

Looking Beyond The Mark

Book I

A Blessing Hitherto Unknown

Max B. Skousen

PREFACE SECOND EDITION

In 1986, when President Benson spoke at his first conference as president of the Church, he announced a revelation he had received from the Lord calling the Church and all the children of Zion out from under the Lord's "condemnation, scourge and judgment" by allowing the sacred pages of the *Book of Mormon* to become the center of our spiritual lives. He promised that each child of Zion who did so would "**receive a blessing hitherto unknown.**" (Ensign, May 1986, p. 78)

WHAT BLESSING WOULD BE HITHERTO UNKNOWN?

This book is the first of a four-part series which describes my own journey in deeper understanding which led to a wonderful blessing which I, personally, had never known before. I had desired and sought for that blessing much of my adult life, but, up to that time, had yet to see those desires fulfilled. The blessing I had sought was what Mormon promised when he declared, that "**YE CAN ENTER INTO THE REST OF THE LORD FROM THIS TIME HENCEFORTH until ye shall rest with Him in heaven.**" (Moroni 7:3)

ENTERING THE REST OF THE LORD

I was thrilled by President Benson's promise because I thought that "**entering the rest of the Lord**" might be the blessing he was promising the Saints. If so, he would be in harmony with those scriptures in all four of the Standard Works which bear abundant testimony to the critical nature of this heavenly blessing.

So I followed the prophet's counsel, having faith that there might be such a special blessing for those who would, as he instructed, sup daily from the pages of the *Book of Mormon* and ABIDE BY ITS PRECEPTS. Wonderfully, it was not long before I began to have a series of surprising experiences. I found, as Mormon promised, that we *enter His rest* when we receive the gift of the pure love of Christ because that love, as John declared, *casts out all fear*. For the first time I understood what it must mean to walk in the light *as Christ is in the light*. I began enjoying a *totally* new relationship with both our Savior and this world He has created for us. Just as He has promised, this new-found relationship had none of the old spiritual burdens I had carried so long.

As I continued searching the scriptures, they began to expand into deeper meanings, clearly describing what to me had been this “hitherto unknown,” deeper relationship with Christ.

IS THE “REST” ONLY FOR THE NEXT LIFE?

Not many of us have focused our attention on *entering into the rest*. Perhaps the reason is that we have not believed Christ was talking about a blessing for this life when He said **“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11:28)

Yet, I found that many of His prophets have testified that *entering into the Lord's rest* is a blessing that we are invited to let Christ bestow upon us during our earthly probation. For example, Paul testified that he and many others of his fellow Saints had *already entered into this rest*, even though most members in his day were still failing to do so. Paul pled with them to enter into His rest before it was too late. He wrote:

Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it...for we which have believed DO ENTER INTO REST. (Hebrews 4:1&3)

It appears that Paul also used other labels to describe *entering the rest*, such as being in **“the fellowship of the mystery of Christ.”** Paul mourned that he was not allowed to teach such a deep, spiritual level to the zealous Saints at Corinth, but he was joyfully permitted to talk plainly to the Saints at Ephesus because they had already experienced being *sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise*. Here are his profound words to the spiritually advanced Ephesians:

Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ... [That to me,] who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given...to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery...that CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in [His pure] LOVE, may be able to comprehend with ALL SAINTS what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and to KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST, WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE, THAT YE MIGHT BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. (Ephesians 1:13, 3:4-19 – As will be the case with all quotations throughout this book, the emphasis by capitalization, italics and brackets are added by the author unless otherwise noted.)

As for this statement by Paul, I have found no greater description of the magnitude of Christ's gift of His pure love, which is so great that it **“passeth knowledge.”** I believe that it is for this reason that Christ is called a MYSTERY, **“to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery...that CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS by faith.”**

THE LORD'S REST IS THE GIFT OF THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST

In the *Book of Mormon*, we have many prophets declaring the same message. Mormon ended his message about entering the rest of the Lord by saying that it is the blessed result of receiving the gift of charity, **“the pure love of Christ,”** which the Father **“hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of His Son, Jesus Christ, that ye may become the sons of God...that we may be purified even as He is pure.”** (Moroni 7:48)

The great prophet Alma was just as emphatic about the availability of receiving this gift while still in this life. He testified that **“there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the REST of the Lord their God.”** (Alma 13:12)

What I also began finding was that the deeper spiritual treasures of all the four Standard Works tell us much about *WHAT* we are to experience in **“the rest of the Lord.”** Yet, even more significantly, *the Book of Mormon does more than tell us WHAT, it also tells us HOW!*

So the central theme of this series of four books will deal with the principles of *HOW* we can receive a blessing which, for most of us, has been “hitherto unknown.” These books are an in-depth study of the teachings of our ancient and modern prophets who have cautiously revealed, and often *partially concealed*, this awakening process. They have assured us that all who dili-

gently seek, with a humble heart, may be able to partake of the delicious fruit of *the tree of life*, which represents this pure and holy love of God which is shed into the hearts of the children of men.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE VS THE TREE OF LIFE

The essential fall of mankind comes from “looking beyond” *the tree of life* to seek the “wise” yet “bitter” fruit from *the tree of knowledge*. As we are reminded each time we go to the temple, we cannot have both trees at the same time. When we choose to live by the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we inevitably lose access to the tree of life. It seems to me that this critical choice of taking pride in our great knowledge of good and evil has kept us under condemnation all these years and is referred to by the Lord as *walking in darkness at noonday*.

But behold, verily I say unto you, that there are many who have been ordained among you, whom I have called but few of them are chosen. They who are not chosen have sinned a very grievous sin, in that they are walking in darkness at noon-day. (D&C 95:5-6)

So, for the cover of this first volume, *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, I show a picture of the symbolic white tree of life on a solid *black* background, representing that when we look beyond the tree of life, we look to the darkness, even “**the darkness at noonday**.” This darkness is the essential characteristic of the *forbidden* tree of knowledge, because the penalty of that *tree* is *death*, which is separation, rather than *life*, which is eternal union.

It is my firm belief that the prize or “mark” of the gospel is none other than being bestowed this most precious of all gifts, the pure love of Christ, thus enabling us to *enter into the rest* of the Lord, symbolizing the partaking of the precious *fruit of the tree of life*. *Book II, Finding the Mark* also has a white tree on the cover, but the cover is a rich purple, symbolizing the love of Christ, which we receive *when we find the mark*.

PURPOSE OF THIS REVISED EDITION

The first edition of this book was published in 1993. Then, four years later, in 1997, I published *Book II, Finding the Mark*. Readers have told me that the second book is much clearer than the first. I had to agree. So in preparing a second edition of Book I, I have made a number of changes to provide more clarity in understanding the difference between these two primary levels of the gospel, one being “milk,” symbolized by the tree of knowledge, and the “meat,” symbolized by the tree of life. In Book II, I deal in greater depth with these two primary levels, showing the two different levels of the “milk gospel” and the two different levels of the “meat gospel,” making four in all.

For greater clarity, this book has been divided into two sections. Section I has to do with understanding the significance of looking BEYOND that aspect of the gospel which is referred to as the “MARK.” The second section will consider the implications of looking beyond the mark as it relates to the darkness which covers the whole earth.

The purpose of this *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, is to help readers take their first steps in understanding that there are more than one level to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that by better understanding the mark and what looking beyond it means, that *the blessing hitherto unknown* promised to us by President Benson will begin to be enjoyed by more and more children of Zion. If you have questions, feel free to give me a call.

Max B. Skousen

(Oct. 28, 1921 - Nov. 16, 2002)

For more information, visit:

www.maxskousen.org

Chapter I

A PROPHET PROPHECIES

Ezra Taft Benson was first sustained as the thirteenth President of the Church on April 6, 1986. In the concluding session of that conference, the new Prophet, Seer and Revelator over the Church made a startling announcement. He emphasized the significance of a new revelation he was announcing to the Church by comparing his message to a landmark revelation received by Lorenzo Snow. That revelation by Lorenzo Snow was a challenge for the Church and proved to be a great turning point in the temporal prosperity of the Church.

As President Benson looked back at that historic event which occurred in 1899, the year of his birth, he reminded the Saints that just as the Lord had revealed His will at that time, He was now calling for a *spiritual transformation* of the Church in this day. Here are his words:

In the opening session of this conference we talked about cleansing the inner vessel. And so we must. The Lord inspired His servant Lorenzo Snow to reemphasize the principle of tithing to redeem the Church from financial bondage. In those days the General Authorities took that message to the members of the Church.

Now, IN OUR DAY, THE LORD HAS REVEALED THE NEED TO REEMPHASIZE THE BOOK OF MORMON TO GET THE CHURCH AND ALL THE CHILDREN OF ZION OUT FROM UNDER CONDEMNATION—THE SCOURGE AND THE JUDGMENT. This message must be carried to the members of the Church throughout the world...

The *Book of Mormon* declares that “everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve Him is inspired of God...And 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.” (Moroni 7:13-17)

... Now, in the authority of the sacred priesthood in me vested, I invoke my blessing upon the Latter-day Saints and upon good people everywhere.

I bless you with increased discernment to judge between Christ and anti-Christ. I bless you with increased power to do good and to resist evil. I bless you with increased understanding of the Book of Mormon.

I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and *abide by its precepts*, that GOD WILL POUR OUT UPON EACH CHILD OF ZION AND THE CHURCH A BLESSING HITHERTO UNKNOWN — AND WE WILL PLEAD TO THE LORD THAT HE WILL BEGIN TO LIFT THE CONDEMNATION — THE SCOURGE AND JUDGMENT. Of this I bear solemn witness. (Ensign, May 1986, p. 78)

FACING ANOTHER NEED FOR CHANGE

President Benson was declaring that the voice of the Lord had made it clear to him that a new day was to dawn upon the Church, providing a spiritual blessing never before experienced by most members.

Some may have wondered what President Benson meant when he said, **“We will plead to the Lord that He will begin to lift the condemnation—the scourge and judgment.”** It is of little wonder that few realized that the Church had been under “condemnation” for the previous one hundred and fifty-four years. Seldom has this condition been referred to by Church leaders since September 1832, when it was revealed as part of the Revelation on Priesthood, Section 84 in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

The reason that it may not have been specifically emphasized before 1986, as we will discuss in greater detail, is that in the Lord's timetable it may not have been timely for the Church to be

released from the restrictions placed upon it at that early stage. If that assumption is true, then President Benson's inspired pronouncement should cause all the Saints to rejoice and prepare for this outpouring of a previously unknown blessing.

BECAUSE OF VANITY AND UNBELIEF

In the following General Conference that year, October, 1986, President Benson emphasized the subject even further and then finished by quoting a portion of Section 84 in which the children of Zion, even all, were put under condemnation. He said:

Over ten years ago I made the following statement regarding the *Book of Mormon*: “Do eternal consequences rest upon our response to this book? Yes, either to our blessing or our condemnation...”

I reaffirm those words to you this day. *Let us not remain under condemnation, with its scourge and judgment*, by treating lightly this great and marvelous gift the Lord had given to us. Rather, let us WIN THE PROMISES associated with treasuring it up in our hearts. In the *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 84, verses 54 to 58, we read:

“And your minds in times past have been darkened because of *unbelief*, and because you have *treated lightly* the things you have received—which *vanity and unbelief* have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.

“And they shall remain under this condemnation until they *repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments*, which I have given them, not only to say, but to *do* according to that which I have written—that they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father's kingdom; *otherwise* there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion.” (*Ensign*, November 1986, p.7)

Many have assumed that because President Benson was stressing the *Book of Mormon*, that it was only because of our neglect of that book which was the cause of our being under condemnation. However, the specific verses he quoted make it clear. It is our pride and lack of faith. Notice how clear the Lord is. **“Which *vanity and unbelief* have brought the whole church under condemnation.”** It is to find the answer to our *vanity and unbelief* that we are to search deeply in the *Book of Mormon* and *abide by its precepts*.

TURNING TO THE *BOOK OF MORMON*

As the membership of the Church will attest, in the months following the April, 1986, General Conference, there was a great resurgence in the study and teaching from the *Book of Mormon*, even above the increased levels experienced during the previous decade. President Benson reminded us of the truth of what Joseph Smith assured the brethren in his day, that the *Book of Mormon* will get a person nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book. (*History of the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 461)

In his closing address at that same October, 1986, General Conference, President Benson declared:

The *Book of Mormon* title page declares its purpose is threefold: to show what great things the Lord has done, to teach of the covenants of the Lord, and to convince both Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. The *Book of Mormon* must be reenthroned in the minds and hearts of our people. We must honor it by reading it, by studying it, by *taking its precepts into our lives and transforming them into lives required of the true followers of Christ*. (*Ensign*, November 1986, pp. 79-80)

In conference after conference, making six in all, President Benson led the way, emphasizing that the time is upon us.

ELDER DALLIN OAKS RENEWS THE CHALLENGE

President Benson died in the summer of 1994. A year and a half before, in January 1993, Elder Dallin Oaks of the Quorum of Twelve confirmed to all the Church that President Benson's primary message was of great importance and must be taken seriously. In a BYU address re-broadcast by satellite throughout the Church in June, 1993, and published in the March, 1994 issue of the Ensign, Elder Oaks declared:

I speak to you as one of that small group who have been very close to President Ezra Taft Benson during all of the seven and one-half years he has served as our Prophet/President. I have been part of virtually every occasion when he and his counselors have met with the Council of the Twelve Apostles, and I have been present on every occasion when he has instructed the General Authorities. I have read all of the books he has written and studied the written text of all of the talks he has given as President of the Church...

Along with other General Authorities, I have a clear recollection of the General Authority Temple Meeting on March 5, 1987. For a year, President Benson had been stressing the reading of the *Book of Mormon*. Repeatedly he had quoted these verses from the *Doctrine and Covenants*, including the Lord's statement that the Saints' conduct had "*brought the whole church under condemnation*."

In that temple meeting, President Benson reread those statements and declared, "*This condemnation has not been lifted, nor will it be until we repent*." He also repeated his declaration of a year earlier that "in our day the Lord has *inspired His servant* to reemphasize the *Book of Mormon* to get the Church out from under condemnation."

Along with others, I felt the impact of this declaration of condemnation. As I studied the subject, I was relieved to find that the *serious consequences* of this condemnation *need not be permanent*. The use of this term elsewhere in modern revelation suggests that it refers to a *punishment or a penalty, not to a permanent banishment*. In fact, the words President Benson quoted invite the Saints to *repent of their deficiencies* so the condemnation can be removed. (Ensign, March, 1994, p. 60)

Along with Elder Oaks, I knew every member of the Church was being challenged by our living prophet to do our part in fulfilling the requirements which would open the Church and each of us to experiences we had never realized before. The most interesting question was, what will it mean to experience A BLESSING HITHERTO UNKNOWN? This is the subject we will discuss in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

Members of the Church, at the end of the Twentieth Century, are being called to more fully abide by the precepts of the *Book of Mormon* by surrendering their vanity and overcoming their unbelief, both of which have kept the Church and all the children of Zion under severe restrictions, called the condemnation, scourge and judgment. This condition has prevented the Church from attaining the much greater level of blessings yet to be realized.

Chapter II

EXPERIENCING A BLESSING HITHERTO UNKNOWN

As I mentioned in the Preface, when I heard President Benson's concluding address at his first conference in 1986, the phrase which caught my greatest attention was the promise of *a blessing hitherto unknown*. What blessing? Why is it to be something we as individual children of Zion

and the Church as a whole had never known before?

Because of a very choice, personal experience that I once had with President Benson, I was especially impressed by his challenging us to gain a much deeper understanding of this ancient record. His words brought a burning in my chest when he said: **“We must honor the *Book of Mormon* by...studying it, by taking its precepts into our lives and transforming them into lives required of THE TRUE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.”** (Conference Address, *Ensign*, November 1986, p. 80)

But I wondered what were the precepts I was failing to understand which would transform me more fully into **“a true follower of Christ?”** Having read, loved and taught the *Book of Mormon* for many years, I wondered what was in it which I did not understand. Then as I prayerfully returned to its pages, holding President Benson's promise of a hitherto unknown blessing in my heart, I began to discover certain familiar verses taking on much deeper meanings.

A NEW WAY OF EXPERIENCING LIFE

Gradually, a very unique and powerful blessing began to unfold. It was not only different from any experience I had ever had before, but even any that I had imagined. Eventually, I began finding myself walking more and more continuously *in a marvelous, strange new world*. Even though it was the same world I had always known, it was being experienced as a totally different place.

With this surprisingly new inner perspective, I found that our deepest scriptures were not just tantalizing promises of a peace that **“passeth knowledge,”** but those sacred passages, many of which I knew by heart, were now being understood as surprisingly accurate and vivid descriptions of what I was now experiencing.

