 Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did;

4 And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Jeremiah 19:4–7

4 Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents;

5 They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind:

6 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter.

7 And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcases will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 14:11

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.

— The Book of Mormon

Revelation 6:9–11

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“I Will Not Remember Thy Sins” — Mercy

Author’s Commentary

Justice is not the last word. Many who read this chapter carry wounds of their own, whether from choices they made, choices made for them, or circumstances they did not choose. The same Lord who demands justice for innocent blood also offers the Atonement of His Son to every repentant heart. Through Ezekiel He asked, “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? … and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” To the repentant He promises, “I, the Lord, remember them no more.” The adversary, who first leads a person into sin and then tells them there is no way back, is a liar in both. The way back is open, and the Savior stands at the end of it.

Ezekiel 18:21–23

21 But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

22 All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

23 Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 58:42–43

42 Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

43 By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Isaiah 43:25

25 I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XVI. Ensnarements

Author's Commentary

A snare is a trap that works by appetite. The bird is not driven into the net; it is drawn by the bait, and the cord tightens only after it has stepped inside. Paul spoke of "the snare of the devil," and Alma told the people of Ammonihah that Zeezrom's lying and craftiness was "a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains."

Some ensnarements are obvious: addiction to drugs and alcohol, addiction to pornography and sexual gratification, prostitution, and threats. Others are quieter. Gambling promises gain without labor. Debt makes the borrower "servant to the lender." Bribes and gifts blind the wise. Flattery and the hunger for approval bind a person to the opinions of others. Anger and the desire for revenge keep a wound open. Occult practices and fortune-telling invite the very spirits the scriptures warn against. Gluttony, idleness, and endless entertainment dull the spirit by degrees. Secrets, gossip, and compromising images give others a hold over us. Loneliness can be exploited by false friends, and fear by those who threaten. Each of these begins as something that seems small, private, or even harmless. Each can become a cord.

"As a Bird Hasteth to the Snare" — How the Gateway Works

Author's Commentary

The scriptures describe the progression with remarkable precision. James lays it out as a chain: a man is "drawn away of his own lust, and enticed," then lust "when it hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin," and sin, "when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The young man of Proverbs is not dragged

into the harlot's house; he wanders near her corner at twilight, is flattered, and follows "as an ox goeth to the slaughter … as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." David's fall began with a look from a rooftop, became adultery, then deception, and ended in murder, each step taken to hide the one before.

The drunkard in Proverbs describes the moment the cord closes: "They have stricken me … and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." Peter explains why: those who promise liberty are themselves "the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."

Author's Commentary

Every addiction begins with a temptation, and every temptation begins with a thought. The adversary delights in placing thoughts in our minds, for he knows that a thought entertained is the first spark of every fire he hopes to kindle.

Consider a campfire. Few things draw us like a fire in the open air at night—the glow, the warmth, the flicker of light against the dark. Yet no campfire has ever lit itself. Before there is a flame, someone must first think of a fire. Then the thought becomes action: we go and find a match. We strike it, and a small flame dances at its tip. We carry that flame to the kindling, and as the fire catches, we feed it—first twigs, then branches, then logs—until what began as a thought has become a roaring blaze.

Temptation follows the same course. It begins as a thought. With the first action, the thought becomes a flame on the end of a match. If the thought is not quenched, the match is struck; if we do not stop there, the fire is lit, and with every indulgence we feed it until it burns beyond our control. The place to put out a fire is before it is ever lit. The surest way to prevent the blaze is to quench the thought—to recognize it for what it is, to refuse it room, and to replace it with something better, before it ever reaches the match.

James 1:14–15

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 7:7–10; 7:21–23

7:7 And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,

7:8 Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house,

7:9 In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:

7:10 And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.

7:21 With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.

7:22 He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks;

7:23 Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Samuel 11:2–4; 11:14–15

11:2 And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

11:3 And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

11:4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

11:14 And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

11:15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 23:29–35

29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

30 They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.

32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

35 They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

2 Peter 2:18–19

18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

"He Shall Be Holden with the Cords of His Sins" — Appetites as Chains

Author's Commentary

Every appetite God gave was given for a good purpose, and every one can be turned into a chain. Enoch saw the adversary's whole design in a single image: Satan holding "a great chain in his hand," which "veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness," while he "looked up and laughed." Each ensnarement is a link in that chain. Isaiah pronounced woe on those who rise early to follow strong drink, and Mosiah records that the court of King Noah spent its days in wine and harlots.

The Lord gave the Word of Wisdom partly for this reason: "in consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days." Those who profit from addiction have every reason to create it. Paul's answer is to keep the body free: "All things are lawful unto me, ... but I will not be brought under the power of any," for "your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost."



Proverbs 5:22

22 His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Moses 7:26

26 And he beheld Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced.

— The Pearl of Great Price

Isaiah 5:11; 5:22

5:11 Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!

5:22 Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink:

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mosiah 11:14–15

14 And it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and he spent his time in riotous living with his wives and his concubines; and so did also his priests spend their time with harlots.

15 And it came to pass that he planted vineyards round about in the land; and he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber, and also his people.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 30:18

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 39:3–4

3 And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

4 Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted.

— The Book of Mormon

Matthew 5:27–30

27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 42:23

23 And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 89:4–9

4 Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation—

5 That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him.

6 And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.

7 And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies.

8 And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill.

9 And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

1 Corinthians 6:12; 6:18–20

6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all

things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

6:18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Elder Hartman Rector Jr.

It is primarily the spirit that sees, hears, feels, knows passion and desire; it is the spirit that becomes addicted to drugs, bad habits, and evil desires. It is not just the physical body that is addicted, but the spirit also, which, of course, is the real you and me.

— Hartman Rector Jr., "Repentance Makes Us Free," general conference, October 1970 (Conference Report, October 1970, 73)

"That They Might Have Matter for an Evil Report" — Coercion, Blackmail, and Entrapment



Author's Commentary

Once a person is caught, the snare can be used as a lever. This is where ensnarement becomes coercion, and where the adversary's methods join the secret combinations of Chapter IX. A person with a hidden addiction, a hidden debt, or a hidden sin can be threatened with exposure, and a threatened person can be made to do what he would never have done freely. Each concession becomes a new secret, and each new secret a new hold.

The scriptures record the pattern. The lords of the Philistines each offered

Delilah eleven hundred pieces of silver to entice Samson and learn the secret of his strength, so that they might "bind him to afflict him." Nehemiah's enemies hired a false prophet to frighten him into hiding in the temple, which was forbidden to him, "that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report." The Pharisees laid wait for the Savior, "seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him." Zeezrom offered Amulek six onties of silver if he would deny the existence of God, a bribe designed to buy a public denial.

Modern forms are easy to recognize. A person in debt to a drug dealer is made to carry drugs or recruit others. A public official who accepts one favor is later reminded of it and asked for another, until he lets the guilty go free "because of their money." A young person who shares a compromising image is threatened with its release unless he sends more, or pays. A lonely person is befriended online, drawn into affection, and then manipulated for money. An employee who covers one small wrong is told that exposure of the first will ruin him unless he helps with the next. In every case the pattern is the same as the oath of Cain: a secret, a threat, and a deeper agreement.

Judges 16:4–6

4 And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

6 And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Judges 16:18–21

18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Nehemiah 6:10–13

10 Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.

11 And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

12 And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

13 Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Luke 11:53–54

53 And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things:

54 Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 11:22–25

22 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord, which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord. And Zeezrom said unto him: Behold, here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a Supreme Being.

23 Now Amulek said: O thou child of hell, why tempt ye me? Knowest thou that the righteous yieldeth to no such temptations?

24 Believest thou that there is no God? I say unto you, Nay, thou knowest that there is a God, but thou lovest that lucre more than him.

25 And now thou hast lied before God unto me. Thou saidst unto me—Behold these six onties, which are of great worth, I will give unto thee—when thou hadst it in thy heart to retain them from me; and it was only thy desire that I should deny the true and living God, that thou mightest have cause to destroy me. And now behold, for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 12:6

6 And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity.

— The Book of Mormon

Proverbs 22:7

7 The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Exodus 23:8

8 And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 29:25

25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“He Fled, and Got Him Out” — The Opposite

Author’s Commentary

The opposite of ensnarement is freedom, and the scriptures show how it is kept and regained. Joseph, when Potiphar’s wife seized his garment, did not negotiate; “he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.” Paul counseled Timothy to “flee also youthful lusts.” Alma told his son Corianton to “go no more after the lusts of your eyes,” and the Savior taught the Nephites to “suffer none of these things to enter into your heart.” The Lord asks us to “let virtue garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly,” and Paul describes what to think on instead: whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

For those already caught, the Savior’s promise is the final answer to every cord: “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. … If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” The snare depends on secrecy and shame; it loses its power in the light. Confession, counsel, and the help of others break the leverage that secrets give, and the grace of Christ breaks the chain itself.

Genesis 39:7–12

7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

9 There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

10 And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

11 And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



2 Timothy 2:22

22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Alma 39:9

9 Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

— The Book of Mormon

3 Nephi 12:29–30

29 Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart;

30 For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.

— The Book of Mormon

D&C 121:45

45 Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Philippians 4:8

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

John 8:34–36

34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 13:28

28 But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;

— The Book of Mormon

D&C 62:1

1 Behold, and hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XVII. The Few Snares — Young Adults and the Way Back to the Light

Author's Commentary

The years between adolescence and settled adulthood are years of leaving: leaving home, leaving the routines of youth, leaving the faith of one's parents to build a faith of one's own. They are also the years in which many step away from the light. Each person who leaves has a story, and every story is different. A friend who hurt us, a leader who failed us, a question no one answered, a habit we could not break, a crowd we wanted to belong to—the details are endless.

Yet the snares themselves are not endless. In my study and experience, there are only a handful of them, and the myriad stories fall into those few. There may be a thousand reasons a young person becomes angry at God or at his parents, but they all roll into the same entrapment, and it leads away from the light by the same path. This chapter names the few snares, shows what they have in common, and offers a playbook for recognizing them and becoming free. The analysis and the playbook are my own teaching; the scriptures and the words of Church leaders are offered in support.

Running through every part of this chapter is one truth: the way out of every snare is a Person. There must be a desire to build a special relationship with Jesus Christ—to let Him in, to seek Him out, and to hear Him. No playbook can replace that relationship; the playbook only clears the way for it. He will help you to heal, and He will help you to overcome the darkness.

Jeremiah 29:13

13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

“Remember Now Thy Creator in the Days of Thy Youth” — Why These Years Matter

Author’s Commentary

Alma counseled his son to learn wisdom in his youth, and Paul told Timothy to let no one despise his youth, but to be an example of the believers. President Russell M. Nelson has reminded young adults that their most important identities are eternal ones, and that the adversary rejoices in labels that narrow the way we see ourselves. These are the years to take charge of one’s own testimony.

Of all the relationships formed in these years, the one that matters most is with the Savior. Seek Him now, while your habits and your heart are still being formed, and He will walk with you through every choice that follows.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Alma 37:35

35 O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.

— The Book of Mormon

1 Timothy 4:12

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

President Russell M. Nelson

First and foremost, you are a child of God. Second, as a member of the Church, you are a child of the covenant. And third, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. …

The adversary rejoices in labels because they divide us and restrict the way we think about ourselves and each other. … I plead with you to take charge of your testimony. Work for it. Own it. Care for it.

— Russell M. Nelson, "Choices for Eternity," worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022

“Will Ye Also Go Away?” — Many Stories, the Same Path



Author’s Commentary

Whatever the snare, the path away from the light follows the same five steps. First comes a wound or a want: something real or perceived that hurts, or something desired that the gospel forbids. Second comes a story: an explanation that justifies distance—“they hurt me,” “it isn’t true,” “it isn’t fair,” “I’m not good enough,” “I don’t need it.” Third comes withdrawal from the sources of light: prayer grows short, then stops; scripture is set aside; the sacrament is missed; faithful friends are avoided. Fourth, darkness fills the space the light left behind, and the story begins to feel truer. Fifth, identity changes: “I used to believe” becomes “I was never really one of them.”

The details of the story do not matter to the adversary. What matters to him is the third step—the withdrawal. As long as we stay near the light, the wound can heal, the question can be answered, and the want can be mastered. Once we withdraw, every snare tightens. That is why the playbook at the end of this chapter begins, not with the story, but with stopping the withdrawal.

The answer to the withdrawal is not simply to return to a set of practices, but to return to Him. Prayer, scripture, and the sacrament are not the destination; they are the places where we meet Christ. When the relationship is real, the practices come alive, and the story that justified our distance begins to lose its power.

Snare One: Offense — “A Brother Offended Is Harder to Be Won Than a Strong City”



Author’s Commentary

Offense is the snare behind the greatest number of stories. The grievance may be against God (“He didn’t answer,” “He let this happen”), against parents

("they were too strict," "they were hypocrites"), against leaders or members ("they judged me," "no one reached out"), or against the Church itself. The reasons are myriad, but the snare is one: a wound is nursed into a grievance, and the grievance becomes a reason to stay away. The Savior foresaw those who would receive the word with joy and then, "by and by," be offended. Elder David A. Bednar taught that being offended is ultimately a choice, not a condition imposed on us—which means it is also a snare we can choose to leave.

The cure for offense is found in the One who was more deeply wronged than any of us and who forgave. Bring the wound to Him. He does not ask us to pretend we were not hurt; He asks us to let Him heal what others broke. When the risen Lord stood among the Nephites, He invited all who were afflicted in any manner to come to Him, and He healed them every one.

Proverbs 18:19

19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Elder David A. Bednar

"Several years ago a man said something in Sunday School that offended me, and I have not been back since." … "I did not agree with the counsel the bishop gave me. I will not step foot in that building again as long as he is serving in that position."

However, it ultimately is impossible for another person to offend you or to offend me. Indeed, believing that another person offended us is fundamentally false. To be offended is a choice we make; it is not a condition inflicted or imposed upon us by someone or something else.

— David A. Bednar, "And Nothing Shall Offend Them," general conference, October 2006



D&C 64:9–10

9 Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.

— The Doctrine and Covenants



3 Nephi 17:7

7 Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy.

— The Book of Mormon

Snare Two: Unanswered Questions — Doubt That Feeds on Itself

Author's Commentary

Honest questions are not a snare; stagnant doubt is. A question about history, doctrine, or the conduct of Church members can lead to learning and a stronger faith, or it can become an end in itself. The snare closes when the question is taken everywhere except to God, and when faith already received is set aside while waiting for every answer. The earlier section on unbelief, and Elder Widtsoe's counsel on doubt, apply directly here.

Questions are best carried to Christ Himself. Alma taught that even a desire to believe is enough to begin. Seek Him out, and listen for Him in the scriptures and in the quiet promptings of the Spirit; He knows the answers we are waiting for, and He will not leave us without the help we need while we wait.