Surely, I thought, this is a wonderful **“blessing hitherto unknown,”** at least to me. Whether President Benson's promise includes further unfolding yet to come, I do not know. But I do know that after many years of seeking and searching, nothing in my life had been so delicious and sweet to the taste. Certainly this new level of experience must have been what Mormon was promising to the faithful saints in his day, when he said that they could **“enter into the REST OF THE LORD FROM THIS TIME HENCE FORTH UNTIL YE REST WITH HIM IN HEAVEN.”** (Moroni 7:3)

I had known this statement of Mormon's by heart and quoted it many times. And certainly I had experienced levels of spiritual rest, but never anything like the blessing now being enjoyed. In the same way, I had previously experienced times of overwhelming love which I felt certainly was His gift of pure love, but it would come only at fleeting periods of time.

LIVING WITHOUT FEAR

A completely different level of that love was now being experienced—not just some of the time, but ALL of the time. That love was not a special feeling, like I had experienced on occasion, but a different way of seeing the world. I was startled to notice that *fear was gone from my life!* I am not saying that I still did not look both ways before crossing a street. It was just that I now found myself living with a greater, inner knowing that everything was working out perfectly.

I had read many times the statement by John when he declared:

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in [His] love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear is torment. He that FEAREST is NOT made PERFECT IN LOVE. (1 John 4:17-18)

“This is incredible!” I marveled to myself. “It is exactly the way John said it would be!” It was then I recognized why charity, the pure love of Christ, *cannot coexist with fear*. The two opposites are mutually exclusive of each other. One is light, even the light of Christ, and the other is darkness. I began to discover that all darkness is fear. In turn, all fear is darkness. I could see

that all forms of fear, whether it is worry, stress, contention, anger, intolerance, impatience or what other negative emotions we might have, were all manifestations of insecurity, and insecurity is fear.

AT LAST, UNDERSTANDING JOHN!!

Now, for the first time, I could personally understand what John meant when he wrote to the Saints of his day that God is LOVE. Yes, because God is LIGHT. The two words, love and light, mean basically the same thing. (1 John 4:16) The evidence of that is in the statement which John had declared in the opening of his first epistle:

Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that GOD IS LIGHT [love], AND IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS [fear] AT ALL. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, WE LIE AND DO NOT THE TRUTH. But if we walk in the light, AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from ALL SIN.

(1 John 1:5-7)

CAN I SHARE THIS WITH OTHERS?

During those first several years, as the new level of understanding the scriptures, particularly the *Book of Mormon*, blossomed into personal experience, I asked for guidance from the Lord as to how much of this I could share. The answer was, “Only with those close to you, one at a time.” This I did. Some found it confusing, others frightening, but a few found their lives being opened up to the same blessings the Lord had graciously given to me.

After several years of sharing with a few, I was wondering if the Lord would permit me to put some of this in written form. For several more years, the answer was, “No, not yet.” Then, suddenly, I was impressed to write. I wrote eight lengthy chapters of what I thought would be a single volume of about 25 chapters. The title was taken from President Benson’s talk, *A Blessing Hitherto Unknown*. Then, just as suddenly, I knew that all I had written was for me, like a practice-run, and not for publication.

AFTER THE PRACTICE RUN—STARTING OVER

The process of writing had been an incredible discovery of even deeper meaning to the scriptures. But now I knew that I was to start over. This time, instead of merely guiding the reader through the scriptures, I was to describe my own journey of discovery, to bear my testimony of my own growing experiences which led to a deeper love, joy and peace than I had ever known. I could see that no longer was it to be a single book, but four books. These books are my way of sharing my testimony that there truly is *a blessing hitherto unknown* for each child of Zion and the Church.

I can deeply appreciate how Mormon must have felt when he asked the Lord for the privilege of sharing his special message with his faithful brethren and sisters. We can read his powerful sermon on *entering into the rest of the Lord and receiving the pure love of Christ* in a spiritual treasure-chest, Chapter Seven of the *Book of Moroni*, the last section on the gold plates. Only after much prayer, the Lord gave Mormon permission to share his personal knowledge of Christ’s greatest gift. He testified of this as he began his sermon with these grateful words:

And now I, Mormon, speak unto you, my beloved brethren: and it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and His holy will, because of the gift of His calling unto me, that I am permitted to speak unto you at this time. (Moroni 7:2)

In the following forty-six verses, his talk contains one of the richest, most powerful chapters in all scripture. Much of my third book will consider these great treasures of

wisdom which he shared with his faithful friends in the Church, inviting them to truly come unto Christ and be perfected in Him by entering into His rest at that very time.

REPENTING OF MY OWN VANITY AND UNBELIEF

President Benson counseled us to sup daily from the *Book of Mormon* and ABIDE BY ITS PRECEPTS. One of the major precepts found all through the *Book of Mormon* is not only to repent of our sins, but to teach repentance. These four books are about my own repentance from the vanity and unbelief which had restricted my own spiritual release from being under condemnation. I believe, for me, entering His rest was so long in coming because I, unknowingly, did not have eyes to see nor ears to hear. Thus I kept supping the milk of the gospel which I mistakenly thought was meat.

I have divided the story of my journey of discovering *a blessing hitherto unknown* into these four separate books so that each volume will open the door slowly enough to enable the reader to take a few steps at a time instead of trying to take only one large jump. The titles are to be as follows:

Book I — *Looking Beyond the Mark*

Book II — *Finding the Mark*

Book III — *Entering into the Rest*

Book IV — *Perfection in Christ*

To be on my mailing list for announcements, please contact me at my address or simply call my toll free phone number, both shown in the front of the book.

IT REALLY IS HAPPENING

As I worked on this second edition, nearly twelve years after President's Benson's first call, some have asked, are others enjoying this kind of understanding? As I move among the Saints, I find many who have found these things long before I did. Many others, it seems, are moving more gradually. It may appear that the Brethren seem to be leading us gently, slowly, so that their message can move the majority along in a carefully-guided manner. Actually, from my observation, the message is being delivered these days by the Brethren with much greater clarity and power. Yet, I am sure they know they must be patient and realize that the body as a whole can only be moved at a pace the majority of faithful Saints can tolerate.

But, again, that doesn't mean that the Lord is not inviting all of us, individually, to enter HIS REST TODAY. Paul warned his lukewarm Jewish-Christian members by quoting the 95th Psalm:

But Christ as a son over His own house; whose house are we, *IF* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith,

“Today if ye will hear His voice. Harden not your hearts, as in the [first] provocation... Wherefore, I was grieved with that generation and said, They do alway[s] err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, *They shall not enter into my rest.*”

(Psalms 95:7-14)

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of UNBELIEF, in departing from the living God... Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, ANY OF YOU SHOULD SEEM TO COME SHORT OF IT. (Hebrews 3:7-12 & 4:1)

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION I

This book has been divided into two sections to simplify the study of *Looking Beyond the Mark* as it applies to those seeking the kingdom of God. Section I deals with an understanding of the “mark” itself, and Section II is a study of how looking beyond it has effected the world in

which we live, as well as the Church we love to serve.

SUMMARY

Since the gospel is really true and we are led by prophets of the Lord, then each of us is to move to higher spiritual ground in the light and blessings of Christ. Personally, I have found President Benson's promise of a blessing hitherto unknown to be more valid than I had ever imagined. So this and the other three books in this series are my way of sharing my testimony of the truth of President Benson's words.

Section I

Understanding the Significance of Looking Beyond the Mark

Chapter III

JACOB REVEALS THE SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

The chosen people of God, the Israelites of old, stumbled—even though they had been offered the greatest promises of any people on earth. Jacob, a prophet in the *Book of Mormon*, summed up their problem as “*looking beyond the mark*,” which I have chosen as the title of this book. Let’s read his complete declaration, which although it is three sentences long, is contained in only one, single verse.

BOOK OF JACOB, Chapter 4, Verse 14

**Behold, the Jews were a *stiffnecked* people;
and they despised the words of *plainness*,
and *killed* the prophets,
and *sought* for things that they could not understand.**

**Wherefore, because of their *blindness*,
which blindness came by *looking beyond the mark*,
they must needs *fall*;
for God hath taken away His plainness from them,
and delivered unto them many things
which they cannot understand,
because they *desired it*.**

**And because they desired it,
God hath done it *that they may stumble*.**

This famous quotation from the *Book of Mormon* not only provides the title for this book, but also the primary text. Jacob is telling us the amazing fact that the Jews were given a *stumbling block* because of their *looking beyond the mark*. So I realized that they, too, were put under condemnation and have yet to become free from their scourge and judgment.

LEARNING FROM THE GREAT PROPHET JACOB

As I examined the many aspects of this one revealing verse, I found that it is one of the most amazing and compact declarations in the entire *Book of Mormon*. As I pondered its possible relevance to us, I wondered why the critical phrase, “**looking beyond the mark**” is mentioned only by this one, obscure prophet, Jacob, the younger brother of Nephi.

So first of all, I became better acquainted with Jacob and found that he was, in many ways, his older brother's spiritual teacher. In fact, Jacob was, indeed, a very great prophet. Elder Neal A. Maxwell calls him the “**great poet-prophet**.” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are*, p.1) Robert J. Matthew considers Jacob “**the outstanding doctrinal teacher of the *Book of Mormon***.” (Robert J. Matthew, *Who's Who in the Book of Mormon*, p.72)

WHO WAS JACOB?

When Lehi left Jerusalem, Nephi was the younger of his three sons. On the journey to the promised land of America, two more sons were born. Jacob was the first, and Joseph was the second. Both boys were special, but Jacob was particularly blessed. Even in his youth, he had been called by the Lord as a prophet. This early calling was emphasized by his father Lehi when he gave Jacob his final instruction:

And now, Jacob, I speak unto you: Thou art my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness... Thou knowest the greatness of God; and He shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain... And thou hast in thy youth *BEHELD HIS GLORY* [which is to enter into His rest]; *wherefore thou art blessed even as they unto whom He shall minister in the flesh.* (2 Nephi 2:1-4)

After Lehi's death, Nephi ordained both Jacob and Joseph as presiding priests and assigned them to be the principal teachers of the people. In fact, several of Nephi's greatest chapters are Jacob's sermons. It was Jacob whom Nephi chose to continue writing their sacred history. His writings, known as the Book of Jacob, contains seven chapters. Nephi gave him very specific instructions as to what was to be written on these smaller of the two sets of plates

Nephi gave me...a commandment that I should write upon these plates [the small plates of Nephi] a few of the things which I considered *to be most precious...*and if there were preaching which was sacred, or *revelation which was great*, or prophesying, that I should engraven the HEADS of them upon these plates. (Jacob 1:1-4)

ONLY HEADLINES TO COVER MOST PRECIOUS REVELATIONS

I wondered what Jacob meant when he said that Nephi told him to “engraven the *heads*” of their most sacred revelations. Well, we all know about the use of a headline to highlight the most important point of an article. So I concluded that Jacob had been instructed to reveal only brief summary headlines of their greater revelations—and *that was all*. Then it would be up to us to see if we were prompted to obtain further light through additional study and inspiration. Chris Conklin, in his award-winning paper on Jacob, also agrees that “heads” signifies “headlines.” (*Ensign*, February 1992, p. 7)

Nephi's strict and cautious counsel to Jacob was consistent with the prophet Alma's explanation of why all need to carefully guard their knowledge of the mysteries. Alma said:

It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of His word which He doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto Him. (Alma 12:9)

EARLY NEPHITES ALSO DESPISED THE WORDS OF PLAINNESS

Jacob informed us that the Lord did reveal many great mysteries to him and his brother. But they lamented that before they could teach their people even an overview of these plain and simple mysteries of God, they had to admonish them severely regarding the first principles of faith and repentance. Strange as it may seem to us now, most of the faithful Nephites in the early generations were willing to at least believe in the law of Moses but were not willing to yield to the full power of faith in Christ. Jacob found that he needed to continually bear down on his people.

In fact, not long before Nephi's death, we find that Nephi was also constrained by the Spirit and had to stop trying to teach his “faithful” family anything beyond the basic righteousness of the Law of Moses. In the next to the last chapter of his writings, Nephi sadly wrote:

I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the *unbelief, and the wickedness, and ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men* [his loyal followers who loved and honored him greatly]; **for they will not search *knowledge, nor understand great knowledge*, when it is given unto them in *PLAINNESS*, even as plain as word can be. (2 Nephi 32:7)**

These words of harsh condemnation describe the “blindness” of even the loyal part of Lehi's family. I noticed that Nephi talked about “**great knowledge**,” which was “*given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be.*” I kept that in perspective as I read what his brother Jacob wrote about sharing the holy mysteries to the same people.

JACOB PLED FOR HIS PEOPLE TO ENTER THE REST OF THE LORD

Jacob began his own writings by telling us how he pled with his people to enter into a spiritual state called the “*rest of the Lord.*” The REST is a prominent doctrine emphasized also by Alma, Helaman and Mormon. Jacob warned his people that they should not treat lightly the great promise and privilege of *entering into the rest of the Lord* while in this life. He challenged his people with all his might:

And we [Jacob and Joseph] also had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy... Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to *come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God*, that they MIGHT ENTER INTO HIS REST, lest by any means He should swear in His wrath *they should not enter in*, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. (Jacob 1:6-7)

Notice that Jacob is equating—to *come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God*—with the blessing—**THAT HE MIGHT ENTER INTO HIS REST**. One does not exist *in the absence of the other*. Christ promised that He would give *rest* to those *who came unto Him*. We will consider in depth this critical aspect of the gospel in Book III of this series, *Entering The Rest of The Lord*.

However, for now, we will begin to cover in the next chapter some more of the subjects taught by Jacob.

SUMMARY

As we are to search and heed the teachings of the *Book of Mormon*, it is Jacob's writings which can open the door to better understand our modern dilemma of coming out from under condemnation. Just as Nephi found that even the best of Lehi's family could not give up the supposed “safety” of the law to the plainness of these “mysteries” of Christ, Jacob sadly lamented that these same people were still failing to enter into the REST OF THE LORD. Since Jacob reports that he followed the advice of Nephi to write about his greatest revelations only in headlines, our study will pay close attention to each one of the words that he used in those headlines of his greatest mysteries.

Chapter IV

JACOB'S SEVEN HEADLINE MYSTERIES

After Jacob warned his people about their being unwilling *to enter into the rest*, he used the remainder of his first chapter and all of his next two chapters to call them to further repentance, giving them emphatic warnings not to set their hearts on the vain things of this world. He also

chastised many of the men for not honoring their marriage covenants. But then in his *fourth chapter*, he turned from these themes of repentance to sharing some of his most positive blessings. First he bore his own beautiful and powerful testimony.

THE FAITH OF JACOB AND JOSEPH BECAME UNSHAKABLE

In testifying regarding his blessings from God, he wrote these words describing what he and Joseph had experienced:

Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have *many revelations*, and the *spirit of prophecy*; and having all these witnesses we obtain *a hope*, and our *faith becometh unshaken*, inso-much that we truly can *command* in the name of Jesus and *the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.* (Jacob 4:6)

In all the scriptures I do not think we can find any greater personal testimony than this! What unshakable faith and power! Even trees, mountains and seas obeyed!

When I used to read this great testimony, I would try to imagine what great spiritual giants these two chosen prophets must have been. I was sure that they were totally free from those typical human frailties which I certainly experienced in my own life.

THEY STILL HAD WEAKNESSES

But something I had failed to appreciate in my earlier years is that Jacob immediately added his acknowledgment that they still had many weaknesses of the flesh, for he wrote:

Nevertheless, the Lord God *showeth us our weakness* that we may *know* that it is *by his grace*, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have *power* to do these things. (Jacob 4:7)

As I now understand the significance of this humble acknowledgment, I realize that their lives were a coexistence of incredible blessings along with natural human weaknesses. The difference between these men and most of us is that their faith was stronger and their blessings were greater than ours, even though their weaknesses of the flesh were still there to some significant measure.

This is an important factor in Jacob's message, since most of us tend to put holy men, even our present leaders, on pedestals that make them appear, unrealistically, beyond human frailties.

CHRIST'S PERSONAL MESSAGE TO MORONI

The prophet Moroni, almost a thousand years later, may have tended to do the same as well, for he tells us that the Lord, in a personal visitation, made this principle of the duality of strength and weakness very clear to him. Moroni wrote:

[Christ] *hath talked with me face to face*, and he told me *in plain humility*, even as a man telleth another in mine own language...[saying:] *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.* (Ether 12:39 & 27)

Each time I now read this report by Moroni, that the Savior talked to him face to face and told him about this principle in "plain humility," I get a lump in my throat and a little quivering in my arms at what a wonderful experience that must have been. Now, back to Jacob.

UNSEARCHABLE DEPTH OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

After Jacob described how their faith had become unshakable, he then turned to revealing the headlines of a number of mysteries which he and his brother had been privileged to comprehend.

He gave us seven of them in all, each one contained in consecutive verses. Each mystery cryptically but clearly reveals some surprising information about how the Lord works in His mysterious ways.