James 1:5–6

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 32:27

27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an

> experiment upon my words, and 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.
>
> — *The Book of Mormon*

Snare Three: Appetite — The Chain That Grows Link by Link



Author's Commentary

Pornography, substances, and the endless pull of entertainment and screens are the most visible snares of these years. Each begins with a small indulgence that seems private and harmless. Each grows by repetition until it is no longer chosen but required. The chapter on ensnarements describes how the chain is forged; here it is enough to say that appetite is almost never the story a young person tells about leaving, yet it is very often the reason. Shame over a hidden habit makes prayer feel false and church feel unbearable, and withdrawal follows.

The same is true of sexual sin, which so often begins in private moments that seem harmless. We are commanded to avoid the exploration of another's body. We are commanded to avoid becoming overly passionate in secluded places. Sexual encounters are reserved for husband and wife, being legally and lawfully married—man and woman. If you find that you have crossed a line, remember: YOU are not a bad person. We have all faced these situations, and the Savior is there to help you. BUT there is a repentance process that you must follow, and it involves summoning the courage to overcome embarrassment and talking about it with your Bishop.

No chain is stronger than the Savior. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Let Him into the very place you are most ashamed of; He will help you to become free, and He will not turn away.

Mosiah 4:30

30 But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

— The Book of Mormon

Isaiah 61:1

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Snare Four: Approval — The Great and Spacious Building

Author's Commentary

In Lehi's dream, many who had tasted the fruit fell away not because it was bitter, but because they were ashamed when the people in the great and spacious building mocked them. The desire to belong is strong in these years, and the world offers belonging on its own terms. Sometimes the mockery is open; more often it is the quiet pressure of friends, feeds, and culture, and the labels that tell a young person who he is and what he must think.

The crowd is loud, but the Good Shepherd's voice is the one that knows your name. His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, and no one can pluck them out of His hand. Choosing to hear Him above the noise of the building is the whole of the escape from this snare.



JOHN 10:27–28

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

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

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Snare Five: Pride — "When They Are Learned They Think They Are Wise"



AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY

Education, independence, and new ideas are gifts. The snare is the conclusion that we have outgrown the faith that brought us here, or that we no longer need God. Nephi's brother Jacob warned that learning is good only if we hearken unto the counsels of God.

King Benjamin asked how a man can know the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him. Pride keeps Christ a stranger. The humble seek Him out, and in serving Him they come to know Him.

2 Nephi 9:28–29

28 O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

29 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Mosiah 5:13

13 For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?

— *The Book of Mormon*

Snare Six: Shame — "I Am Too Far Gone"

Author's Commentary

Shame is the adversary's second voice. First he says "it doesn't matter"; afterward he says "it's too late." The young person who has sinned, or who feels he can never measure up, withdraws not because he stopped believing but because he believes he no longer belongs. The Lord's answer is that He cannot forget us: He has graven us upon the palms of His hands. The chapter on the adversary's methods and the Savior's parable of the prodigal son speak to this snare at length.

Shame tells us to hide from Christ; He tells us to come to Him. He already knows everything we are ashamed of, and He has not turned away. Let Him in, and let Him lift what you cannot carry. There is no one He cannot heal.



ISAIAH 49:15–16

15 Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.

16 Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Snare Seven: Drift — The Slow Neglect



AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY

Some never make a decision to leave. They simply become busy—with school, work, relationships, and recreation—and the small practices of faith fall away one by one. Drift has no dramatic story, which makes it the hardest snare to notice. Alma's question is the test: if we have ever felt to sing the song of redeeming love, can we feel so now?

Drift ends when we choose to abide in Christ again. The Savior taught that a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine. Seek Him out each day—not only in crisis, but in the ordinary hours—and the relationship itself will keep you from drifting.

Alma 5:26

26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, 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?

— The Book of Mormon

John 15:4–5

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

A Playbook for Freedom

Author's Commentary

Part One — Identify the snare. Ask yourself honestly: (1) What have I stopped doing—prayer, scripture, church, the sacrament, time with faithful friends—and when did it start? (2) What story do I tell to explain the distance? (3) Strip away the details of the story: is the root offense, unanswered questions, appetite, approval, pride, shame, or drift? More than one may be present, but one is usually first. (4) Who is served by my staying away from the light?

Part Two — Steps to become free. Every step below is a step toward Christ; none of them works without Him.

Step 1 — Desire Him. Before anything else, want a real relationship with Jesus Christ. Tell Him so in prayer, in your own words. Let Him in. Seek Him out. Listen for Him in the scriptures, in the sacrament, in the temple, and in the quiet promptings of the Spirit. He will help you to heal and to overcome the darkness.

Step 2 — Name the snare, not just the story. Say it plainly to yourself and to God: "I have been offended," "I am ashamed," "I have drifted." A snare that is named has already begun to loosen.

Step 3 — Stop the withdrawal today. Return to the smallest source of light you can: one sincere prayer, even if it is only "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Read a few verses. Go to one sacrament meeting. Every small act of light is a step back toward Him.

Step 4 — Clear your space. Use the pattern in the chapter "Clearing Your Space": command darkness to leave in the name of Jesus Christ, and ask the Father to send His angels to attend you. Then invite the Savior in; a cleared space is meant to be filled with Him.

Step 5 — Separate God from the people who hurt you. Parents, leaders, and members are imperfect; God is not. Do not let someone else's failure cost you your relationship with Him. Get to know Christ as He is, not as others have represented Him.

Step 6 — Release the offense. Forgiveness is not approval of what was done; it is refusing to let it keep you from the light. The Lord requires us to forgive all men, and He will help us do it. Ask Christ to help you forgive; He has borne the wound too, and He can heal it.

Step 7 — Take your questions to honest sources and to God. Ask of God, who gives liberally. Study faithful answers as diligently as you have studied the doubts. Hold fast to what you already know while you wait for more. Listen for His voice as you study.

Step 8 — Break the chain with help. Appetites that have become addictions rarely yield to willpower alone. Talk with your bishop, use the Church's Addiction Recovery Program, and seek qualified professional help. Christ is the Deliverer; the help He sends through others is part of His rescue.

Step 9 — Reconnect with people of faith. Let someone nourish you by the good word of God: a parent, a minister, a friend, a leader. Isolation is the adversary's ally. Christ often comes to us through the people who love us.

Step 10 — Serve someone. Service turns the heart outward and breaks the self-absorption on which every snare feeds. When we serve others, we find Him among them.

Step 11 — Renew your covenants. Take the sacrament each week, and work toward the temple. Covenants are the shelter described earlier in this book. Each covenant binds us more closely to Him.

Step 12 — Guard the gate. Watch your thoughts, your words, and your deeds. Clear your space often, and notice early when the pattern of withdrawal begins again. Keep your thoughts turned toward Him.

Step 13 — Be patient with yourself. Overcoming the world does not mean becoming perfect in this life; it means that your resistance to sin increases and your love for God grows. He is patient with you; the relationship grows line upon line.

Part Three — For parents and friends. Do not argue with the story; love the person, and point them gently to Christ rather than to yourself. Keep the door open and the light on. Pray, fast, and be ready to run to meet them while they are yet a great way off, as the father of the prodigal did. And remember that not every struggle is a snare: anxiety, depression, and other illnesses can look like spiritual drift, and they call for professional care as well as faith.

Moroni 6:4

4 And 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.

— The Book of Mormon

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

However bewildering this all may be, these afflictions are some of the realities of mortal life, and there should be no more shame in acknowledging them than in acknowledging a battle with high blood pressure. … If you had appendicitis, God would expect you to seek a priesthood blessing and get the best medical care available. So too with emotional disorders.

— Jeffrey R. Holland, "Like a Broken Vessel," general conference, October 2013

Matthew 7:7–8

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

President Russell M. Nelson

In those two words—"Hear Him"—God gives us the pattern for success, happiness, and joy in this life. … We can go to the scriptures. They teach us about Jesus Christ. … Daily immersion in the word of God is crucial for spiritual survival. … We also hear Him more clearly as we refine our ability to recognize the whisperings of the Holy Ghost.

— Russell M. Nelson, "Hear Him," general conference, April 2020

“To Whom Shall We Go?” — The Way Back

Author’s Commentary

When many disciples turned away and walked no more with the Savior, He asked the Twelve whether they would also go away. Peter’s answer is the answer for every young person standing at the edge of the light: there is nowhere else to go, for Christ alone has the words of eternal life. Every snare is finite. The way back is always open.

That is the heart of this chapter and of this book. Desire Him. Let Him in. Seek Him out. Hear Him. Whatever the snare, Jesus Christ will help you to heal and to overcome the darkness.

John 6:66–68

66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Elder M. Russell Ballard

So before you make that spiritually perilous choice to leave, I encourage you to stop and think carefully before giving up whatever it was that brought you to your testimony of the restored Church of Jesus Christ in the first place. Stop and think about what you have felt here and why you felt it. Think about the times when the Holy Ghost has borne witness to you of eternal truth.

— M. Russell Ballard, "To Whom Shall We Go?" general conference, October 2016

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XVIII. Repentance



Author's Commentary

Every chapter of this book has described the adversary's work. This chapter describes its undoing. Repentance is the opposite of every method we have studied: where the adversary hides, repentance confesses; where he binds, repentance looses; where he says there is no way back, repentance is the way back. The scriptures call men to repentance on nearly every page, far too often to gather here, so this chapter cites only a few examples, and then turns to the struggle that takes place in the heart of every sinner between the voice that says "hide" and the voice that says "come."

"Repent Ye" — The Prophets' Call



Author's Commentary

Jonah preached a single sentence of warning in Nineveh, and the whole city, from the king to the beasts, put on sackcloth, and God "repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them." Joel called Israel to "rend your heart, and not your garments," for the Lord "is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." John the Baptist's first words were "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." At Pentecost, when the people were pricked in their hearts and asked, "What shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you." Samuel the Lamanite, from the wall of Zarahemla, promised that if the people would repent, the Lord would turn away His anger. And Alma declared that the Lord "sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you."

Jonah 3:4–10

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Joel 2:12–13

12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Matthew 3:1–2

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Acts 2:37–38

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Helaman 13:11

11 But if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God I will turn away mine anger, saith the Lord; yea, thus saith the Lord, blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not.

— The Book of Mormon

Alma 5:33–34

33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.

34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;

— The Book of Mormon

"My Guilt Was Swept Away" — The Blessings of Repentance

Author's Commentary

Repentance is not a punishment but a release. King Benjamin's people, having cried for mercy, were "filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience." Enos wrestled in prayer all day and into the night until a voice declared his sins forgiven, "and my guilt was swept away." Peter promised "times of refreshing … from the presence of the Lord." The Savior Himself explained why He suffered: "that they might not suffer if they would repent." And heaven rejoices: "joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," and "how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!"

Even the worst may return. Manasseh, the king who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood and caused his own children to pass through the fire, was carried to Babylon in chains. There he "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him," and the Lord heard him and brought him home. If Manasseh could return, no one is beyond reach.

Mosiah 4:1–3

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

2 And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

3 And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Enos 1:4–8

4 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

5 And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.

6 And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

7 And I said: Lord, how is it done?

8 And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Acts 3:19

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



D&C 19:15–19

15 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.

16 For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

17 But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

18 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—

19 Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

Luke 15:7

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 18:10–13

10 Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

11 For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.

12 And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance.

13 And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!

— The Doctrine and Covenants

2 Chronicles 33:1–2; 33:9–13

33:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem:

33:2 But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

33:9 So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the

children of Israel.

33:10 And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

33:11 Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

33:12 And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

33:13 And prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"I Was Afraid … and I Hid Myself" — The Adversary's Counsel to Hide

Author's Commentary

The first thing Adam and Eve did after they transgressed was to hide. "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." The first thing Cain did after he killed his brother was to deny it: "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" The instinct to hide is as old as sin, and the adversary makes the most of it.

We may speculate on how he does it. After a sin, he whispers that no one must ever know: that the shame of confession would be unbearable, that others would think less of us, that we can quietly fix it ourselves. It feels like protection. But a hidden sin cannot be healed, because it cannot be brought to the Physician. The secret becomes a burden, and then a hiding place, and then a room in which the adversary can speak without interruption. David described what that silence does: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." The moment a sinner decides that the secret must never come to light, he has begun to surrender to further darkness, because every future

choice must now protect the first one. This is how the snares of the previous chapter tighten, and how the adversary gains his leverage.

The scriptures answer plainly. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” “Be sure your sin will find you out.” And from the same psalm in which David confessed his silence: “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. … and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

Moses 4:14–16

14 And they heard the voice of the Lord God, as they were walking in the garden, in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife went to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

15 And I, the Lord God, called unto Adam, and said unto him: Where goest thou?

16 And he said: I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I beheld that I was naked, and I hid myself.

— *The Pearl of Great Price*

Moses 5:34

34 And the Lord said unto Cain: Where is Abel, thy brother? And he said: I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?

— *The Pearl of Great Price*

Psalms 32:3–5

3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Proverbs 28:13

13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Numbers 32:23

23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Alma 39:8

8 But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

— *The Book of Mormon*

2 Nephi 27:27

27 And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord! And their works are in the dark; and they say: Who seeth us, and who knoweth us? And they also say: Surely, your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay. But behold, I will show unto them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that I know all their works. For shall the work say of him that made it, he made me not? Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, he had no understanding?

— *The Book of Mormon*

"Come Out of the Water" — When the Adversary Interrupts Repentance

Author's Commentary

The adversary does not only keep sinners from starting repentance; he also tries to stop it once it has begun. He whispers that the work is already finished, that enough has been done, and that the sinner may stop short of the fruit of repentance. Amulek's warning answers him: "do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end."

The lesson is subtle. The adversary may tell one sinner that repentance is impossible, and another that it is already finished. Either way the work stops. Alma warned against procrastinating the day of repentance, for "this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God," and those who delay until the end become "subjected to the spirit of the devil."

Alma 34:31–35

31 Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

32 For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

33 And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

34 Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.

35 For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Heber C. Kimball

I have said, a great many times, that that spirit which possesses us here will possess us when our spirits leave our bodies, and we shall there be very much the same as we are here.

— Heber C. Kimball, 25 January 1857, Journal of Discourses 4:273–74

Elder Hartman Rector Jr.

It appears that we do not change when we die, which means that if we are addicted to drugs, bad habits, and evil desires when we go out of this life, those influences will probably follow us. Therefore, repentance and forgiveness, which come under the heading of fearing God and keeping his commandments, are our whole duty here in mortality.

— Hartman Rector Jr., "The Gospel," general conference, October 1985

"Awake Thou That Sleepest" — Coming Out of the Darkness

Author's Commentary

The Savior's arms are always open, but He will not drag anyone out of the dark. The sinner must decide to come. The prodigal son "came to himself" in the far country and said, "I will arise and go to my father," and while he was yet a great way off, his father ran to meet him. Peter wrote that God has "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Paul cried, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The Savior stands at the door and knocks, but the door opens from the inside.