Although I had always been impressed with the seventh mystery, the one dealing with looking beyond the mark, I had never noticed anything particularly novel or revealing about what he had written in the first six. In fact, I had not realized that any of the seven verses were mysteries at all. They seemed rather obvious, standard gospel principles. But they are, when more deeply understood, carefully stated, life-transforming mysteries.

THE SEVEN HEADLINE MYSTERIES

We will go into greater detail on these seven mysteries as we study various principles, but for now, let us merely review the basic subjects of each as found in the seven verses, from 8 to 14, Chapter Four in the Book of Jacob.

- Mystery No. 1, Verse 8** How unsearchable are the ways of the Lord
Mystery No. 2, Verse 9 God always creates according to His own will and pleasure.
Mystery No. 3, Verse 10 Seek not to counsel the Lord for He knows what He is doing.
Mystery No. 4, Verse 11 Be *perfectly reconciled* to God through the atonement of Christ.
Mystery No. 5, Verse 12 We can attain *a perfect knowledge* of Christ and the resurrection *in this life*.
Mystery No. 6, Verse 13 God is willing to let us *know, perfectly*, all truth as to what *was, is and will be*.
Mystery No. 7, Verse 14 But when the stiffnecked despise His *plainness*, God will give them *confusion* so they will *stumble*.

THE UNSEARCHABLE WAYS OF THE LORD

In this chapter we will take a more detailed look at the First and the Sixth Mysteries, then we will review his Seventh, which is the blockbuster and the basis for this book.

As you carefully read the first of the seven, see if you find anything that you do not believe you already know.

FIRST MYSTERY, Verse Eight — Behold, *great and marvelous* are the works of the Lord. How *unsearchable* are the *depths of the mysteries* of Him; and it is *impossible* that man should find out *all His ways*. And no man knoweth of His ways save it be *revealed* unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not [these] revelations of God. (Jacob 4:8)

WE REALLY KNOW SO LITTLE AND THINK WE KNOW SO MUCH

I don't know about you, but I now realize how amazing it is that I could have read such a powerful declaration and not have seen the magnitude of what Jacob was trying to convey. I tended to say, "Of course, man cannot comprehend all the depths of God's mysteries. So what?"

However, Jacob's words finally took on a far greater significance to me when I realized this first mystery is to prepare the reader for the next six verses. In verses 9 to 13, he shows the steps one takes, while still in the flesh, to come to the blessed state of having a *perfect knowledge* OF CHRIST. Little did I realize what that really means—to live on this earth with a *perfect knowledge of Christ and even the RESURRECTION*. But Jacob did! More on this in the next two chapters.

REVEALING ALL TRUTH IN ABSOLUTE PLAINNESS

In the Sixth of the Seven Mysteries, I found that Jacob told us another seemingly obvious truth. He wrote that the Spirit is ready and willing to reveal ALL truth, in full clarity and plain-

ness, with no hidden messages. Don't we think we know that already? But here it is:

SIXTH MYSTERY, verse thirteen — The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they REALLY ARE, and of things as they REALLY WILL BE; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls. (Jacob 4:13)

I finally began to see the relationship between this and the next verse, which is the Seventh Mystery. The Sixth Mystery speaks of the Lord revealing all “**things as they REALLY ARE, and of things as they REALLY WILL BE.**” The Seventh Mystery speaks of how “**God hath taken away His plainness from them...that they may stumble.**”

So as we put the two concepts together, the one in verse thirteen and the other in verse fourteen, what Jacob really said is that the Lord *is willing* to give His children plainness in the fullness of truth, BUT only on three conditions. Those conditions are that they (1) do not *look beyond the mark*, (2) nor do they *despise the words of plainness* (3) and they are *meek and lowly*, i.e., not stiffnecked.

THE MYSTERY OF CONFUSION

As I began to comprehend the complex meaning in the paradox between verses thirteen and fourteen, I could better understand some of the more perplexing questions mankind tries to answer about why there is so much confusion among the peoples of the world about religion, such as what is: God, good and evil, salvation, the purpose of life, life after death, the eternal condition of the saved and the damned, essential ordinances, etc., etc.?

In particular, I began to see more clearly that Jacob was describing the complex way the Lord handles His “children of darkness” on the earth and specifically how He dealt with the impatient and proud children of Israel, whom Jacob calls the Jews.

In this last of his seven mysteries, Jacob uses eighty-one words to give a very candid and capsulated explanation of one of God's greatest mysteries, *the mystery of confusion*.

THOSE WHO LOOK BEYOND THE MARK

As we all know from the Old Testament, the Israelites were a particularly blessed but stiffnecked people. In this fourteenth verse, almost every word carries a message. So let us read Jacob's revealing passage again carefully, word for word, and then I will list the twelve questions which I asked myself in order to better understand their meaning.

SEVENTH MYSTERY, VERSE FOURTEEN—

But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand.

Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, THEY MUST NEEDS FALL; for God hath taken away His plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it.

And because they desired it, God hath done it, that they may stumble.(Jacob 4:14)

Since Jacob told us that he was writing his greatest revelations only in headlines, we might remember that this verse is not intended to be a full treatise of this amazing mystery. Almost each word is a message in itself. Collectively they provide a condensed, capsulated statement of one of the greatest mysteries of God, *the mystery of confusion*.

SIXTEEN CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER

In this last of the seven headlines, Jacob used sixteen specific concepts, each of which needs to be explored to understand the depth of his meaning.

1. They were “stiffnecked”

2. They “despised”
3. “Words of plainness”
4. They “killed”
5. The “prophets”
6. They “sought”
7. They cannot “understand”
8. Their “blindness”
9. “Looking beyond”
10. The “mark”
11. They needed to “fall”
12. God hath “taken away”
13. God hath “delivered”
14. “Many things”
15. They “desired” it
16. They must “stumble”

Three of these words—*blindness*, *plainness*, and *desired*—were repeated twice for emphasis. Since I realized that all of these sixteen concepts have many levels of meaning, here are the questions around which I started my prayerful research.

TWELVE QUESTIONS ON LOOKING BEYOND THE MARK

1. What is the *mark*?
2. What does looking beyond the *mark* mean?
3. How did Israel despise the words of *plainness*?
4. When did God take away His *plainness*?
5. How did Israel desire many things that they could not understand?
6. Why does looking beyond the *mark* produce blindness?
7. What does it mean to be a stiffnecked people?
8. In what way does God deliver these many things which people cannot understand?
9. Why did the Jews need to fall?
10. Is Jacob referring only to the Jews or to the condition of the whole world?
11. What does it mean for a whole people to stumble and what about us in the latter days?
12. How do we keep from killing the prophets?

SUMMARY

As Jacob shared his own and his brother's testimony of the power of their faith and the meekness which came from their weaknesses, he gave us brief summaries as “headlines” of seven mysteries. The First Mystery asks us to give up our belief that we know much about what God will and will not do. The sixth has to do with God's willingness to show us all truth, in candid plainness. The Seventh Mystery then explains that when even His chosen people despised the words of plainness and looked beyond the mark, God “revealed” to them all kinds of non-understandable “knowledge” so that they would stumble in their blindness.

Chapter V

Question 1 – Part 1

WHAT IS THE MARK?

My first step in trying to better understand Jacob's profound headline about “**looking beyond the mark**” was to answer the question as to what did he mean by the mark? What is it in the Lord's plan that the children of Israel totally missed? What was it they were looking beyond, thus were put under their own “**condemnation, scourge and judgment?**” What is it they could have had if they had not despised the words of plainness? And for us, is it the *mark* that we will experience when we receive President Benson's promised “**blessing hitherto unknown?**”

When I looked up “mark” in the dictionary, it said that, in this kind of context, it is “something that one wishes to achieve, a target, goal or an object, like a point that serves as a guide.” So does the Lord have a particular, all important aspect of the gospel by which we are to focus our direction, our aim; and, if we do, we cannot fail? But if we do not, we cannot succeed.

LOOKING FOR THE MOST ESSENTIAL, SINGLE ASPECT OF THE GOSPEL

The more study I gave to the meaning of the mark, the more convinced I was that Jacob must be referring to only one critical, most important aspect of the gospel, consisting of a single element rather than a combination of all or many principles of salvation. For example, Christ spoke of the singular, “**strait gate and narrow way which leadeth unto life, and few there be who find it.**” (Matthew 7:14) Notice, this gate is singular and difficult to find, easy to be missed.

I found that Christ also often used only a single word to describe one precious and vital aspect of the gospel when He said,

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field, which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth ALL that he hath, and buyeth that field. (Matthew 13:44)

In the same talk, Jesus gave another singular metaphor.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold ALL that he had, and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-46)

But if these two terms, the treasure and the pearl of great price, are describing the one single, most critical aspect of the kingdom of heaven, what is it?

1. Is it *faith* in Christ? Without faith we cannot please God. (Hebrews 11:6)
2. Or could it be *teaching* the gospel, for the greatest call is to preach *repentance*? (D&C 15:6)
3. Or perhaps it is *knowledge*, for man is saved no faster than he gains knowledge. (D&C 130:19)
4. Perhaps it is *revelation*, the rock upon which the kingdom of God is built. (Matthew 16:18)
5. Or was it the ordinances of the gospel, like baptism, for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. (Mark 16:16)
6. Or better yet, what about *service* to our fellow man by which Christ will divide the sheep from the goats? (Matthew 25:31-46)

I asked myself, could the “mark” be any or all of these? So my next step was to check out what other prophets had to say about the “mark.”

ONLY JACOB AND PAUL REFER TO THE MARK

I was surprised to find that Jacob was the only one in the *Book of Mormon* who spoke of the “mark,” and he used the word only once. In all our scriptures, one other prophet used the word and that was Paul in the *New Testament*. He also used the word only once, but Paul used the word in a positive sense. He said, “**I press TOWARD THE MARK for the prize.**” (Philippians 3:14) Just preceding those words, Paul emphasized how important this mark was to him. Here is his full statement:

This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before [us], I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

Paul explained that he not only refused to look back, but he was totally focused and committed in his faith and hope to the one target which would assure that he would receive the fullness of the calling of Christ.

AS MANY AS BE PERFECT

Then Paul encouraged those Saints who were equally blessed to be likewise committed. In doing so, he used a special word which gave me reason to ponder. He referred to those who were already PERFECT. He wrote: “**Let us therefore, as many as BE PERFECT, be thus minded.**” (Philippians 3:13-15)

“Perfect!” I asked myself. “Does the *mark* have to do with something we experience in *perfection*?” Certainly Israel was looking far beyond being able to be perfect. And, come to think of it, so have we in these latter days. Although I understood that one of the three major purposes of the Church is the “*perfecting of the Saints*,” was I really to believe we could attain it in this life? All we can do in this life, I was taught, is to try hard, for certainly we are not expected to be actually perfect until we dwell with Christ in the world to come.

MORONI'S CLOSING PROMISE OF PERFECTION IN CHRIST

However, if we go back to the *Book of Mormon*, we will find that Moroni, in the two closing verses on the gold plates, emphatically declared that if we truly *come unto Christ*, we would BE, actually and completely, perfected in Him—NOW! In fact, in those two closing verses, I found that he mentioned *being perfect* four times, and all in the *present tense*, just as Paul did. In addition, Moroni also included being “*sanctified*,” “*holy*” and “*without spot*,” which also describe a state of being perfectly pure. Here are Moroni's electrifying words:

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.

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. (Moroni 10:32-33)

PERFECTION IN CHRIST—THE COVENANT OF THE FATHER

Actually, although I had memorized and often quoted these two verses for many years, I had not sufficiently noticed that this *perfection* was totally *IN CHRIST rather than in ourselves*, and

that this perfecting process had a NAME. Notice that Moroni said that it is called “THE COVENANT OF THE FATHER.”

As I first noticed the fact that this perfecting process was called “*the covenant of the Father*,” my mind quickly flashed back to President Benson’s declaration at his second conference when he quoted from the *Doctrine and Covenants* as to how we are to get out from under our judgment of condemnation. Here are the words he quoted from Section 84, Verse 57:

And they shall remain under this condemnation UNTIL THEY REPENT AND REMEMBER THE NEW COVENANT, even the *Book of Mormon* AND THE FORMER COMMANDMENTS. (Ensign, November 1986, p.7)

So I began to realize that it was not just the *Book of Mormon*, specifically, we were to remember, but the new covenant as contained in the *Book of Mormon* and in the “FORMER COMMANDMENTS,” which would most likely mean the *Old and New Testaments*.

IT IS THE “NEW COVENANT” THAT WE ARE TO REMEMBER AND DO

In the talk Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave on President Benson’s message to the Church, he also stressed this fact. After referring to how President Benson frequently quoted Section 84, Verses 56 to 57 which states the Church being put under condemnation, Elder Oaks said:

This revelation [D&C 84:56-57] states that the condemnation can be removed by repenting and remembering “the new covenant.” What is this “new covenant, even the *Book of Mormon* and the former commandments which I have given them?”

The new covenant is obviously inseparable from the *Book of Mormon*, as has frequently been said, but it also includes “the former commandments” which the Lord had given His people... Under this interpretation, the new covenant, whose neglect the Lord condemned, was the covenant contained in the *Book of Mormon* and in the “former commandments” the Lord had now renewed and confirmed upon the early Saints. These former commandments must have been the Lord’s prior revelations, as contained in the *Bible—the Old and New Testaments—and in those modern revelations already given to the Saints.* (Ensign, March, 1994, p. 63)

So Elder Oaks makes it very clear that it is the *new covenant* we are to focus our attention on. Then, with the “covenant of the Father” referred to so emphatically by Moroni having to do with being “perfect in Christ,” I knew that finding out the meaning of the mark would have to lead in that direction. Again, as Moroni testified,

IF YE BY THE GRACE OF GOD ARE PERFECT IN CHRIST... WHICH IS THE COVENANT OF THE FATHER UNTO THE REMISSION OF YOUR SINS, THAT YE BECOME HOLY, WITHOUT SPOT. (Moroni 10:33)

IS THERE A PERFECTION IN THIS LIFE?

So, I began to research all of the scriptures which refer to *perfection in this life*. In the *New Testament*, not only did Paul refer to those in the Church at Philippi who, he said, were perfect, but it appears that he chastised the Saints at Corinth because THEY WERE NOT. He declared:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, NEITHER YET NOW ARE YE ABLE. For ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

We will be talking more about the *milk* and the *meat* in *Book II, Finding the Mark*.

SPEAKING ABOUT THE HIDDEN WISDOM AMONG THOSE WHO ARE “PERFECT”

But what is the *meat*? To answer that question, let us read what Paul wrote to these Corinthian Saints just preceding this severe chastisement found at the beginning of Chapter 3. In Chapter 2 he briefly defined the spiritual level of the gospel which he could not give to them in greater detail. In defining this spiritual meat, he again casually referred to the fact that some of the Saints in those days were already perfect:

God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of His son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brethren...that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be PERFECTLY joined together in the same mind...that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

HOWBEIT, WE SPEAK [this] WISDOM [only] AMONG THEM THAT ARE PERFECT... We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom...[for] we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:9-10 & 2:6-7, 16)

If Paul stood before one of our congregations today and said those words, some of us might challenge him by saying, “Paul, who were those who were *perfect* with whom you were speaking about the hidden wisdom?”

In response to such a question, I imagine that Paul might ask us, in return, “Didn’t your own prophet, President Benson, promise you a blessing hitherto unknown? How would it be unknown if you already knew it? And why have you not known it until now? Is it because you are like our zealous Saints at Corinth who had not fully repented and come unto the *fellowship of His Son*, Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 1:9)

“Fellowship?” we might ask him. “Paul, what do you mean by that? Can’t we have fellowship with Christ without being perfect?”

BEING PERFECT IN THE LIGHT AS CHRIST IS IN THE LIGHT

Then Paul might remind us of what his fellow apostle, John the Beloved, had written about fellowship with God, that—

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN. (1 John 1:6-7)

By reminding us of this declaration by John the Beloved, Paul would certainly have a point. Being in the light, *AS Christ is in the light*, would have to be perfection in that light, and certainly this would be a blessing previously unknown to most of us.

Then we might remember the most compelling statement in the scriptures about perfection. It is a statement made by the Savior that we have all heard many times. Christ told His followers, “**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**” (Matthew 5:50) He did not say to try, strive or hope, but BE!

Even though I was familiar with this statement of the Savior, I had failed to notice a cross-reference at the bottom of the page. (1983 LDS Bible p. 1194) It is a reference to Joseph Smith’s inspired translation, in which he added to the words we have of Christ by formalizing the statement as a full commandment: “**YE ARE THEREFORE COMMANDED TO BE PERFECT...**” (Matthew 5:48 & JST Matthew 5:50)

IS THERE “A PERFECTION” THAT IS A GIFT?

Can we *really be perfect in this life*? If perfection is what Jacob and Paul meant by the mark, not only had Israel been blinded by looking beyond the mark, but so had I. Then is perfection, I wondered, what I am to believe and DO, not just SAY? Is that what is promised in the COVE-

NANT OF THE FATHER that I am to remember?

All this began to make more sense when I realized that the Father absolutely guarantees us, *by covenant*, that He can and will make us perfect, pure, sanctified and holy IN His Son—if we but truly and fully come unto Christ and receive that *perfection in and of Him*.

I must admit that as wonderful as all of this sounded, it was not an easy or even feasible concept to contemplate. Actually, besides sounding impossible, it was also scary! Perfection in this life seemed so unrealistic. Didn't even Jacob acknowledge his great weakness? Paul did likewise. I asked myself, "*What is all this perfection about?*"

I have heard some try to make sense out of this commandment by saying, "We are to be perfect only means that we are to be as perfect in our sphere as God is in His." That sounds reasonable at first, but think a moment. The trouble with that definition is that while God lives His knowledge perfectly, none of us, no not one, lives up to our own knowledge. We all know better than we do. We all know how to be more patient, forgiving, understanding and caring than we are able to manifest in our daily lives. So that definition, if looked at honestly, does not work either. Try as we may, none of us do as well in our sphere as God does in His.

IN WHAT WAY CAN WE EVER BE PERFECT IN THIS LIFE?

I was sure there had to be an answer. When the answer finally began to dawn on me, the mystery of the impossibility of perfection vanished. I could see that most of my problem with the principle of perfection is how I was taught to define the word. I believed that for one to be perfect, that person would have to be without vanity, selfishness, jealousy, indolence and other forms of sin, and in addition, have unshakable faith and unconditional love. That definition seemed to be inescapable. But then no one but Christ has been perfect. He alone had lived without sin!

So if Christ was actually commanding all of us to be perfect, even as His Father in Heaven, and Christ does not command the impossible, then this "perfection" He is referring to must have a different meaning. And I found that it certainly does! Perfection can mean something totally different than being without any flaws. So let's take a careful look at this very interesting word and the understanding we have of it.

In the dictionary, "perfect" is defined as being complete. In grammar we have the perfect tense, meaning the action described by the verb is complete. For example, "running" is present tense. "Ran" is past-perfect tense because it is an act which has been completed in the past. One of the most appropriate definitions I found in the dictionary for the word "perfect" was this: "**Perfect is completely reproducing or corresponding to a type or original.**"

When I read this definition, I remembered again how John described having fellowship with God. We "**walk in the light, as He is in the light.**" What is this light? Well, "**God is light.**" (1 John 1:5) Also John says that "**God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.**" (1 John 4:16)

What does all of this mean? Is there a perfection in love which is a gift from God? The answer John gives us is a resounding yes! **IT IS HIS LOVE WHICH IS PERFECTED IN US.** (1 John 4:12)

ONLY THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST IS PERFECT

But is the gift of His perfect love *for this life*? John said that it is! He added this declaration, in present-perfect tense:

Herein is our love made perfect...because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in [His] love; but PERFECT LOVE CASTETH OUT FEAR, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not [yet] MADE PERFECT IN LOVE. (1 John 4:17-18)

Wow! That says it all! I began to realize that it is only in the gift of the pure love of Christ

that we are promised PERFECTION ON THIS EARTH. There is no perfection in the flesh or in the natural mind. In fact, Mormon stressed that *ALL things must fail but one*. That one perfect thing is CHARITY, THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST, because it *"never faileth."* (Moroni 7:46)

I then realized that *pure*, as in *"the pure love of Christ,"* means *holy, without spot*, just like Moroni said that there is a perfection in Christ that the Father has promised us BY COVENANT. In fact, Paul described charity in just that way. He said, **"But when that which is PERFECT IS COME, then that which is *in part* shall be done away."** (I Corinthians 13:10)

So then I took another look at the Savior's commandment that we are to BE perfect. I noticed that He said, **"Be ye THEREFORE perfect."** *"Therefore"* is an adverb, connecting the words **"be ye"** to the subject which has just been previously discussed. For example, if you said, "I want you to baby-sit my children, and I want you, *therefore*, to have them in bed by nine o'clock." The *"therefore"* would refer to the job assignment of baby-sitting the children.

I reread what Christ had been talking about just before commanding us to be perfect to see what He was referring to by the *"therefore."* I found that He had just been talking about pure, unconditional love, just like the Father demonstrates when He lets the sun shine and the rain fall on the just and the unjust. So Christ was not giving us an impossible earthly task, but asking us to receive this gift of His pure love so that we could love perfectly, just as His father does.

CHRIST'S SERMON ON PERFECT LOVE

Here is the full text on perfect, unconditional love which immediately precedes His command for us to be perfect. It is part of the Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.

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; 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.*

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?

Ye are *THEREFORE* commanded to be perfect [in this kind of love], *even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* [in love]. (JST Matthew 5:43-50)

WITHOUT THAT LOVE WE ARE NOTHING

My final conclusion, therefore, was that possessing what Paul called charity—which is translated from the Greek word "agape," meaning Godly understanding—and which Mormon called the *"pure love of Christ,"* had to be the perfection of love which can be bestowed upon us *in this life*. These two great prophets, Paul and Mormon, gave the most emphatic statements found in the scriptures about charity. They stressed that *charity* is the *ONE* and *ONLY* thing we must not be without for it is the only thing *which does not fail*. Here are their testimonies:

[Paul declared:] **Though I speak with the *tongues of men and of angels* [i.e. teaching repentance in power], and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or A TINKLING SYMBOL.**

Though I have the *gift of prophecy*, and understand *all mysteries, and all knowledge*; and though I have *all faith*, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I AM NOTHING.

And though I bestow *all my goods to feed the poor* [i.e., total charitable deeds], and though I give *my body to be burned* [i.e., total sacrifice], and have not charity, IT PROFITETH ME NOTHING. (I Corinthians 13:1-3)

[Mormon declared:] **Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, YE ARE NOTHING for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, WHICH IS THE GREATEST OF ALL, FOR ALL [other] THINGS MUST FAIL—BUT CHARITY IS THE PURE [perfect] LOVE OF CHRIST, AND IT ENDURETH FOREVER.** (Moroni 7:46-47)

Would this not also be what Christ called “the pearl of great price,” “the treasure,” “the strait and narrow way” and what John called “being in the light as Christ is in the light,” thus having fellowship with God and what Paul called “the mind of Christ?” So I began to accept the fact that in our present day, President Benson had called us to remember the covenant of the Father and come unto Christ to be *perfected* in the pure love of Christ, which is bestowed upon all who are true followers, not only to SAY, but to DO what Christ has commanded.

SUMMARY

So in what way can we be perfect in this life? It is by possessing the free gift of Christ's pure, perfect, unconditional love, called *charity*. Charity is the most irreplaceable aspect of the gospel, for we can have all else and still be nothing if we have looked beyond it to be “wise” instead of “perfectly pure.” It is only by being bestowed this perfect love that we can be pure, possessing the mind of Christ and, in this way, being holy without spot. So, as we study further, we will find that this pure gift of His perfect love is the “mark” which the natural man looks beyond in order to enjoy the vanity and judgmentalness of being “right.” Yes, so right!

Chapter VI

Question 1 – Part 2

IS THE MARK THE PURE, PERFECTING LOVE OF CHRIST?

Since the first edition of this book came out, some readers have angrily objected to defining the MARK as the pure love of Christ, saying that, instead, the mark merely refers to Christ and His atonement. Others feel that the mark refers to the whole gospel of Christ.

In either case, I could not agree more—as long as we acknowledge that the essential requirement of Christ's gospel and His atonement is *being bestowed the gift of His infinite and eternal love*.

As BYU Professor Stephen E. Robinson, in his excellent book, *Believing Christ*, stressed that too many of us believe *in* Christ without truly *believing Him*, meaning that we do not believe *He will purify and sanctify us as He promised—by His grace, in this life*. As we will discuss in detail in the chapters ahead, Christ promised us the *fruit of the tree of life*, if we truly come to Him. (1 Nephi 11:22)

ALL TRUE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE TO RECEIVE THIS GIFT

As Mormon stressed to the faithful Saints in his day, the pure love of Christ *IS “bestowed upon ALL who are TRUE followers of His Son.”* So if we are not having bestowed upon us the pure and perfect love, then we would know that we are not yet *true enough followers of Christ*, i.e., *possibly looking beyond the mark* as Israel did of old.

So we might wisely ask, what does it take to be a true follower of Christ? Is a testimony,

faithful obedience, gospel knowledge and the ordinances enough? As important as they are, Mormon testified that this love is bestowed upon those who have three additional qualifications.

The first two requirements he mentioned are (1) *faith in Christ* and (2) *hope in Christ*. But, we might ask, faith and hope *in what about Christ*? Would it not be faith and hope that Christ will fulfill His promise to bestow upon us the most precious of all His gifts—the pure love of Christ? (1 Nephi 15:36) So if *faith and hope* are the first two requirements, what is the third qualification?

Mormon stated that the other critical ingredient is that (3) we must be *meek and lowly* or else our *faith and hope would be in vain*. Then he reminded us of the absolute necessity of being meek and lowly to receive this gift.

And if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, HE MUST HAVE [would naturally have] CHARITY [the pure love of Christ]; for if he have not charity he is NOTHING [because his faith is in vain], wherefore he must needs have charity. (Moroni 7:43-47)

So it appears to me that being the recipient of Christ's greatest gift of His pure love is the ONE essential aspect by which we can measure the fulfillment of our truly believing Christ and being His true followers.

From this point on, I invite the reader to join me in experimenting with the possible idea that the MARK Jacob was referring to could be nothing less than Christ's gift of His purifying and sanctifying love provided in, by and through His atonement, the critical keystone of His gospel of salvation.

JACOB TESTIFIED THAT WE CAN ATTAIN TO A PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

As for my own journey of discovery, after I had begun to see the possibility that the *mark* had to do with receiving and being *perfected in the pure love of Christ*, I was surprised to find that in the verse just prior to Jacob's declaration about the Jews looking beyond the mark, he had stressed the attainability of a very special type of *perfection available to us*. Interestingly, Jacob used the word perfection as it relates to perfect knowledge.

Remember that Paul said that **“faith was the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** (Hebrews 11:1) In the seven headline mysteries of Jacob, the *fifth* gives us some exciting news about how we can go even beyond faith to a *perfect knowledge*. This is his **FIFTH MYSTERY**:

And now, beloved, marvel not that I tell you these things; for why not speak of the atonement of Christ and ATTAIN TO A PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF HIM, AS TO ATTAIN TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF A RESURRECTION AND THE WORLD TO COME? (Jacob 4:12)

As I began to understand this headline mystery, it became self-evident that no one can go from faith in Christ to a perfect knowledge of Christ without experiencing the gift of Christ's pure and perfect love.

To love as Christ loves is really the only way we can know, understand and comprehend Christ. So I asked myself, isn't Jacob saying that there is available, even in this life, a perfect knowledge of Christ through experiencing the perfect quality of His love?

I could see also that no one can go beyond faith to a perfect knowledge of the glorious resurrection of the body without knowing the *experience of a spiritual resurrection*, a rebirth of one's spirit in the infinite Spirit of Christ.

As Jacob confidently challenged each of us, **“MARVEL NOT! WHY NOT?!”** And as Paul would charge those who, like himself, were “perfect” in Christ's love, **“Press toward the mark for the HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.”** (Philippines 3:14)

THE TREE OF LIFE REPRESENTS THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST

The availability and magnitude of the pure love of Christ is illustrated in the vision seen by Jacob's brother, Nephi, and their father, Lehi. When Nephi saw this vision, he wanted to know the meaning of the gloriously pure white tree of life which he beheld. When the meaning was revealed to him, he declared,

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. (1 Nephi 11:22)

What is the love of God but the pure love of Christ? So in Nephi's thrilling declaration, we might insert the words Mormon used to define charity, which would be the same GIFT symbolized by the tree of life. Let us read it again, inserting the fuller meaning.

Yea, it [the tree of life] is the love of God [charity, the *pure love of Christ*], which sheddeth itself abroad [is bestowed] *in the hearts of the children of men*; wherefore, it is the most desirable above ALL THINGS.

When I finally began to put Mormon's message and Nephi's vision together, I could then better understand Christ commanding us to be perfect. It is to be perfect in the love which He bestows upon ALL who are His true followers. *It is to be perfected in this love, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect in love.*

Then, as Jacob's sixth mystery shouted from the pages, why did I marvel? Why did I hesitate? Is it because of my "vanity and unbelief?" For years I had wondered why I failed to consistently experience the magnitude of this pure and holy love that was to be shed into my heart. I yearned to be able to testify, as did Paul, that **"to KNOW the LOVE of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD."** (Ephesians 3:19)

I accepted the fact that such a purity of love must be **"beyond [my] knowledge"** as a natural man. Yet Nephi's account was reminding me that just as his father had eaten of its fruit and wanted all of his family to do the same, all people are invited to make room in their hearts to enjoy and partake of that love. No wonder Lehi said, **"It was most sweet, above all that I had ever before tasted...It filled my soul with exceedingly great joy."** (1 Nephi 8:11-12)

THE LIVING WATER ALSO REPRESENTS THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST

The angel gave Nephi another surprise. He was shown that the gift of Christ's pure love is also symbolized by the metaphor of the *fountain of living waters*.

The fountain of living waters...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. (1 Nephi 11:25)

Regarding this incredible symbol of the *living water*, we can remember the time Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman at a well. He responded to the shocked and questioning woman:

If thou knewest THE gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water...Whosoever drinketh of this water [of this well] shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:10-14)

When I began to realize that the LIVING WATER, which symbolized the pure love of Christ, was **"THE" GIFT OF CHRIST**, that when we look beyond it to the tree of knowledge, we are really looking beyond and away from the gift of the purification of Christ's love.

OUT OF ONE'S BELLY SHALL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

Most people are not aware that Christ, personally, testified publicly and forcefully regarding

this miraculous gift of His perfect love by *shouting* out to a huge crowd at the temple in Jerusalem.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:37-38)

But if the tree of life, like the rivers of living water, symbolizes the one and only thing we cannot do without, how do we obtain access to it? We all realize that Adam and Eve lost access to the tree of life after the fall because *Cherubims* and a *flaming sword* were placed to guard the only entrance. So how are we to partake of the fruit when the way is so heavily guarded and protected?

Again, the *Book of Mormon* is the only place we will find the specific answer to that important question. Alma gave us the way it is to be done. We can *grow our very own, personal tree of life* by planting its seed right in our own hearts. We usually refer to his experiment as planting the seed of faith. But what Alma said is that the seed was the word of God:

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...(Alma 32:28)

In Lehi's vision, the word of God was symbolized by the iron rod which led directly to the full-grown, fruit-bearing tree of life. (1 Nephi 11:25) Then the word of God, we must conclude, is the promise of and leads to the *tree of life*, which is the *pure love of Christ being shed into our hearts!* So it is faith in God's covenant that He can and will provide this redeeming miracle of the fruit of the tree of life and the perpetually-flowing fountain of living waters.

But there is one critical condition. We must not cast out the promise by our indifference and unbelief. We are to carefully nurture the promise until it brings forth the fruit of the pure, infinite love of God. His Thirty-second Chapter in Alma will be discussed in greater detail in Book II, *Finding The Mark*, but let us review these powerful instructions which Alma gave to the humbled poor among the Zoramites:

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...

[But] if ye will not nourish the *word* [the promise], looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye will never PLUCK OF THE FRUIT OF *THE TREE OF LIFE*.

But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree [of life] as it beginneth to grow it shall take root; and behold it shall be a *tree springing up unto everlasting life*.

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* [pure love of Christ] *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 you shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst* [ever again]. (Alma 32:40-42)

Of course, this chapter of Alma had long been a favorite of mine. I knew this great prophet was describing the strait and narrow way, but over the years, merely believing that I could and should plant such a seed and nurture such a tree did not produce anything like what Alma described. He said that we would no longer hunger or thirst, *but I still had hunger and thirst.*

So as I intensified my search in response to President Benson's challenge, I noticed one day a critical word Mormon had used to describe this process of experiencing the pure love of Christ. He said that *this love is BESTOWED*.

As many times as I had read Mormon's words about charity in Chapter Seven of Moroni, I

had failed to grasp the difference between “*bestowed*” and “*developed*.” One does not develop a gift. A gift is *bestowed*. Mormon said:

Charity is the pure love of Christ...which He hath bestowed upon ALL WHO ARE TRUE FOLLOWERS OF HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, that ye may become the sons of God; that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is; that we may have this hope, that we may be purified even as He is pure. (Moroni 7:47-48)

I guess I was like so many others. I thought the pure love could only come from my struggling to stop putting conditions and limitations on my love. This process of failing to obtain the perfect love through self-improvement was a heavy burden indeed. In addition, neither was I justified in my belief that such a degree of *perfect love* was a gift reserved only for the few. In the above quotation, Mormon forcefully declared that this gracious gift is bestowed on *every single one who has become a true follower of Christ!* Guaranteed! Present tense!