When the resurrected Lord spoke to the survivors of the destruction in the Americas, His first message was an invitation: "Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? ... Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive." Alma the Younger, who had fought against the Church until an angel stopped him, described the change in a single sentence: "I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God."



1 Peter 2:9

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Ephesians 5:8–14

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13 But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Revelation 3:20

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



3 Nephi 9:13–14

13 O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?

14 Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.

— The Book of Mormon



Mosiah 27:28–30

28 Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

29 My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

30 I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.

— The Book of Mormon



President George Q. Cannon

It is true that some have greater power of resistance than others, but everyone has the power to close his heart against doubt, against darkness, against unbelief, against depression, against anger, against hatred, against jealousy, against malice, against envy. God has given this power unto all of us, and we can gain still greater power by calling upon Him for that which we lack.

— George Q. Cannon, discourse, Deseret Weekly, 29 September 1894; Gospel Truth, 19

"Why Will Ye Die?" — The Lie That There Is No Way Back



Author's Commentary

The adversary's final lie is the one we met in the second chapter: that there is no way back, only forward to damnation. He tells the sinner that he has gone too far, sinned too often, or waited too long; that God is tired of him; that he may as well continue, since he is already lost. Every one of those claims is contradicted by scripture. The Lord swears by His own life that He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live," and asks, "Why will ye die?" Jacob pleaded with his people to "cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you," because "his arm of mercy is extended

towards you in the light of the day."

There is a real danger in delay, and the scriptures warn of it; but the danger lies in refusing to come, never in coming too late while there is still breath and desire. As long as a heart can turn, the arms of mercy remain extended. The adversary can only win by persuading us not to try. The opposite of his lie is the simplest truth in this book: Christ is the way back, and He is waiting.



Ezekiel 33:11

11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Jacob 6:4–6

4 And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people; but as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

5 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts.

6 Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for why will ye die?

— The Book of Mormon

3 Nephi 9:22

22 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.

— The Book of Mormon

John 8:12

12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XIX. The World of Spirits — Paradise and Prison



Author's Commentary

The contest between good and evil does not end at death. Alma taught that the spirits of all men, whether good or evil, are taken home to God who gave them life, and then to a state of paradise or of darkness until the resurrection. Brigham Young taught that the wicked remain wicked there and the faithful remain faithful—and that the faithful pass beyond the adversary's reach, becoming masters over his power.

Yet even the prison is not beyond the mercy of God. Christ Himself opened its door, and the gospel is preached there still. This chapter follows the opposites of this book across the veil.

"A State of Happiness, Which Is Called Paradise" — Paradise and Prison



Alma 40:11–12; 40:14

40:11 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

40:12 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

40:14 Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.

— The Book of Mormon



BRIGHAM YOUNG

The wicked spirits that leave here and go into the spirit world, are they wicked there? Yes.

Suppose, then, that a man is evil in his heart—wholly given up to wickedness, and in that condition dies, his spirit will enter into the spirit world intent upon evil. On the other hand, if we are striving with all the powers and faculties God has given us to improve upon our talents, to prepare ourselves to dwell in eternal life, and the grave receives our bodies while we are thus engaged, with what disposition will our spirits enter their next state? They will be still striving to do the things of God, only in a much greater degree—learning, increasing, growing in grace and in the knowledge of the truth.

— Brigham Young, Deseret News Weekly, 27 August 1856; Discourses of Brigham Young, 379; Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), chapter 38

"Masters over the Power of Satan" — The Faithful Beyond the Veil



BRIGHAM YOUNG

If we are faithful to our religion, when we go into the spirit world, the fallen spirits—Lucifer and the third part of the heavenly hosts that came with him, and the spirits of wicked men who have dwelt upon this earth, the whole of them combined will have no influence over our spirits. Is not that an advantage? Yes. All the rest of the children of men are more or less subject to

them, and they are subject to them as they were while here in the flesh.

Here [the faithful] shall be perplexed and hunted by him; but when we go into the spirit world there we are masters over the power of satan, and he cannot afflict us any more, and this is enough for me to know.

— Brigham Young, Discourses of Brigham Young, 379; Deseret News Weekly, 1 October 1856; Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), chapter 38

"He Went and Preached unto the Spirits in Prison" — The Door Opened



1 Peter 3:18–19

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



1 Peter 4:6

6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 138:18–19; 138:29–30

138:18 While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful;

138:19 And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance.

138:29 And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and my understanding quickened, and I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them;

138:30 But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Brigham Young

Jesus was the first man that ever went to preach to the spirits in prison, holding the keys of the Gospel of salvation to them. Those keys were delivered to him in the day and hour that he went into the spirit world, and with them he opened the door of salvation to the spirits in prison.

Compare those inhabitants on the earth who have heard the Gospel in our day, with the millions who have never heard it, or had the keys of salvation presented to them, and you will conclude at once as I do, that there is an almighty work to perform in the spirit world.

— Brigham Young, Discourses of Brigham Young, 377–78; Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), chapter 38

“It Is Right Just as It Is” — The Veil

Author’s Commentary

President Young cautioned against wishing the veil away. To see and converse freely with those who have gone before might remove the very trial of faith we came here to meet. The veil, like opposition itself, is part of the design.

Brigham Young

“Why cannot I see him? Why cannot I converse with his spirit? I wish I could see my husband or my father and converse with him!” It is not reasonable that you should, it is not right that you should; perhaps you would miss the very object of your pursuit if you had this privilege. … It is right just as it is, that this veil should be closed down; that we do not see God, that we do not see angels, that we do not converse with them except through strict obedience to his requirements, and faith in Jesus Christ.

— Brigham Young, Deseret News Semi-Weekly, 28 July 1874; Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), chapter 38

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XX. Counterfeit Altars

Author's Commentary

From the beginning, the altar has been the place where heaven and earth meet. Adam built one outside the garden and offered the firstlings of his flock, and an angel explained that the offering was "a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father." Every true altar in scripture points to Christ. It is therefore no surprise that the adversary, who imitates everything God does, has built altars of his own. Wherever the true sacrifice was revealed, a counterfeit soon followed: the same fire, the same blood, the same outward form, turned toward another master.

This chapter looks at the counterfeit altar in scripture, at the place John called "Satan's seat," and at the possibility that the spirits once worshipped at those altars may return to nations that turn away from God.

"A Similitude of the Sacrifice" — The True Altar

Author's Commentary

The true altar teaches three things. It is commanded by God, not invented by man. It offers the firstlings, the best, as a token of the Son who would be offered. And it spares the child: when Abraham raised the knife over Isaac, the Lord stopped his hand and provided a ram in his place, and Abraham named the place "Jehovah-jireh," the Lord will provide. The counterfeit altar reverses every one of these. It is invented by men or demons, it demands what God never asked, and it consumes the child.

Moses 5:5–8

5 And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

6 And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

7 And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

8 Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.

— The Pearl of Great Price

Genesis 22:7–14

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not

withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"They Sacrificed unto Devils" — The Counterfeit Offering

Author's Commentary

The scriptures say plainly who receives the offerings made at false altars. Moses commanded Israel to "no more offer their sacrifices unto devils," and sang of a people who "sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not." Jeroboam ordained priests "for the devils, and for the calves which he had made." Paul was explicit: "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils."

Leviticus 17:7

7 And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Deuteronomy 32:16–17

16 They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger.

17 They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Chronicles 11:15

15 And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Corinthians 10:19–21

19 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?