Thus, the pure love of Christ, which is the gift that is to shed itself into the hearts of the children of men, is **THE treasure, THE greatest of all other gifts, THE pearl of great price, THE strait gate and narrow way.** Then dare we conclude that THE one and only “mark” could be anything less, for it is the keystone of our faith in Christ, “*to press toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”

SUMMARY

Jacob confirms the promises of Christ's word that we can attain to a perfect knowledge of Christ. We do this by partaking of the *fruit of the tree of life and the fountain of living waters*, both of which symbolize the gift of this pure love of Christ, whereby we never again would spiritually hunger nor thirst, for it would be like an artesian well, constantly springing up from within our very beings. It is then, by the grace of God, that we are *perfected in the love of Christ* and can in nowise deny the power of God.

Chapter VII

Question 2

AS FOR THE MARK, WHAT DOES LOOKING BEYOND IT MEAN?

When I realized that one of the primary symbols of the mark might be the tree of life, I remembered that this tree played a central part in the events which took place in the Garden of Eden. So it seemed logical that it would be helpful to review the story.

As the world knows, Latter-day Saints have a room in their temples called the Garden of Eden Room. From that interesting fact, it would appear that the events which occurred before the fall could have a significant symbolic meaning to our members. So would it not be appropriate if those who go through the temple were instructed to pray and meditate on the great truths which were only taught to them in symbols? So let us briefly review some important aspects of those events.

LOOKING BEYOND THE TREE OF LIFE

Before the fall, Adam and Eve could partake of all the trees of the garden, including the *tree of life*, except that they were absolutely forbidden to eat any of the fruit from one particular tree,

the *tree of knowledge of good and evil*. What an amazing name for a fruit-bearing tree, especially a forbidden tree which God had created in the midst of the perfect paradise.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of *every tree* of the garden thou mayest *freely eat*. But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:16-17)

So even though Adam and Eve originally had unlimited access to the tree of life, “the most desirable above all things,” Satan was able to arrange it so that they wanted the tree of knowledge *more* than the tree of life. As it says:

The serpent said unto the woman: Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall *be as gods, knowing good and evil*. And when the woman saw that the tree was *good for food*, and that it became *pleasant to the eyes*, and a tree to be *desired to make her wise*, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat. (Genesis 3:4-6 & Moses 4:10-12)

So they both looked beyond the tree of life and partook of the forbidden tree of knowledge. Satan's bait was that it would make them *wise* and they would be *as gods*. The consequence of this act produced their fall and the fall of mankind, whereby Adam and Eve became “wise” to their nakedness, feeling somewhat alienated and fearful of the Father and doing their best to conceal their guilt with a cover-up of fig leaves.

THE STORY OF ADAM IS OUR STORY, TOO

As God tells us, “*All things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal and things which are spiritual.*” (Moses 6:63) Therefore, because Latter-day Saints are reminded that the story of Adam and Eve is also their own story, it might be well to see how this event might be understood in “**the mind of Christ.**”

We have an excellent insight into Christ's view of the fall because of an explanation given by the prophet Lehi to his son, Jacob. Lehi clarified how the fall, though leading to all the frailties, sins and sorrows of mortality, was not a tragedy in the eyes of Christ but an essential ingredient for the eternal exaltation of the children of God. Because we live in the spiritual darkness which covers the earth, one of the best ways to pierce the darkness of fear, hate, guilt and greed is through *the light of Christ's own eternal view*. Otherwise, even though we are members of His Church, we will continue to be, as the Lord has said, “**walking in darkness [fear] at noonday.**” (D&C 95:6)

NEED FOR OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS

Following are the insightful words Jacob heard from his father as to why the great Jehovah had arranged for the children of God to experience a fallen nature.

For it must needs be, that there is *an opposition in all things*. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, *righteousness* could not be brought to pass, neither *wickedness*, neither *holiness* nor *misery*, neither *good* nor *bad*. Wherefore, *all things* must needs be *a compound in one*...

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*... If Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the Garden of Eden...

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. But behold, ALL THINGS have been done in the WISDOM OF HIM who knoweth all things. Adam fell that *men might be*; and men are, that *they might have joy*. (2 Nephi 2:11-25)

Even the great Jehovah descended *below all things* so that *He could comprehend all things*, that He might be **IN ALL AND THROUGH ALL THINGS**. (D&C 88:6)

JOY COMES ONLY AFTER EXPERIENCING THE OPPOSITE TO JOY

So Adam fell that *we* might be. Might be what? That we might become a natural man, an enemy to God, cut off from His presence, to be temporarily in darkness, not comprehending the light.

The critical thing for us to understand is that we did not come to the earth to experience the infinite light of heaven, for we already had that. We chose to follow Adam into the fall to discover the opposite of the glorious light which we already knew in Heaven. The opposite of light is darkness, which we could not comprehend while still in Heaven.

Then why did we, the children of God dwelling in His glorious presence, need to go where we would experience sin and darkness? *The answer is that only by experiencing the opposite to our infinite light could we comprehend the glory of being infinite, literal children of an infinite and eternal God.* So it was essential that we fall into darkness, cut off from God's presence, so that we might comprehend *the spiritual light that we, as spiritual beings, are*, thereby being able to have *a fullness of JOY!*

So it was by Christ's eternal plan that we, like Adam, *look beyond the tree of life* for the supposed wisdom of the tree of knowledge. Thus we, as natural man, become proud of our great wisdom as to what is good and evil, feeling that we need to fight for that which is good and judgmentally resist that which is evil. Our internalized standards of good and evil lie behind all our *impatience* with what we think or feel is evil, bad or displeasing. We feel justified in our *alienation* from those with whom we disagree, *intolerance* with those who don't behave correctly and *resentment* for that which seems unfair and unholy in the world around us. *These are all characteristics of the natural man, not the child of Christ.*

LOOKING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL AS THE WAY TO ACHIEVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Our treasured knowledge of good and evil is also the basis of our *self-righteousness*. We, like Israel in the days of Paul, seem to feel worthy because of our obedience to many particular laws of righteousness, even while we ignore many others.

Especially is this true of those who believe that their knowledge of good and evil is the result of direct or indirect revelations from God. In their zeal to serve God, people often find it almost impossible to be truly meek and lowly in heart because they feel their zeal to do right is ample evidence of their righteous intent. Such religious souls often think that their only problem is that they should better master the inspired knowledge of good and evil which God has revealed for them. In other words, they believe that more information is all that is needed to eventually become completely perfect, pure and holy in some world to come.

Since pure, unconditional love, however, is the **ONLY** foundation for righteousness, it may well be that our determined belief and desire to serve the Lord without first obtaining the gift of that pure love is what Jacob called *looking beyond the mark*.

BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF THE "NATURAL MAN" TO UNDERSTAND

When Christ asked those who would follow Him to *love their enemies*, especially those who spitefully used them and were repugnant to them, His disciples must have been greatly mystified. Since it was their natural, human tendency to admire what is perceived as good and to loathe that which is perceived as bad, they were incapable of loving their enemies in the same way that they loved their friends. Without a miraculous change in their hearts, Christ's command to have perfect, unconditional love could only be accepted as a worthy but nearly impossible ideal. As an ideal, the natural mind believes it must "try" to gradually self-improve toward achieving that goal, rather than receive *a free gift of that love* through faith, hope and meekness.

I was particularly impressed by the way Paul described the error of the zealous, self-improvement efforts of his Jewish compatriots. He described them as being ignorant of “God's righteousness.” Well, God's righteousness is His infinite love, is it not? So let's read Paul's words while we fill in a more complete description of his terms. He said:

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge [of the mark]. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness [which is the gift of His pure love], and going about to establish their own righteousness [by being right as they see the right], [they] have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:2-3)

Since the “righteousness of God” is His pure, unconditional love “which sheddeth itself abroad into the hearts of the children of men,” Paul is acknowledging that the Jews, being ignorant of Christ's gift of the mark, were looking beyond the mark for salvation and approval through the very laws God had given them “that they might stumble.”

So Paul then emphasized that “they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God, for Christ is the end of the law FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS to every one that believeth.” (Romans 10:3-4) In other words, Christ is to bring the stumbling block of the law to an end through the gift of Christ's righteousness, His perfect love.

SUMMARY

We can see that the symbolic meaning of the Garden of Eden story was duplicated in the history of Israel. But even more to the point, we can see that it is duplicated in each of our own lives. Realizing this fact can help us see both the nature of our fall, the wisdom of the whole plan and the true way of redemption. We can begin to understand that we came on earth, not to experience Heaven but to experience for ourselves the nature of darkness and sin, the blindness of looking beyond the gift of Christ's pure love by trying to establish our own righteousness through being “wise” in our knowledge of good and evil.

Chapter VIII

Question 3

HOW DID ISRAEL DESPISE THE WORDS OF PLAINNESS?

Jacob said that the Jews “were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness...and sought for things that they could not understand.” Consequently, he declared that by their “looking beyond the mark,” God took “away His plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it.” (Jacob 4:14)

In the past I had not given such a statement about despising the words of plainness much thought. I assumed that the point was rather self-evident. But now I realize that I had not been clear at all as to what this “plainness” was that these people were despising.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DESPISE?

So I first took a better look at the word “despise.” Obviously, one way to despise something is to look down on it with contempt or scorn. However, the dictionary says that another evidence of despising is to regard it as trivial or irrelevant. So why would any people despise the words of

plainness about the mark, the greatest of all the blessings of God?

For one thing, if we give lip service to some straight-forward instruction of the Lord, but do nothing about putting it into practice, we might take comfort in that we are not rejecting His teaching openly, but would we not be actually despising it in our hearts by treating it as "trivial and worthless?" But I had to ask, what plainness were they despising? Finding the answer to that question turned out to be critical.

WHAT PLAINNESS DID THEY DESPISE?

It was during the first three months after leaving Egypt that the Israelites were despising the plainness of truly trusting God in their hearts. As the Lord led them into one frightening situation after another, they responded by being angry and resentful, expressing their displeasure by bitterly complaining. Then, immediately following those three months, before Israel was given any of the laws of Moses, they experienced a cataclysmic event, called "**THE PROVOCATION**," in which the children of Israel severely provoked the Lord.

The Psalmist described this sad day and pled for the children of Israel to recover from the curse placed on Israel because of what happened on that fateful day. Here are king David's words:

Today if ye will hear His voice, *harden not your heart*, AS IN THE PROVOCATION, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted Me, proved, Me, and saw My work. Forty years long [thereafter] was I grieved with this generation, and said, it is a people that *do err in their heart*, and they *do not know My ways*: Unto whom I swear in My wrath that they **SHOULD NOT ENTER INTO MY REST. (Psalms 95:7-11)**

The amazing account of the provocation is found in Exodus 19. It was not until after this incredible event that the Lord began to give Israel the extremely detailed and complex Law of Moses, starting with the first Ten Commandments reported in the very next chapter, Exodus 20. Even after they were given over 600 commandments in the law, they remained "**a people that *do err in their heart*, and they *do not know My ways***" for the remaining 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and then, to this very day. This incredibly zealous, brilliant and ambitious people has miraculously held their identity as God's chosen people through the suffering of untold persecutions, treachery and prejudice. Yet their scriptures remind them that they "***do err in their heart*, and they *do not know* [God's] *ways***." Therefore, they could "**NOT ENTER INTO [God's] REST**." What an indictment! Why didn't they KNOW?

DESPIISING THE PLAINNESS BECAUSE IT IS TOO SIMPLE

As we have seen, the stiffnecked do not believe they are stiffnecked, the blind do not believe they are blind, and those who despise the words of plainness are sure they are not guilty of such a spiritual offense. The children of Israel, after having seen so many miracles performed by the Lord in their behalf, were convinced that they had to be the most holy, righteous and obedient people God had ever raised up upon the earth. Yet, every time the Lord put them in difficult circumstances, they angrily complained and felt they were being betrayed and forsaken.

THE LORD INVITED THEM TO RECEIVE WHAT THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD HANDLE

So what does a loving Father do with a blind and stiffnecked people like that? We shall see that the Lord did what a good teacher sometimes does with arrogant, know-it-all students. As we say in modern times, He *gave them enough "rope to hang themselves."* In other words, He invited them to receive what they believed they were prepared to receive. In doing so, the Lord gave them the opportunity to discover for themselves that they were not capable of enduring such

a blessing.

So before inflicting upon them the stumbling stone of such a demanding law of good and evil, with its promises of incredible blessings and threats of devastating cursing, the Lord announced to the children of Israel that they were being given the *ultimate reward for righteousness*. They were being invited to “*enter into His rest*,” which we will find is the result of experiencing *the fullness of His glory*. In other words, they were being offered the blessing of becoming a Zion people, to literally dwell in the visual presence of the Lord. What they did not know is what Zion really is. For “**this is ZION—THE PURE IN HEART.**” (D&C 97:21) *The pure in heart are like little children*, and evidently, since they hardened their hearts, this was the *simple requirement, the plainness, that they despised*.

THEY PROUDLY COVENANTED TO BE HOLY

This invitation to become a Zion people was given to Moses to deliver to his people.

Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles wings, and brought you unto myself.

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:3-6)

When Moses delivered these simple words of the Lord to the people, “**all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.**” After Moses reported to the Lord the people’s enthusiastic covenant of absolute obedience, the Lord was ready to put them to the test, i.e., were their hearts as close to the Lord as their mouths?

And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day; for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. (Exodus 19:10-12)

So we see that the people not only were sure they had sufficient faith, but they believed that they were sufficiently holy to endure the fullness of God’s glory.

OBEY MY VOICE AND KEEP THE COVENANT

Why would this simple request be too plain for them? Possibly the reason is the undefined quality of mere “holiness” did not give them any specific standards upon which they could “show” their individual obedience and worthiness. They could not even earn Brownie Points for the degree to which they were being “holy, meek and loving.” It was too intangible to satisfy the needs required for the basis of pride, which is personal recognition and gratification.

At this point, they still had no specific commandments of “thou shalts” and “thou shalt nots,” not even the first Ten, by which they could prove their superior, righteous obedience. They had not even been instructed to build the elaborate and complex tabernacle during that time.

But they were told to move their camp here and there. They did that. Yes, they would grumble and complain when things became rough, but they felt that they certainly should not be blamed for that! So they were convinced that they were very worthy. After all, they had followed Moses, left the security of their slavery and gone into the wilderness. Wasn’t that being faithful enough to qualify as the chosen people of the Lord, the best above all nations?

From our perfect twenty/twenty hindsight, we can see that this was to be their *lesson of all lessons*. To prepare them, the Lord instructed Moses to take the vast multitude to the base of the towering Mt. Sinai. All that was required of them was—“**IF YE WILL OBEY MY VOICE INDEED, AND KEEP MY COVENANT.**”

How simple and plain are these words. There were no rigid laws, ordinances or perform-

ances to obey. All they were asked to do was simply (1) *obey His voice* and (2) *keep the covenant*. Let us examine the deeper meaning of these two seemingly simple requirements. We will consider them in two sections.

PART I THE WORDS OF PLAINNESS

“OBEY MY VOICE”

What does the Lord mean to “**obey my voice?**”

That is a question I had pondered for many years. The voice of the Lord speaks to us by the scriptures, by His priesthood leaders, by personal revelation, and particularly by the still small voice of inner guidance. During those first three months in the wilderness, the children of Israel had no scriptures or any fixed laws for them to obey. So the voice they were to follow was simply the voice of the Spirit within their hearts. We are told that:

The Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world [the experiences of everyday life], **that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit, and every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father** [i.e. no longer is cut off from His presence].

And the Father teacheth him of the covenant [which is to be made pure and holy in His love]. (D&C 84:46-48)

In the same way, Nephi tried to assure his own obedient but hesitant people, that the Spirit “**will show unto you all things what ye should do.**” (2 Nephi 32:5)

For many years I thought that Nephi was promising that God, through His Spirit, would dictate the right and wrong to every question. This had meant to me that if I really had the Spirit and obeyed His voice, I would be told, moment by moment, what was exactly the right thing to do in my life. Then, of course, I was to obey and do only those right things.

WHAT IS “RIGHT” IS SELDOM IN BLACK AND WHITE

As we sing in our song, “Choose the Right,” the second verse says that “**there is a right and wrong to every question.**” I truly believed that, of course, and what I interpreted that to mean is that I was to do everything “by the book.” I felt that to “**obey my voice**” was to always have God telling me exactly what was right and what was wrong. I was sure that if I did this fully, I would never make a mistake. I would never fail. I would never have any regrets. I would never hurt anyone, etc. etc.

But the reality of life is that most questions facing us in life are not cast in black and white, right or wrong.