20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

21 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord′s table, and of the table of devils.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Elder John A. Widtsoe

Satan succeeded in those early days to turn many from righteous lives. These people lived sinfully. Yet, as they departed from association with the people of the Lord, they carried with them the knowledge of the gospel. Such parts of it as seemed to fit their desires they retained, often warped beyond recognition. … Even those who refused full obedience, took of the gospel such truths as they desired, and without authority built their religions in imitation of the full truth.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 17, "How Do You Account for the Gospel Resemblances in Non-Christian Religions?"

"Like unto the Feast That Is in Judah" — The Counterfeit Altar

Author's Commentary

The most dangerous counterfeits are the ones that look almost right. When Jeroboam divided the kingdom, he feared that his people would return to Jerusalem to worship, so he built altars at Bethel and Dan, set up golden calves, and ordained a feast in the eighth month "like unto the feast that is in Judah." It had the familiar season, the familiar sacrifice, and the familiar words, but it was aimed at a different god. King Ahaz saw a foreign altar at Damascus, sent its pattern home, had a copy built, and moved the Lord's brazen altar aside to make room for it. The Zoramites built a Rameumptom and repeated a single prayer from its top once a week, thanking God that they were chosen and others were not.

Abraham's record shows the end of such altars. The priests of Elkenah bound Abraham on their altar to offer him as they had offered others, but the angel of the Lord loosed him, and "the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them."

1 Kings 12:28–33

28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

29 And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan.

30 And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.

31 And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

32 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made.

33 So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

2 Kings 16:10–16

10 And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof.

11 And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus.

12 And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and

the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon.

13 And he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings, upon the altar.

14 And he brought also the brasen altar, which was before the LORD, from the forefront of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar.

15 And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king′s burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to inquire by.

16 Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Alma 31:21–23

21 Now the place was called by them Rameumptom, which, being interpreted, is the holy stand.

22 Now, from this stand they did offer up, every man, the selfsame prayer unto God, thanking their God that they were chosen of him, and that he did not lead them away after the tradition of their brethren, and that their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about.

23 Now, after the people had all offered up thanks after this manner, they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand, to offer up thanks after their manner.

— The Book of Mormon

Abraham 1:15–17; 1:20

1:15 And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold, I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with the vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands;

1:16 And his voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father's house, and from all thy kinsfolk, into a strange land which thou knowest not of;

1:17 And this because they have turned their hearts away from me, to worship the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; therefore I have come down to visit them, and to destroy him who hath lifted up his hand against thee, Abraham, my son, to take away thy life.

1:20 Behold, Potiphar's Hill was in the land of Ur, of Chaldea. And the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them, and smote the priest that he died; and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the court of Pharaoh; which Pharaoh signifies king by royal blood.

— The Pearl of Great Price

"Where Satan's Seat Is" — The Altar at Pergamos

Author's Commentary

In the book of Revelation, the Lord told the church at Pergamos, "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." The Greek word translated "seat" is thronos, a throne. Many interpreters have connected this throne with the great altar that stood on the acropolis of Pergamon, a monumental sacrificial altar built in the second century before Christ,

probably to Zeus and Athena, and carved with the war of the gods against the giants. Whether John meant that altar, the city's temple to the emperor, or the whole pagan religious life of Pergamon, the image is the same: the adversary has a throne on earth, and it is an altar.

The history of that altar is striking. It was excavated by German archaeologists in the 1870s and 1880s, carried to Berlin, and rebuilt in a museum designed around it. In 1945 the Red Army removed it to Leningrad, and it was returned to East Berlin in 1959. Some writers have gone further, claiming that its design shaped certain twentieth-century political stages and platforms. Those connections are debated and should be held loosely. But the lesson of Revelation 2 does not depend on them: Satan's throne was at the center of a city's public and religious life, and the faithful there were called to hold fast while living in its shadow.



Revelation 2:12–13

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"Empty, Swept, and Garnished" — When the Old Gods Return



Author's Commentary

The Savior's parable of the unclean spirit describes a spirit that leaves a man

and wanders through dry places seeking rest. Finding none, it returns to its former house, finds it "empty, swept, and garnished," and brings back seven spirits more wicked than itself. The parable speaks of a single soul, but the same pattern can be seen in nations. When faith in Christ spread among the nations, the ancient gods lost their altars. When a nation later empties its house of God, the old spirits may find it open once again.

Three of the gods the Bible names most often illustrate the pattern. Baal, whose worship Israel took up again and again, stands for the desire for dominion and for a culture that rejects the authority of God. Ashtoreth, worshipped as "the queen of heaven," stands for the corruption of sexuality and the blurring of what was once held sacred. Molech, who received children in the fire, stands for the sacrifice of the innocent. How closely these ancient patterns match the events of our own day is a matter each reader must weigh for himself, but the scriptural pattern is real, and it parallels what this book has traced.

Solomon, the wisest of kings, built high places for Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Molech on the hill facing Jerusalem, and Israel served "Baalim" and "Ashtaroth" within a generation of Joshua. Jeremiah found whole families making cakes for the queen of heaven, and when he rebuked them they answered that they had prospered while they served her. The altars were not always of stone. They were built wherever a people chose to offer the best of what they had to something other than God. In our day we may ask the same question of ourselves: what receives our firstlings? Whatever receives our time, our devotion, and our children in place of God has become an altar.

Matthew 12:43–45

43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Judges 2:11–13

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



1 Kings 11:4–8

4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.

7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Jeremiah 7:18

18 The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*



Jeremiah 44:17–19

17 But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.

18 But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.

19 And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

“The Fire of the Lord Fell” — The True Altar Prevails

Author’s Commentary

The contest on Mount Carmel is scripture’s clearest confrontation between the two altars. The prophets of Baal called on their god from morning until noon, leaped upon their altar, and cut themselves until the blood gushed out, “but there was neither voice, nor any to answer.” Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord that had been broken down, drenched it with water, and prayed once. “Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice,” and the people cried, “The Lord, he is the God.” At Bethel, a man of God cried against Jeroboam’s altar, and it was rent and its ashes poured out.

The final answer to every counterfeit altar is the sacrifice that ended all others. After His resurrection, the Savior told the Nephites that their burnt offerings were done away: “ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” Hebrews teaches that we are sanctified “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” And Paul describes the only altar left for a disciple: “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” The adversary’s altars demand the lives of others. The Lord’s altar asks only for our own hearts, and gives them back whole.

1 Kings 18:21–24; 18:26–29; 18:36–39

18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

18:22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

18:23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no

fire under:

18:24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

18:26 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

18:27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

18:28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

18:29 And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

18:36 And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

18:37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

18:38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

18:39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Kings 13:1–5

1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.

2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.

3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.

4 And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Beth-el, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.

5 The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

3 Nephi 9:19–20

19 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. 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 Lamanites, 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.

— The Book of Mormon

Hebrews 10:10–12

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of

Jesus Christ once for all.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



Romans 12:1

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

XXI. The Unseen Hosts



Author's Commentary

This book has spent many pages on the powers of darkness. It would be incomplete, and untrue, if it did not give equal attention to the powers of light. The same scriptures that describe the adversary and his hosts describe a far greater company of angels, unseen by mortal eyes, who protect, direct, and minister, and who keep the plan of God moving forward in the face of every opposition.

Some of what follows is clearly taught in scripture. Some is educated speculation, drawn from the scriptures but not fully revealed, and it is offered as such.

"They That Be with Us Are More" — The Unseen Presence



Author's Commentary

When the king of Syria sent horses and chariots by night to surround the city where Elisha was, Elisha's servant rose early, saw the army, and cried, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Elisha answered, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them," and prayed, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes." The servant looked again, "and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

That scene is a window into what is always true. “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” The angels are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” Jacob saw them ascending and descending between heaven and earth, and on his journey home “the angels of God met him,” so that he named the place Mahanaim, “two camps”: his own, and God’s. The Lord promised His latter-day servants, “mine angels round about you, to bear you up.” And Mormon taught that angels have not ceased to minister, for “it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men.”



2 Kings 6:14–17

14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Psalms 34:7

7 The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Psalms 91:11–12

11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Hebrews 1:13–14

13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Genesis 28:12; 32:1–2

28:12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

32:1 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

32:2 And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 84:88

88 And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Moroni 7:29–32; 7:36–37

7:29 And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.

7:30 For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

7:31 And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by

declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him.

7:32 And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men.

7:36 Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? 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?

7:37 Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.

— The Book of Mormon



Heber C. Kimball

If evil spirits could come to me, cannot ministering spirits and angels also come from God? Of course they can, and there are thousands of them.

— Heber C. Kimball, 2 March 1856, Journal of Discourses 3:229

"Every One According to His Order" — The Organization of Angels



Author's Commentary

The scriptures describe the heavenly hosts as ordered, not random. Isaiah saw seraphim with six wings crying "Holy, holy, holy." Cherubim guarded the

way to the tree of life. Michael is "the archangel" and "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people"; Gabriel is the messenger who "stand[s] in the presence of God." John saw seven angels who stood before God, and four angels given "power over the four parts of the earth." Paul names thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, all created by Christ. Latter-day revelation adds that heavenly messengers include both resurrected angels and "the spirits of just men made perfect," and that Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and "divers angels" each restored their own keys and powers.

We may reasonably speculate that the hosts of heaven are organized much as the priesthood is on earth: in orders and offices, each with its stewardship, and all under the direction of God. Some guard, some carry messages, some minister to the dying, some to little children, some to nations. What is certain is that none act on their own authority; they are "subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command."



Isaiah 6:1–3

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Genesis 3:24

24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Daniel 12:1

1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Luke 1:19

19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Revelation 5:11; 8:2

5:11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

8:2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Colossians 1:16

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

D&C 77:8

8 Q. What are we to understand by the four angels, spoken of in the 7th chapter and 1st verse of Revelation? A. We are to understand that they are four angels sent forth from God, to whom is given power over the four parts of the earth, to save life and to destroy; these are they who have the everlasting gospel to commit to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; having power to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness.

— *The Doctrine and Covenants*

D&C 129:1–3

1 There are two kinds of beings in heaven, namely: Angels, who are resurrected personages, having bodies of flesh and bones—

2 For instance, Jesus said: Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

3 Secondly: the spirits of just men made perfect, they who are not resurrected, but inherit the same glory.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 128:21

21 And again, the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca county, and at sundry times, and in divers places through all the travels and tribulations of this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! And the voice of Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood; giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; giving us consolation by holding forth that which is to come, confirming our hope!

— The Doctrine and Covenants

“He Shall Give His Angels Charge over Thee” — How They Protect and Direct

Author’s Commentary

The scriptures are full of angelic protection and direction. An angel shut the lions’ mouths for Daniel. An angel woke Peter in prison, loosed his chains, and led him past the guards. An angel stopped Laman and Lemuel from beating Nephi and Sam with a rod. Angels took Lot by the hand and led him out of Sodom. An angel went before Israel “to keep thee in the way.” An angel stood in the path of Alma the Younger and turned his life around. When the resurrected Savior blessed the Nephite children, angels descended “as it were in the midst of fire” and encircled them. And in Gethsemane, when the Son of God bore the weight of the world’s sins, “there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.”

Daniel 6:22

22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Acts 12:5–11

5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers

before the door kept the prison.

7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version



1 Nephi 3:29–30

29 And it came to pass as they smote us with a rod, behold, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them, saying: Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands.

30 And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed.

— The Book of Mormon

Genesis 19:15–16

15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Exodus 23:20

20 Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Mosiah 27:11–16

11 And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood;

12 And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

13 Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the

transgression of my people.

14 And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith.

15 And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God.

16 Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.

— The Book of Mormon



3 Nephi 17:24

24 And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

— The Book of Mormon

Luke 22:43

43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

"According to Their Desire" — The Limits of Angels

Author's Commentary

For all their power, angels do not override agency. The same angel who stopped Laman and Lemuel could not change their hearts: "after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur." Alma, longing to be an angel so that he could cry repentance to every people with a voice to shake the earth, stopped himself: "I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire." When Alma and Amulek watched the believers of Ammonihah burn, the Spirit constrained them not to intervene. Even the Savior, on the night of His arrest, said that He could pray to the Father for "more than twelve legions of angels," and did not, because the plan required that He go forward.

The pattern suggests a rule. Angels may protect, warn, strengthen, and deliver, but they may not compel. They show themselves "unto them of strong faith and a firm mind," and they minister to those who will receive them. Their help flows through the same door as all heavenly help: our own choice to seek it.

1 Nephi 3:31

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

— *The Book of Mormon*

Alma 29:4–5

4 I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God, for 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.

5 Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.

— *The Book of Mormon*

Matthew 26:53

53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

Moroni 7:30

30 For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

— *The Book of Mormon*

“The Heavens Wept” — The Sorrow of Angels

Author’s Commentary

We are told that there is “joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” The converse must also be true. If heaven rejoices when one soul returns, heaven must grieve when one is lost. When Lucifer fell, “the heavens wept over him.” When Enoch saw the wickedness of his day, “the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept,” and Enoch himself “wept and stretched forth his arms.”

We may speculate about what the angels feel as they watch. They see the danger that we do not see; they stand ready to help, but they cannot compel; and they watch many turn away from the very help they were sent to give. Theirs may be the sorrow of a guardian who can warn but not command, and of a friend who can open the door but cannot make anyone walk through it.

Luke 15:10

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

D&C 76:26

26 And was called Perdition, for the heavens wept over him—he was Lucifer, a son of the morning.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Moses 7:28–29

28 And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains?

29 And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?

— The Pearl of Great Price

“Laid Hold on the Dragon” — Their Power over Darkness

Author’s Commentary

Where the powers of darkness and light meet directly, the scriptures show that darkness gives way. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and “prevailed not” is written of the dragon, not of Michael. John saw an angel come down from heaven with a key and a great chain, who “laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.” The chain that Satan once held over the earth in Enoch’s vision will be used to bind him. Michael detected the devil when he appeared as an angel of light, and in the last battle Michael will gather the hosts of heaven and cast the devil and his armies “into their own place.”

Revelation 20:1–3

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

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

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

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Hebrews 2:14

14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 John 3:8

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

“Unclean Spirits Like Frogs” — The Forces of Darkness

Author’s Commentary

The adversary’s forces are organized as well, and in some ways they mirror the order they rebelled against. Paul names “principalities,” “powers,” and “rulers of the darkness of this world.” A single man in the Gospels was possessed by a “Legion,” because many devils had entered him. John saw “unclean spirits like frogs” coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, “the spirits of devils, working miracles,” gathering the kings of the earth to battle. Paul warned that in the latter times some would “depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils,” and John counseled, “try the spirits whether they are of God.”

We may speculate that the dark hosts include the fallen of the premortal war, the great ones among them and the lesser; that they work in coordination, as the fighting and envying hosts Isaiah saw in the firmament suggest; and that, having no bodies, they seek to influence those who do. Their weaknesses are as instructive as their strengths. They cannot overpower a faithful will. They are revealed by the light. And they can be discerned: the Lord taught that "that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness," and that the faithful may proclaim against any spirit that is not of Him, and it will not have power over them.