WE BELIEVE GOD NEEDS US TO BE PERFECT SERVANTS

Actually, what I was doing was trying to be a perfect servant and *be commanded in all things*. But the fullness of the gospel does not call us to be servants, but “**joint heirs.**” (Romans 8:17)

The *preparatory gospel*, it is true, is built on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, where the only voice we hear commands us with magnificent promises and terrible threats. But as we have seen, the *fullness of the gospel* comes from the tree of life, which fills us with His pure love, and from the sense of that love, one has a wisdom to choose that which is appropriate for the moment.

Since there are advantages and disadvantages to any choice, pure love remains fluid and flexible, not being stuck in fixed, rigid laws of absolute right and wrong.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS THE VOICE OF CHRIST

This pure love of Christ reveals to us, softly, all things which are most appropriate at the moment—moment by moment. The Spirit flows, not with rigid and fixed rules, but with love unfeigned and without guile, meaning selfish intent. So I have found that to receive and follow that still small voice of the love of Christ, one does not serve the pride and vanity which comes from claiming to have a fixed knowledge of absolute good and evil.

If the Israelites had only been meek and lowly in heart, they could have been filled with and guided by the pure love of Christ, which would have enabled them to clearly hear and obey that inner voice of perfect love, with its patience, kindness, understanding and humility, totally **“will-ing to submit to all things which the Lord sees fit to inflict upon them, even as a child submits to his father.”** (Mosiah 3:19)

What other “knowledge” would they have needed to be holy? They would not have to be told the eight “thou shalt nots”—

**to have no other gods before them,
not to make graven images and bow down to them,
not to use the name of God in vain,
not to kill,
not to steal,
not to bear false witness,
not to commit adultery or
not to covet their neighbor's wife and property.**

Nor would they have to be told the two positives—

**to keep the Sabbath day holy and
to honor their parents.**

So in Israel's beginning, during those first critical three months as a free nation, all the Lord asked them were those two things, **“obey His voice and keep His covenant.”** Now that we have considered the first, **obeying His voice**, what about the second? What is **the covenant** that they were to keep?

PART 2

THE WORDS OF PLAINNESS

KEEP MY COVENANT

The covenant which God was asking them to keep was the original covenant of Israel, which was made between Abraham and the Lord IN A PERSONAL VISITATION — “[He] **shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.**” (Genesis 18:18)

But why was Abraham and his descendants offered such a blessing? It was because he was to obey the Lord's injunction to **“WALK BEFORE ME AND BE THOU PERFECT.”** (Genesis 17:1)

There we have the *commandment of perfection* again. To those who live by the natural mind, partaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it is so unrealistic, even impossible to ever fulfill the command to be perfect in this life, as perfection is defined on the tree of knowledge. And of course, based upon the absolute laws of that tree, they are absolutely 100% RIGHT!

But perfection in love is experienced only by those who understand the width and breadth of this covenant as it relates to the tree of life.

As we have already reviewed, we can thank Moroni for giving us the most complete definition of the covenant of the Father which he gave as the concluding statement in the *Book of*

Mormon.

Simply, to say it in the language of Moroni, Israel was to come unto Jehovah (Christ) and *be perfected in Him by denying themselves of all ungodliness and loving God with all their might, mind and strength, thus being sanctified by the love of God, which is in “the covenant of the Father unto the remission of their sins, that they would become holy, without spot.”* (Moroni 10:32-33)

ISRAEL WAS CALLED TO BE ANOTHER ZION NATION

Imagine! To be a Zion nation and be allowed to stay on the earth to bless all nations. What a glorious promise! Actually, if they had only accepted the words of plainness, they could have fulfilled that call and become another city of Enoch. As a holy nation, what a great blessing Moses and his people could have been to all the nations of the earth, teaching them the gift of God's love. In such a case, they would be God's **“peculiar treasure,” “above all people”** across the face of the world.

As we have seen, after Moses received this wonderful offer by the Lord, he called the elders together and told them how the Lord was offering to make them a peculiar treasure above all nations. The elders of Israel were pleased, of course, and took the thrilling message back to their people. The great multitudes, though so quick to rebel at the slightest testing, were suddenly more than willing to take up the Lord's offer and replied: **“And all the people answered together, and said, ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SPOKEN WE WILL DO.”** (Exodus 19:7-8)

Sounds great, does it not?

No, not quite.

Their bold covenant was actually boasting in their own ability and strength to do any and all things the Lord would command. In their vanity, they overlooked the plainness of the strait and narrow way. We should remember at this point, they had been given none of the specific commandments, not even the first Ten.

ISRAEL'S INVITATION TO ENTER THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Although the Israelites were looking beyond the mark and despised the words of plainness, God was giving them this glorious invitation to receive the full blessings of righteousness, which they thought they were obviously worthy of receiving. We can imagine their joy when Moses announced that they were to be allowed to pierce the veil and come into His presence to behold His glory, thus replacing faith with perfect knowledge.

How thrilled and joyous they must have been! They had seen His miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness, but now they were to behold God himself! Surely they would then be able to bear and endure all things like Moses.

For two days the people prepared, washing their clothes and bathing. The men must have trimmed their beards and the women would have braided their hair. For those two days, everyone was probably very polite and generous to one another. What joy! What happiness! What peace and tranquility! What faith, hope and charity. Surely, they thought, this was a people the Lord could trust and endow with the blessings of Enoch.

BEING FRIGHTENED BY THE FULLNESS OF HIS GLORY

On the third day, the clean, well-dressed and proud hosts of Israel prepared to move up close to the great mountain. As they heard the trumpet and arrived at the mountain, the mountain began to smoke, with ear shattering thunder and lightning. The trumpet sounded louder and louder from high in the fiery clouds, causing all the people to tremble. It was becoming evident that if they were to see God in His glory, they would have to endure the power of His presence.

As Moses brought the vast congregation close, the presence of the Lord on the mountain be-

came more evident by an exploding, rolling “**fire like a furnace**” that shrouded the peak. The ground shook terribly and the trumpeting grew even louder, then louder and then louder still. Finally, in the midst of all these frightening circumstances, the voice of the Lord called Moses to come up into the raging inferno to converse.

Think of it! What an incredible assignment. But since Moses had learned to fully trust the Lord, he immediately obeyed. In faith, he climbed directly into the heat of the furious fire, walking on trembling earth, seeing the lightning, hearing the roar of the thunder and the incredible sound of the trumpet.

THE PEOPLE RAN FOR SAFETY

What did the people do in the face of such a terrifying display of God's presence? They ran! One can hardly blame them. But we should remember, they ran because of the weaknesses God had given them so that in the flesh they might learn humility and patience.

But they were neither humble nor patient, only scared, and their unrepentant plea to Moses on his return was: “**Speak thou with us, and we will hear [truly obey]; but let not God speak with us lest we die.**” (Exodus 20:19-20) In their boastful zeal, they still thought that they had what it would take, if given enough knowledge, to be the “peculiar treasure” unto the Lord.

THE PLAINNESS WAS THE “MARK”

The plainness which Israel despised was the simple way of regaining access to the tree of life to partake of its fruit of perfect love, to never again hunger or thirst. Let's read again these profound words from the *Book of Mormon* which describe their problem:

They despised the words of plainness... and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, WHICH BLINDNESS CAME BY LOOKING BEYOND THE MARK, they must needs fall. (Jacob 4:14)

The *MARK* is the fullness of the gospel which is available to those who come in faith, with a meek and lowly heart. Those, and those alone, can truly obey His voice, which is the voice of perfect love, out of which comes the pure wisdom of living, moment by moment, without guile, greed, complaining or condemning.

If Israel, in their day, would have done this, they would have been keeping the covenant made with Abraham to walk before the Lord and “**be thou perfect**” in His love. In turn, God would have fulfilled His covenant of giving them a total remission of their sins so that they would be found pure and holy, without spot.

SUMMARY

The story of Israel's *Provocation*, when they were invited to walk by sight, rather than by faith, was their most powerful wake-up call. But they could not hear the still, small voice in their hearts which was muffled to silence by their busy and all-important minds. When God gave them their chance to endure the fullness of His presence, they were terrified at the resulting call upon their faith and trust, for “**God is a consuming fire.**” (Hebrews 12:29) Yes, like those who suffer from vanity and unbelief, they wanted it all, but on their own terms. The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, did not oblige. “**The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.**” (John 1:5)

Chapter IX

Question 4

WHEN AND HOW DID GOD TAKE AWAY THE PLAINNESS FROM ISRAEL?

Let's read again what Jacob reported.

The Jews...must needs fall; for God hath *taken away His plainness from them*, and delivered unto them *many things which they cannot understand*, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, *that they may stumble*. (Jacob 4:14)

As we take one step at a time in examining Israel's story, we find that Moses first taught them the fullness of the gospel, i.e., the gift of the fruit of the tree of life, which is the "**covenant of the Father**" to bestow this blessing upon all those who come unto Christ to be perfected in His love.

THE REVELATION ON PRIESTHOOD

In no place in the scriptures is this fact revealed more clearly than in the Doctrine and Covenants. This critical information is explained clearly in the same revelation which informed us, as modern Israel, of our also being placed under condemnation. The prophet designated this Section 84 as the Revelation on Priesthood. In it, the Lord explained what really happened to Israel. It came in three steps.

1. They were invited to *enter into His rest*, which comes from experiencing the *fullness of His glory*.
2. They could not trust God's word when He showed His presence with devouring fire, thus they ran away, which is called **the provocation**.
3. They were *stripped of the fullness of the priesthood and the gospel*, thus left with the lesser priesthood and the preparatory gospel, i.e., the temporal Law of Moses.

THE KEY TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The Savior said, during His great prayer at the last supper, that "**this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.**" (John 17:3) To know God, of course, is to experience the fullness of God.

And this greater priesthood administereth the [fullness of the] gospel and holdeth the key to the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God...

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God.

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure His presence; therefore, the Lord in His wrath, for His anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into His rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fullness of His glory. (D&C 84:19-24)

The fullness of the gospel is about being sanctified and made holy so that one can enter the rest Christ promises to those who truly come unto Him. "**which rest is the fullness of His glory.**"

THE PREPARATORY GOSPEL

So instead of being allowed to enter into the rest of the Lord and become a blessing to the

whole world, Israel had the higher priesthood taken from them and were left with the lesser priesthood.

Therefore, He took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also. And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of *the ministering of angels* and THE PREPARATORY GOSPEL: which gospel is the gospel of *repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of CARNAL COMMANDMENTS*, which the Lord *in His wrath caused to continue...* (D&C 84:26-27)

It is very significant to notice that it was only after Israel's non-repentant provocation that the Lord started to give the great multitude of the commandments and statutes known as the Law of Moses. As the angel of the Lord told king Benjamin, **"The Lord God saw that His people were a stiffnecked people, and He appointed unto them a law, even the Law of Moses."** (Mosiah 3:14)

As the people ran away, Moses went to the top of the mountain and received the first group of the laws, called the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:1-17) In the next few days, the Lord added ninety additional commandments, making an even one-hundred up to that time. (Exodus 20, 21, 22 & 23) Eventually, there would be over six-hundred.

Both Paul in the *New Testament* and Jacob in the *Book of Mormon* have emphasized that providing the law to the stiffnecked people was designed as a stumbling block so that they would fall. **"And because they desired it, God hath done it, that they may stumble."** (Jacob 4:14) Paul said, **"But as it were by the works of the law. For they stumble at that stumbling stone."** (Romans 9:32)

THE LAW WAS A STEPPING STONE AS WELL AS A STUMBLING STONE

There is another purpose for the law, of course, and that is to provide order among selfish and vain people in preparation for higher truth. The Mosaic Law was tough, demanding, sometimes ruthless, but it also held up a very high ethical and moral standard whereby people could live lawfully and peacefully together.

A great prophet in the *Book of Mormon*, Abinadi, testified of this positive aspect of the law when he asked the wicked king Noah and his priests, **"What teach this people?"** They replied, **"We teach the law of Moses."** Abinadi retorted,

If ye teach the Law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people? (Mosiah 12:29)

After Abinadi reminded king Noah of the specific contents of the Ten Commandments, he explained why the law was given to Israel in the first place.

And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a *very strict law*; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of *performances and of ordinances*, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards Him.

But, behold, I say unto you, that all these things were *types of things to come*. And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law [in its symbolism]; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they *understood not* that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God [through His gift of perfect love]. (Mosiah 13:29-32)

THE PLAIN AND SIMPLE WAY THE LORD OFFERED TO PROVIDE ISRAEL THEIR PROMISED LAND

As the Lord began giving the children of Israel law upon law, which of course they self-confidently covenanted that they could and would obey in every word and detail, the Lord thereby promised them that if they did, they would be showered with great blessings of peace, wealth and health. This is what the Lord told Moses to instruct the people:

And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread, and thy water, and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land; the number of thy days I will fulfill. (Exodus 23:25-26)

These blessings implied that they would have a safe and extensive homeland. Their father Abraham had been promised all the land between the Nile and the Euphrates, but in the days of Moses, this “promised” land was fully occupied by great and powerful heathen nations. (Genesis 15:18)

So let us examine the Lord's incredible promise as to how He would provide these children of Abraham all of that land on the condition that they kept their covenant by being absolutely obedient to the commandments. He would miraculously deliver all the land they could fill, and even more, year by year, as their numbers increased. Even more wonderfully, they would not have to raise their swords to kill one person to obtain it.

How in the world would the Lord arrange that? Simply, God was going to do it by creating great hordes of *hornets*! Yes, HORNETS! This is what the Lord told them:

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy [or, in other words, remove] all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

[But] I will not drive them out from before thee in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased and inherit the land.

And I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines and from the desert unto the river, for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. (Exodus 23:27-31)

LOSING THEIR PROMISED BLESSINGS

We know that Israel failed to merit this blessing and had to eventually go into Canaan and, as commanded by God at that time, slaughter 100% of the men, women, children and animals. However, because they wearied of the slaughter and allowed nearly half the people and animals to survive, they were punished severely. Well, that is how things go on the tree of knowledge! No wonder it is called the tree of death.

The children of Israel, in contrast to the possible blessings of having a freely-given, secure homeland, were required to do all this savage fighting after roaming in the desert for forty years. But none of those terrible wars would have been necessary if they had looked to the mark, honored the words of plainness, humbled themselves and trusted totally in the mercy and grace of the Lord, their God.

SUMMARY

It was not until after the provocation that Israel lost the plainness and singleness of the call to be one in Christ and be another city of Enoch, with the accompanying blessings of a freely-given homeland. On the very same day that the provocation took place, the Lord started replacing the plain and simple way of perfect love with the complex, exacting, contradictory system of ordinances and performances, with their accompanying penalties, if they were not fulfilled to perfection.

Chapter XI

Question 5 – Part 2

HOW WAS ISRAEL TO GIVE UP WHAT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND?

The second key to answering the fifth question is simply: what does the Lord want us to do with the law when we have found the mark and have had bestowed upon us the pure love of Christ?

Jacob answered that question in the same sermon in which he talked about the awful state of those under the law. But he did so in such a subtle way that the “wise” would fail to understand it. As we have been told many times, it is not given for such to know the mysteries of God. What Jacob carefully said was only that there is no condemnation for those who have not been given a law. That sounds simple until we ask the question—who has not been given a law?

JACOB SAID—WHERE THERE IS NO LAW GIVEN, THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION.

For many years I had read what Jacob said about those who were not given a law and assumed that he was talking about those I had labeled as “heathen nations.” But as we have seen by the words of Nephi, there are no nations that have not been given a knowledge of good and evil, which is their “divine” law. Besides, by studying the histories of the nations, we find all have their own “prophets” and “scriptures.” So I realized that I needed to take a more careful look at what Jacob wrote about those *who are given NO law*. He said:

Wherefore, [God] has given a law; and where there is NO LAW GIVEN there is NO punishment; and where there is NO punishment there is NO condemnation; and where there is NO condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement [at-one-ment by His love]; for they are *delivered by the power of Him* [dwelling in them].

For the atonement satisfieth the demands of His justice upon ALL those who have not the law given to them...and they are *restored* to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 9:25-26)

At first glance, it sounds like people would be better off if God didn't send them prophets. But obviously that is not the meaning, because He already has. So who is Jacob talking about? Perhaps, at least, he is referring to little children for they are not under the burden of the law. Is this not one of the reasons why we must become as little children?

As we have already noted, Christ told even His own disciples,

Verily I say unto you, Except ye be *converted* [turned around], and become as *little children*, ye shall *not* enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall *humble himself* as this little child, the same is *greatest* in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4)

So if we become like little children, would we still be under the law? Was Christ describing the childlike condition of those who have found the mark, thus live by the voice of pure love within their hearts instead of by the fixed standards of a rigid law? Mormon has given us the answer to that question.

MORMON SAID—ALL WHO ARE WITHOUT THE LAW ARE INNOCENT AS LITTLE CHILDREN

Mormon wrote to his son Moroni on the subject of baptism of children. At the conclusion, he wrote these very interesting things about those, besides children, who have NO LAW.

For behold...ALL little children are ALIVE IN CHRIST. AND ALSO ALL THEY THAT ARE WITHOUT THE LAW. For the power of redemption cometh on ALL them that have NO LAW, wherefore he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing—but it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of His Holy Spirit, AND PUTTING TRUST IN DEAD WORKS. Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are *under condemnation and under the CURSE OF A BROKEN LAW.*

And the first fruits of repentance [from dead works] is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the *fulfilling* the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth *remission* of sins: and the remission of sins bringeth *meekness, and lowliness of heart* [the fruits of the pure love of Christ]; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, WHICH COMFORTER FILLETH WITH *HOPE AND PERFECT LOVE.*
(Moroni 8:22-26)

So what is repentance? On the level of the preparatory gospel, it is repenting from violating the standards of good and evil harvested from the tree of knowledge. On the level of child-likeness which Mormon stressed, it is turning away from trusting in the *dead works under the curse of a broken law.*

Repentance, when viewed from the tree of life, really means to give up our trust, but not our respect, for the tree of knowledge. When we do, we witness to this newness of life by the ordinance of baptism, symbolizing a rebirth, from death into life. We come out from the condemnation of being stiffnecked and vain. Then we find the mark, becoming wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, which fills us with His perfect love.

PAUL SAID—THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION IN THOSE WHO LIVE AFTER THE SPIRIT

Since those of us who have treasured the commandments and have thought of them as the ultimate way to find the strait and narrow gate, this understanding of Jacob's and Mormon's words may be difficult to fully understand, let alone accept. It certainly was for me. But Paul helped me see their point.

Remember that Mormon described repentance as *FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENTS*. That is what Christ said He was doing to the Mosaic Law. **“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, BUT TO FULFILL.”** (Matthew 5:17) Paul wrote, **“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”** (Romans 10:4) The broken law is healed and fulfilled when it breaks our hearts and opens us up to the fulfilling love of Christ.

In addition, Paul wrote extensively about those to whom the law had become dead because the law is fulfilled in them by what he calls GRACE, which is the purifying, cleansing power of the love of Christ.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as *Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also SHOULD walk in newness of life* [with the pure love of Christ]....

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are *become dead to the law* by the [spiritual] body of Christ [the church of the firstborn], that ye should be married [perfectly joined] to another,

even to Him who is raised from the dead... But now we are *delivered from the law* [so no law is given any more to us], *that being dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter...*

There is therefore now **NO CONDEMNATION** to them which are **IN Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh [the natural man] but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me *free from the law of sin and death...*

For they that are after the flesh [the natural man] do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit [the pure love of Christ] the things of the Spirit. But to be carnally [naturally] minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God [an enemy to God]; for it is not subject to the law [the pure love] of God, neither indeed can be. But ye are not [after] the flesh, but [after] the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit [love] of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit [love] of Christ, *he is none of His.* (Romans 6:3-4; 7:4-6; 8:1-2; 5-9)

NEPHI'S GREAT LAMENT CAME FROM TRYING TO BE PERFECT IN THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

It may be surprising to find that even Nephi found it difficult to let loose of the tree of knowledge. It was not until he reached his more mature years that he was able to rejoice in the full liberty of being made free from the burden of the law. He recorded this state of liberation in Christ at the end of his second book when he was at least sixty years old (between 559 BC and 545 BC).

When he was younger, probably around thirty-five (between 588 BC to 570 BC), it would appear that he had not yet experienced being freed from the law. Notice his painful words, at this earlier time, because of his failure to make the law produce perfect, peaceful, joyful righteousness in his life:

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.*

I am encompassed about, because of the *temptations and the sins* which do so easily beset me. And when I *desire to rejoice*, my heart *groaneth* because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted... He hath filled me with His love [at times], even unto the consuming of my flesh...

O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in His condescension unto the children of men hath visited me 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?

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*? (2 Nephi 4:17-27)

From this desperate plea, it seems self-evident that Nephi, at this middle-aged time in his life, had not entered into the *rest of the Lord*, as much as he so deeply desired. In his pain, even after all the many blessings he referred to, he wondered why he was still painfully burdened in such grief that his body was wasting away. So what was his problem?

THE GREAT DIFFICULTY OF SURRENDERING THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

We want to remember that all through his youth, Nephi had been raised in a wealthy, Jerusalem home and taught the strict Mosaic law long before his father had been awakened by visions to the iniquity of the people. So it must have been very difficult for Nephi to release himself from the non-yielding demands of perfect obedience to the law of righteousness and surrender himself, as his father eventually did. Lehi, in his final days, testified of his joy in God's grace: "I

have beheld His glory, and I am encircled about ETERNALLY IN THE ARMS OF HIS LOVE.” (2 Nephi 1:15)

“**Beheld His glory**” means *entering the rest of the Lord*. (D&C 84:24) “**Eternally**” means without beginning or end. In other words, the joyous awareness of His love no longer came and went, as it had in the case of middle-aged Nephi, and, evidently, to Lehi, as well, in earlier times. (1 Nephi 16:25)

In contrast to Nephi during those earlier years, his younger brother Jacob, who had been born on the journey and had beheld the *glory of the Lord* in his youth, must have found it easier to let the law die in his heart much earlier than his older brother Nephi.

WHEN OLDER, NEPHI JOYFULLY LET LOOSE OF THE LAW

Later on, we find that Nephi certainly did enter into “**the rest of the Lord from this time henceforth**” when he finally allowed the law to become dead. So at the older age, some twenty to thirty years after recording his lament, these are the thrilling words of joy he wrote:

Wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith [in His love]; yet we keep the law because of the commandments. And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what SOURCE they may look for a remission of their sins.

Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children MAY KNOW THE DEADNESS OF THE LAW; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life [of perfect love] which IS IN CHRIST, and know for what end the law was given [as a preparatory gospel]... And inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses. (2 Nephi 25:25-30)

So what does it mean that although the law was dead to them, they still kept the law, at least as far as it was expedient? It means that they were no longer burdened by the law, feeling they had to because they were afraid not to. Instead, they saw the ordinances and performances as privileges, opportunities to be reminded of God's wonderful condescension and blessings.

In other words, keeping the law had nothing to do with merit or rewards. As we have said, there were no “Brownie Points” for doing those things, only opportunities to rejoice in the privileges of participating. When the law is obeyed as far as it is expedient through the indwelling love of Christ, all fear, all need, all sadness about oneself is removed, even though one may still have sadness about others.

Again we want to remember how Christ described those who are born of the Spirit, that they live free like the wind instead of stuck in self-righteous, hypocritical vanity or heart-breaking, guilt-laden remorse.

NEPHI'S OWN FOLLOWERS COULD NOT LET GO OF THE LAW

But even with all of his eventual, personal victory and joy in the Spirit, Nephi still had reason to be greatly concerned about his own followers. We have referred earlier to Nephi's great sadness that his loyal family and relatives would not make the spiritual break from the law. After explaining to them how the law was dead to him and he was alive in Christ, he challenged his loved ones in these words:

And now behold, my people, ye are a stiffnecked people; wherefore, I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand... 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...

And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father GIVE THE HOLY GHOST, LIKE UNTO ME...

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with *full purpose of heart*, acting *no hypocrisy* and *no deception* before God, but with *real intent*, *repenting of your sins*, *witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name* [nature] *of Christ by baptism...*

Then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost, yea, then *cometh the baptism of FIRE and of the Holy Ghost*, and then can ye speak with the *tongue of angels*, and shout praises to the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 25:28; 26:30; 31:12-13)

Nephi lamented that his burning testimony was falling mostly on deaf ears. Yet he knew the people loved him and honored him greatly. *Then what was their problem? Of what were they afraid?* Certainly they accepted him as a prophet and knew he and Jacob would not deceive them. Surely they could not doubt their testimony that a Savior would come.

NEPHI WAS PREVENTED FROM PUSHING HIS PEOPLE ANY FURTHER

Something was holding them back and Nephi was finally restrained by the Lord from trying to teach them any further. As we have quoted before, this is what he told them:

And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the *unbelief*, and the *wickedness*, and the *ignorance*, and the *stiffneckedness* of men; for they will not search [the true] knowledge [of the tree of life], nor understand great knowledge [of the pure love of Christ], when it is given unto them in *plainness*, even as *plain as word can be*. (2 Nephi 32:7)

So we see that these courageous wanderers in a strange land who had refused to follow Laman and Lemuel, at the risk of their lives, were doing almost exactly what their forefathers had done. *They were despising the words of plainness and looking beyond the mark.*

BELIEVERS IN THE LAW ARE AFRAID TO TRUST THE TREE OF LIFE OVER THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

We cannot have *both trees at the same time*. We must forsake the tree of knowledge of good and evil in order to partake of the precious fruit of the tree of life. Yes, it is frightening to leave the great and spacious building of our hard-won “wisdom,” and move out of the comfort zones of our “tried and true” ideals.

Remember, I said in a previous chapter that the idea of living without relying on our fixed knowledge of right and wrong and, in turn, living by the Spirit, moment by moment, in the pure and perfect love of Christ, is scary. Well, as we have seen, so it was to them.

Notice how Nephi kept pleading for them to trust in the guidance of the Holy Ghost which Christ would give them. He assured them in every way he could that they would be led by light and love as to what they should do, once they were in the strait and narrow way. Here are his words:

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose that ye *ponder* somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do AFTER YE HAVE ENTERED IN BY THE WAY. But, behold, why do ye *ponder* these things in your hearts? (2 Nephi 32:1)

In other words, he was pleading, “*Of what are you afraid?*” He had reminded them, time and time again, that in the full and perfect way of Christ, they would have a far better way than depending upon the wisdom they possessed through the natural man's fixed knowledge of good and evil, *the basis of pride, intolerance, prejudice, and other forms of judging, standing up for their rights and defending what they judged to be the truth.*

SUMMARY

When we awake and forsake the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we are welcomed into the spiritual body of Christ wherein is the precious fruit of the tree of life, the pure love of Christ. Then we are not burdened by the strict demands of the conflicting laws of do's and don'ts, for they are no longer the source of our blessings. They are dead, having no life in them. We still keep the ordinances and performances of the law, of course, as far as they are expedient, because we do them totally out of a loving free will. We rejoice in the gift of the purifying love of God's grace which restores us back into living, not by faith, but by a perfect knowledge of Christ through abiding in His pure and holy love.

Chapter XII

Question 6 – Part 1

HOW DOES LOOKING BEYOND THE MARK CAUSE BLINDNESS?

As Jacob wrote in his seventh headline mystery—

**Wherefore, because of their blindness,
which blindness came by looking beyond the mark,
they must needs fall.**

(Jacob 4:14)

The problem with spiritual blindness, in contrast to physical blindness, is that those who suffer from it are usually the last to know about it. We have already mentioned what Paul wrote about the blindness of the Jews in his day. He said they were zealously **“going about to establish their own righteousness instead of submitting themselves unto the righteousness of God.”**

In addition, Paul explained how the law was their divine stumbling stone. The law had been revealed to them by God to give them a chance to discover their blindness so that, perhaps, they might finally recover their sight, return to the mark and receive the truth that would set them free. This is Paul's declaration:

But Israel, which *followed after* the law of righteousness, hath not *ATTAINED TO* the law of righteousness.

Wherefore? [Why?] Because they sought it not by FAITH [in the gift of Christ's love], but as it were by the WORKS OF THE LAW [of good and evil]. For they STUMBLED AT THAT STUMBLING STONE. (Romans 9:31-32)

What was true in Paul's day was also true in Israel's very beginning. By better understanding their story, we will be able to better understand our own.

WHAT WAS ANCIENT ISRAEL BLIND TO?

Moses was given the fullness of the priesthood so he could prepare his people for the fullness of righteousness. (D&C 84:19-26) But the Israelites blindly looked for *something beyond* the one and only source of that righteousness. They could not see that 1) *the shedding of the Savior's love into their hearts is the free gift from God to the meek and lowly* and 2) *that true righteousness comes from that love and only from that love.* All else is vanity.

So instead of opening their hearts, they hardened their hearts and opened only their minds for specific instructions on HOW TO ACT RIGHTEOUSLY. They sought for divinely legislated laws of do's and don'ts which they were sure they *could* and *would* absolutely obey through their zeal and sincere determination—and then, of course, take justifiable pride in their “righteous” accomplishments. But as Paul wrote to the Hebrew Saints:

The LAW [of good and evil] MADE NOTHING PERFECT, but the bringing in of a better HOPE [in the pure love of Christ] DID, by which we draw nigh unto God. (Hebrews 7:19)

So here again Paul witnesses that there were some members in his day who had received *a perfection in Christ, through a better hope that DID MAKE THEM PERFECT*. But, as he says, there was no perfection by those who tried to obtain it by the law of righteousness, i.e., the commandments.

THE STORY OF ISRAEL'S BLINDNESS

So let us briefly review Israel's early history. We will see how frequently the Lord gave the new fledgling nation opportunities to become another city of Enoch, a true ensign of Zion for all the earth. Most people assume that the first thing the Lord did as the Israelites came out of Egypt was to give them His laws of “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” But that is not the case.

Before the Lord gave Israel any laws at all, He gave them ample opportunities to discover the same truth that an angel later told king Benjamin. The message was that in our inherent state resulting from the fall, there is absolutely no way for any of us to be anything but “an enemy to God” until we yield to the inner voice of Christ and receive His atoning gift of the fountain of living waters, the pure love of Christ. (Mosiah 3:19)

So how did the Lord give Israel a chance to learn the one critical lesson of pure *at-one-ment love* and how did their blindness keep them from getting the message?

All during those long and seemingly endless first three months in the desert, the Lord purposely led them into a number of very serious and threatening situations. We can easily see, in twenty/twenty hindsight, that each of these circumstances were purposely and carefully designed opportunities for the Israelites to wake up to their inherent lack of humility and faith in the Lord's loving care. So as each crisis occurred, instead of meekly trusting in an almighty, loving God who had so miraculously delivered them out of bondage, they would quickly lose hope, become indignant and loudly complain.

BEING CARED FOR BY THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

The first major test happened after only a few days when their heavily burdened caravan had become entangled in the swampy, salt marshes by the Red Sea. The charging armies of Pharaoh, seeing that their previous slaves had obviously lost the protection of their God and were hopelessly trapped, rapidly marched after them. In this seemingly desperate situation, the children of Israel felt betrayed. It seemed to them that God had arranged for their total extinction and indignantly said so.

But the Lord miraculously parted the sea and closed it upon the Egyptians. This was an incredible demonstration that, as Jacob proclaimed in the second of his seven mysteries—

Wherefore, if God being able to speak and the world was... O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of His hands upon the face of it, ACCORDING TO HIS WILL AND PLEASURE? (Jacob 4:9)

The people of Israel thought that God had either failed to see this disaster coming or else was powerless to do anything about it. But God had everything going right on schedule, according to *His will and pleasure!*

METAPHOR OF THE TREE OF LIFE

After the miracle at the Red Sea, the amazed, singing and rejoicing hosts of Israel were led far out into the desert where they soon ran out of water. Miraculously, they came across a beautiful lake in the parched land. They were jubilant until they found that the lake was so bitter it could not be used to quench the thirst of man or beast. As their thirst painfully increased, they were sorely vexed and angrily complained again. So the Lord showed Moses a lonely tree near the lake. He was ordered to sacrifice the tree by cutting it down and throwing it into the bitter waters, which then became deliciously sweet. (Exodus 15:23-25)

What a symbol of how the tree of life takes away the bitterness of life. So then they had water, but no food. They again complained and wished they had been left in peace as slaves in Egypt. So the Lord provided the daily miracle of manna. What a message of how God can provide our daily bread, temporally as well as spiritually. (Exodus 16:14-20)

CHRIST, THE ROCK OF OFFENSE, SHEDS LIVING WATER

Eventually the Lord led them to the base of Mt. Sinai. Here, although they had plenty of manna for food, they again had no water. And again they were resentful, angry and afraid. So Moses struck a giant rock with Aaron's rod and out flowed great geysers of pure water. This is another likeness of the gift of living water which God pours forth into a heart that, though once as hard as stone, becomes broken and contrite. (Exodus 17:1-7)

THE METAPHOR OF THE BRAZEN SERPENT

There is another significant example which occurred many months after they had received much of the Law of Moses and many additional miracles. Even then, however, the people were still quick to anger and complain against their despised leader. So the Lord sent swarms of deadly, flying snakes into the vast camps of Israel. Even worse, the snakes were on fire without being consumed. The people who were bitten soon died painful deaths. Can you imagine anything so terrifying? So horrible? So cruel? Evidently this plague went on for days before the people were frightened enough to overlook their grievances and ask Moses, their despised leader, for help.

This is the way Moses' scribes recorded the story:

And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom; and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the *people spake against God, and against Moses*, [saying:] Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water, and our *soul loatheth this light bread* [manna].