Luke 8:30

30 And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Revelation 16:13–14

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

1 Timothy 4:1

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

1 John 4:1

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

— *The Holy Bible, King James Version*

D&C 50:1–3; 50:31–35

50:1 Hearken, O ye elders of my church, and give ear to the voice of the living God; and attend to the words of wisdom which shall be given unto you, according as ye have asked and are agreed as touching the church, and the spirits which have gone abroad in the earth.

50:2 Behold, verily I say unto you, that there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world.

50:3 And also Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you.

50:31 Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that if you behold a spirit manifested that you cannot understand, and you receive not that spirit, ye shall ask of the Father in the name of Jesus; and if he give not unto you that spirit, then you may know that it is not of God.

50:32 And it shall be given unto you, power over that spirit; and you shall proclaim against that spirit with a loud voice that it is not of God—

50:33 Not with railing accusation, that ye be not overcome, neither with boasting nor rejoicing, lest you be seized therewith.

50:34 He that receiveth of God, let him account it of God; and let him rejoice that he is accounted of God worthy to receive.

50:35 And by giving heed and doing these things which ye have received, and which ye shall hereafter receive—and the kingdom is given you of the Father, and power to overcome all things which are not ordained of him—

— The Doctrine and Covenants

"That Veil of Unbelief" — The Door Left Open



Author's Commentary

Elder John A. Widtsoe observed that the forces of darkness are essentially cowardly, and that their successes always come when the mind is darkened by unbelief. Unbelief is the door left open. It does not require open rebellion, only a slow withdrawal from what we once knew—until, like the rising generation in the days of King Mosiah, we can no longer understand the word of God and become "a separate people as to [our] faith." The Book of Mormon returns to this warning again and again: miracles cease, gifts are done away, and great things remain hidden, all "because of unbelief."

The opposite is not a faith without questions. It is a resolute choice to have nothing to do with the adversary, and to hold fast to what we already know. That determination, Widtsoe taught, drains his strength. Latter-day apostles have added their counsel: to doubt our doubts before we doubt our faith, to be true to the faith we do have, and to remember that the future of our faith is not by chance, but by choice. And for anyone who finds belief and unbelief side by side in the same heart, the Gospel of Mark records a prayer the Savior did not refuse: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."



Elder John A. Widtsoe

One does not really need to fear the angels of evil. They are essentially cowardly. They fear light and truth. Darkness and untruth are their native habitat. Their successes always come when the mind of man is darkened by unbelief or unholy practices. A resolute determination to have nothing to do with them drains their strength. They are mortally afraid of the power of the Priesthood. The command, "Get thou behind me," coupled with righteous living, is sufficient to drive them away.

— John A. Widtsoe, "What Is an Angel?" in Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), no. 19



Elder John A. Widtsoe

Doubt of the right kind—that is, honest questioning—leads to faith. Such doubt impels men to inquiry which always opens the door to truth. ...

On the other hand the stagnant doubter, one content with himself, unwilling to make the effort, to pay the price of discovery, inevitably reaches unbelief and miry darkness. His doubts grow like poisonous mushrooms in the dim shadows of his mental and spiritual chambers. ...

Doubt which immediately leads to honest inquiry, and thereby removes itself, is wholesome. But that doubt which feeds and grows upon itself, and, with stubborn indolence, breeds more doubt, is evil.

— John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 31–33, "Is It Wrong to Doubt?"



Ether 4:15

15 Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to

remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Mormon 9:20

20 And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Moroni 10:24

24 And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth—that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Mosiah 26:3–4

3 And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened.

4 And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And

they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Alma 32:28

28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, 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, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

— *The Book of Mormon*



Elder Neil L. Andersen

Faith in Jesus Christ is a gift from heaven that comes as we choose to believe and as we seek it and hold on to it. … How we live our lives increases or diminishes our faith. Prayer, obedience, honesty, purity of thought and deed, and unselfishness increase faith. … The future of your faith is not by chance, but by choice.

— *Neil L. Andersen, "Faith Is Not by Chance, but by Choice," general conference, October 2015*

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters—my dear friends—please, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith. We must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

— Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," general conference, October 2013

3 Nephi 19:35

35 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples, and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief.

— The Book of Mormon

Mark 9:23–24

23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

In moments of fear or doubt or troubling times, hold the ground you have already won, even if that ground is limited. … When those moments come and issues surface, the resolution of which is not immediately forthcoming, hold fast to what you already know and stand strong until additional knowledge comes.

When problems come and questions arise, do not start your quest for faith by saying how much you do not have, leading as it were with your "unbelief." … I am not asking you to pretend to faith you do not have. I am asking you to be true to the faith you do have. … Be as candid about your questions as you need to be; life is full of them on one subject or another. But if you and your family want to be healed, don't let those questions stand in the way of faith working its miracle.

— Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe," general conference, April 2013

"Open His Eyes, That He May See" — Calling upon Heaven

Author's Commentary

If we could only see the forces of God's righteousness that surround us, we would be overwhelmed at the number of them. John heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, "and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." A third part followed the adversary; the rest did not. Those who stand for us far outnumber those who stand against us, just as Elisha told his frightened servant.

We need only call on God to receive help from them. We need only ask, and decide to move into the light. The Lord's promise is simple and unconditional in its invitation: "Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The same prayer that opened the eyes of Elisha's servant is available to anyone: Lord, open my eyes, that I may see. And when the Savior was tempted in the wilderness and resisted, the record says simply, "behold, angels came and ministered unto him." They are there for us, too.

2 Kings 6:16–17

6:16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

6:17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

Elder George Q. Cannon

If we could see with our spiritual senses as we now see with our natural senses, we should be greatly shocked at the sight of the influences that prompt us to disobey the counsels of God. ... He who is imbued with the Spirit of God is sensibly aware when the evil power approaches; but he does not welcome it to his bosom; he resists it with all the might and strength God has given unto him, and he obtains power over it.

— George Q. Cannon, 13 November 1864, Journal of Discourses 11:30–31

D&C 88:63

63 Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

— The Doctrine and Covenants

Matthew 4:11

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

— The Holy Bible, King James Version

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.

Conclusion — “Be of Good Cheer”

Author’s Commentary

We began with Lehi’s teaching that “there is an opposition in all things,” and we end where he ended: with the freedom that opposition makes possible. Because of Christ, we are “free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death.” Every chapter of this book has been about that choice—how the adversary works to take it from us, and how the Lord works to keep it ours.

We have studied the opposite so that we can recognize it, not so that we can dwell on it. The adversary is real, but he is limited, and he has no power over us except as we permit him. The forces of heaven are far greater: “they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” Prayer, priesthood, covenants, and holy places are not burdens laid upon us; they are protections given to us.

Above all, this book points to Jesus Christ. He is the One who crushes the serpent’s head, who stands at the door and knocks, and who heals what the adversary has broken. Seek Him. Let Him in. Listen for Him. “That which is of God is light,” and whoever receives that light and continues in God “receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.” The Savior’s words to His disciples on the night before His suffering are for us as well: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

The Author's Admonition and Challenge

I am a man on a spiritual journey. I have walked a path, but there is still much that lies ahead. I do not have all of the answers, but I have enough of them to be confident enough to share this with you. As you ponder these things you may have doubts or further questions. I challenge you to open your scriptures and dive into these topics. Pray as you study and He will walk with you.