And the Lord sent *fiery serpents* among the people, and they bit the people; and *much* people of Israel died. Therefore the people [finally] came to Moses and said, We have sinned for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take *away* the serpents from us. And *Moses prayed for the people*. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee [an image of] a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he *looketh* upon it, shall *live*. (Numbers 21:4-8 - "flying"-1 Nephi 17:41)

IMAGINE THE TIME IT TOOK

Notice that Moses wasn't given power to drive out or kill the fiery, flying serpents as they had requested. He wasn't given power to heal those who were being bitten. Instead, as far as the terrified people were concerned, he did nothing. What the Lord did have him do was to take the time necessary to have his artisans carve an intricate mold, melt brass and cast a brazen image.

(Helaman 8:14)

While his craftsmen completed this time-consuming work of art and while the desperate, anxious and mystified people waited impatiently for Moses to really do something, thousands must have been bitten and were dying. Finally, when the fiery serpent figure was completed, Moses raised it high on a pole and sent word out that if anyone had been or would be bitten, they were to look toward the elevated serpent-image and receive instant healing.

Christ, while living among their descendants, referred to this incident to remind Nicodemus, a leader of the people, that this event was to symbolize the Savior being lifted up. He testified, **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.”** (John 3:14)

BEING HEALED BY A GRAVEN IMAGE

There are many elements in these circumstances created by the master teacher which could and should have awakened Israel. Remember, in contrast to the events of the first three months, this took place sometime AFTER they had so joyfully and confidently covenanted to obey all of the commandments.

So first of all, making and raising up a brazen image which would bestow blessings was in specific violation of one of the ten commandments—actually the second on the list.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any *graven image*, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them... (Exodus 20:4-5)

So what were the lessons? One lesson might be to show that their belief that literally obeying fixed rules would produce true holiness and righteousness was grievously flawed. When would they wake up and see that God had given them impossible laws which often contradicted one another for a reason?

We want to remember again what Jacob had said about these people, that—

God...delivered unto them *many things which they cannot understand*, because they *desired it*. And because they desired it God hath done it, *that they may stumble*. (Jacob 4:14)

Paul bluntly challenged his fellow Jews who worshipped the law as the only way to be righteous—

Now we know that what things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and [in the same way] *all the world may become guilty before God*. (Romans 3:19)

In what way did the law contradict the law? Well, for example, He told them as one of the Ten Commandments, **“Thou shalt not kill,”** with no ifs, ands, or buts about it, meaning, evidently, “Thou shalt not kill any of your fellow human beings.” (Exodus 20:13) The Lord did not say, “Thou shalt not commit murder,” just **“Thou shalt not kill.”** Absolutely, **“Thou shalt not kill.”** The *Book of Mormon* said it in the same way. (Mosiah 13:21)

Then, within the next several days, the Lord *commanded* Israel *to kill* those who violated certain of His laws.

THEY WERE TO KILL —

anyone who *hit* another so that the person died,
 anyone who knew he had a dangerous ox and yet it killed someone,
 anyone who *struck* or even *cursed* his father or mother,
 anyone *kidnapping* someone to sell into slavery,
 anyone who was a *witch* or *sorcerer* or *sorceress*,
 anyone who had *sexual intercourse* with an animal,
 anyone who *sacrificed* to another god,

anyone who *gathered sticks* on the Sabbath or
anyone committing *adultery*.

(Exodus 21:12-17, & 29, 22:19-20, Numbers 15:32-36, Leviticus 20:10)

Yet, when Moses read all of these laws of the covenant “**in the audience of the people,**” they shouted out in their proud blindness, “**ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SAID WILL WE DO AND BE OBEDIENT.**” (Exodus 24:7)

THE RAISED SERPENT REPRESENTING CHRIST

As for the brazen serpent, in addition to contradicting one of His own “stumbling stones,” Jehovah chose the most despised and cursed of His creations, the snake, to be a miraculous, symbolic intermediary for His healing:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made... And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. 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. (Genesis 3:1 & 14-15)

ALL THEY HAD TO DO WAS TO LOOK, *NOTHING MORE*

In the *Book of Mormon*, we have many references to this serpent metaphor of Christ. One statement was given to us by the prophet Nephi, son of Helaman, who said:

Yea, did he [Moses] not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall He be lifted up who should come. And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, *even so* as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, *might live, even unto that life which is eternal.* (Helaman 8:4-15)

When Alma taught the Zoramites about growing the tree of life in their hearts to receive the gift of Christ's perfect love, He also referred to the symbolism of Moses raising up the image of a fiery serpent:

Behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did *look and live*. But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were [also] many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because **THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD HEAL THEM.**

COMING TO CHRIST LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

[As Alma continued:] **O my brethren, *if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly,* or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish. If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God [and His gift of perfect love]...**

And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant *this word* in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, *it will become a tree* [of perfect love], *springing up in you unto everlasting life.* (Alma 33:19-23)

Notice that Alma said that most of those who were healed had no inkling of the divine symbolism behind it. Imagine the paradox. The Lord had the priests of Levi execute nearly three thousand men because they sought for a blessing from a molten calf of gold, but now they were to look upon an image of a brazen serpent to be saved from a painful death. (Exodus 32:27-28)

In turn, many would not look. Why? Perhaps a few might have remembered that they had

been commanded not to do things like that and may have thought they were being tested. Most others, however, despising Moses, must have preferred to hold on to their vanity rather than become meek and lowly enough to do something which they and their peers thought was too foolish, superstitious and humiliating even to try.

ALL STRESSFUL EXPERIENCES PROVIDE DIVINE WAKE-UP CALLS

We find that the Lord provided the children of Israel with these desperately challenging experiences as spiritual WAKE-UP CALLS. But in their blindness, they chose to harden their hearts and stay asleep to the free gift of Christ's healing of their souls from the fall.

Again, why? Because they thought that they had a better way. But what did they see in their blindness which looked better than the tree of life? We shall see that the underlying reason for their problem was the same reason that had caused the fall of man in the first place. *It was their belief in the merits of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*

Israel reacted foolishly to the frightening situations which the Lord had carefully created for them. Their failures can teach us one of the most important steps in being healed from our blindness and returning to the mark.

ISRAEL'S HISTORY IS A GREAT TEACHING STORY

By applying their history to our own lives, we can understand that, in the same way, our painful experiences that we go through in life are not *really what they seem to be*. When viewed from the “**mind of Christ**,” our trials can be experienced for what they really are, loving and merciful wake-up calls. But if we, like ancient Israel, refuse to open our eyes to gratefully receive the tough-love messages, then it is likely that an even greater teaching experience will be provided farther down the road of our probationary school.

In their visions, Lehi and Nephi saw the tree of life but not the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Instead, they saw something which stood in opposition to the tree of life. It was a great and spacious building. So we might ask, was it also a representation of the same principle as the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil?

In the next chapter, Part 2 of the question on spiritual blindness, we will consider that possibility.

SUMMARY

As Paul said, Israel did not and could not attain righteousness through the contradictory law of “*legislated righteousness*,” which was given to them in their blindness as a stumbling stone. They had a wake-up call at the dividing of the Red Sea, another with the sweetening of the bitter lake, another with the daily gift of manna, another at the pouring out of water from the rock and eventually with the raised image of the flaming serpent. Why didn't they wake up? Because they believed it was knowledge, wisdom and using the common sense of their own minds, with its knowledge of good and evil, that would produce perfection. They could not perceive that the simple, sweet gift of Christ's love would fill their hearts and cleanse them of all judgmentalness, vanity and unbelief.

Chapter XIII

Question 6 – Part 2

THE BLINDNESS OF THOSE IN THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING

One of my favorite sections in the *Book of Mormon* has always been the great visions of Lehi and Nephi. So as I began to understand that the mark was symbolized by the tree of life, I wondered what the great and spacious building represented?

Lehi described the building in this way:

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. (1 Nephi 8:26).

What a picture! I began to imagine what he meant when he said it was a GREAT building and a SPACIOUS building? And of all things, it was so “heavenly” that it was suspended in the air, high above the ground. Then I went back to the book written by Lucy Mack Smith, the prophet's mother, and read again the report she gave of her husband's seven dream-visions. When their son Joseph was about eleven, his father had a similar dream-vision to that of Lehi. His description adds some interesting details about the building. He said,

I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley which we were in, and it appeared TO REACH TO THE VERY HEAVENS. It was full of doors and windows, and they were all filled with people, who were very finely dressed. (*History of Joseph Smith by Lucy Mack Smith*, Bookcraft, 1956, pp. 49-50)

So in addition to Lehi seeing that the building was levitating, Father Smith was impressed with how extremely high it extended—so high that it reached far into the “very heavens.” Also interesting, the building had, besides windows, a great complex of exterior doors (perhaps what we have now as sliding glass doors) which were open with people standing in them. The people were of all ages, of both sexes, very civilized and cultured, demonstrated by their “**exceedingly fine**” apparel.

Lehi also described the people filling the building as “**both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine.**” (1 Nephi 8:27)

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF ISRAEL ARE ASSEMBLED IN THE BUILDING

Just as Nephi had desired to know the meaning of the tree, he also wanted to know the meaning of the building. The angel told him:

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 [from those at the tree of life], **yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God.** (1 Nephi 12:18)

So then I wondered about a question I had. Since Israel had been blinded by looking beyond the mark, were they inhabitants of that great and spacious building? I found that Nephi was told that they certainly were.

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... The great and spacious building was the pride of the world, and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great.* (1 Nephi 11:35-36)

Then the next question I asked myself was this: In our day, since we are modern Israel, what about us? Are most of us also in the great and spacious building of pride and vain imaginations? I found the answer when I remembered how forcefully President Benson had counseled us to repent of our pride, for he stressed that pride was one of our three most serious problems. (*A Witness and a Warning*, Ezra Taft Benson, Deseret Book, 1988, p.77)

As we have stated, the Lord severely warned the Latter-day Saints about their pride when He pronounced the judgment of condemnation upon ALL the children of Zion, because of our “**vanity and unbelief.**” (D&C 84:55) So that answered my question, since the building is *pride*. Yes, we would obviously be in the great, spacious, and heavenly building if we are still under God’s condemnation, which we are. Not only are we guilty of vanity, but of unbelief—for as a people we have failed to believe Christ’s promise of shedding His pure and perfect love into our hearts, never to fail.

ENTERING THE BUILDING WAS A MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT

Then I noticed something else surprising about the great and spacious building. Not all who tried to enter were able to make it. Many people struggled toward it but failed.

We might recall that in the very beginning of Lehi’s vision, he first saw numberless concourses of people in a great field which represented the world. He watched as many of these people became lost in the thick mist of darkness. He saw a few follow the iron rod to the tree of life. But there were great multitudes feeling their way toward this incredibly beautiful skyscraper that floated in the air. Of those seekers of the great building, “**many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.**” (1 Nephi 8:31-32)

So we can see that the magnificent, symbolic “temple” had great appeal, yet many who “felt” their way toward it were never able to reach what appeared to be the haven of safety. However, many did succeed.

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. (1 Nephi 8:33)

THE BUILDING REPRESENTS THE FORBIDDEN TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

As we compare Lehi’s vision of Israel being in the building with Jacob’s description of the Jews looking beyond the mark, the parallel becomes obvious. Jacob said the Jews were stiff-necked and despised the words of plainness. The building stands for pride and intolerance. Both symbolically represent the rejection by the Jews of the same pearl of great price, represented by the tree of life being the gift of the pure love of Christ. In both cases, Israel thought they had something better—the “great and spacious” institutionalization of their wisdom, especially those who felt “wise” in their knowledge of the law of God.

Obviously, those sincere and dedicated seekers who had been determined and persistent enough to reach the apparent safety of the majestic building would certainly feel justifiably proud of their achievement. Lehi saw that they looked out of the lofty windows, out across the filthy river, to those who had attained what appeared to be some strange. “worthless,” perhaps even poisonous and dangerous, white tree. Since those in the great building had no way of appreciating the incredible joy of the tree’s fruit, they could only feel contempt and dismay at the foolish people who were looking for something better than the great and spacious building.

KNOWLEDGE SHALL PASS AWAY

The wisdom of the world, with all of the knowledge of good and evil, will fall. But we might ask, is not much of that knowledge actually good and will prevail? By the judgment of the world, of course, it is good and certainly will prevail. But not according to the word of the Lord given to Mormon, who, we remember, declared, **“Wherefore cleave unto charity [the pure love of Christ], which is the greatest of all, FOR ALL [other] THINGS MUST FAIL.”** (Moroni 7:46) **“All things”** means just what it says. Only **“CHARITY NEVER FAILETH.”**

Again, let's remember that Paul also testified that only charity will last eternally, then added, but—

whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away...[for] when that which is perfect is come [and only the love of God is perfect], then that which is in part shall be done away... And now abideth faith, hope and charity, but the greatest is charity. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

We can understand the blindness of those who had proudly achieved the great wisdom of the preparatory gospel. We can understand their pride of self-congratulation and why they were pointing their fingers in ridicule, self-righteously trying to badger the foolish tree-of-life people to retrace their steps and rejoin them in the apparent glory and safety of the marvelous structure.

As Alma boldly declared to the self righteous, wicked people of Ammonihah:

He that will harden his heart [to become “wise” instead of being meek like a little child and receive the pure love of Christ], the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word [the word is truth, truth is light and light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ]...until they know nothing concerning His mysteries [of godliness]. (Alma 12:10-11 & D&C 84:45)

To know nothing of the gift, called the mark, was the gross spiritual blindness of Israel by which, while waiting anxiously and religiously for the great day of their Messiah's coming, actually rejected Him and put Him to death when He finally did come. They did so while belonging to the true Church of God, honoring the temple, the holy days, the Levitical priesthood and their presiding prophet, the High Priest, who sat in Moses' seat.

THE CHURCH OF THE LAMB AND THE CHURCH OF THE DEVIL

The angel's last instructions to Nephi had to do with a description of a great and abominable church. There has been considerable speculation by many as to whether Nephi was being shown one particular evil church, and if so, what church would that be. So as I studied more carefully these powerful passages, especially as they relate to those who are looking beyond the mark, I found something that amazed me. Nephi was told that, in a spiritual sense, there are not many churches, but **ONLY TWO CHURCHES**, altogether!

We tend to think of a “church” as an institution or organization of believers, with a set of doctrines. But the dictionary's first definition is that a church is a “mystical, spiritual body.”

In our modern revelations, the Saints are told about those who qualify to be members of a very special, spiritual body, even **“the Church of the Firstborn,”** because they have received *the Second Comforter*. The Lord says,

The promise I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom, which glory is that of the Church of the Firstborn... (D&C 88:4-5)

So only those who are sanctified constitute *the Church of the Firstborn*. These are those who have permitted the tree of life to grow in their hearts. But what about all the rest? Are they still in Satan's “*tree of knowledge*” kingdom?

We should not wonder. To make it clear to us in our day, doesn't the Lord asks us to come into His holy temple and there covenant, before God, angels and these witnesses, like Israel did

vainly in the days of Moses, that we will keep **ALL OF THE COMMANDMENTS?** Then we are assured that if we fail to keep our word, if we break this covenant, which everyone does in a literal sense, then we are told these words—**“YOU WILL BE IN MY POWER!”**

THE CRITICAL MEANING OF BEING UNDER CONDEMNATION

All who fail to walk in the light as Christ is in the light, must, by necessity, belong to a different spiritual body. “But,” one might exclaim, “certainly not we who are faithful members of the Church!” Well, ancient Israel could not believe they were in the devil’s church, so it would not be surprising if we found it difficult to believe it either. Alma knew most of the members in his day were. So shouldn’t our leaders be telling us the same warning Alma gave the Church in his day? He said:

I ask you, my brethren [and sisters] of the Church, have ye *spiritually been born of God*... Behold are ye *stripped of pride*?... 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.*

O ye workers of iniquity... ye that have *professed* to have known the ways of righteousness... And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that *the devil is your shepherd*, and ye are of *his fold*; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever *denieth this* is a liar and a child of the devil. (Alma 5:14, 28, 34-39)

Well, hang onto your seat, dear reader. This is exactly what the angel was stressing to Nephi. Those who are not partakes of Christ’s greatest gift are not members of the Church of the Lamb of God! The angel explained it in these words:

He said unto Me: Look and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations [i.e. vanity and unbelief], whose foundation is the devil. 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 [has] dominion over ALL the earth, among ALL NATIONS, KINDREDS, TONGUES, AND PEOPLE. (1 Nephi 14:9-11)

Could it be, I wondered, that all who look beyond the mark remain, spiritually, in the devil’s church which presides over “**all nations, kindreds, tongues and people**,” including the chosen people of ancient Israel? And what about us? Is that not the real meaning of our still being under the Lord’s condemnation, scourge and judgment?

THE URGENCY FOR COMING OUT FROM UNDER OUR CONDEMNATION

So I began to realize that the message of Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions relates to this profound truth—all who are not yet *true* followers of Christ, thus have not had bestowed upon them this precious of all gifts, are still under the fall, struggling with the vanity and pride of the stumbling stone, burdened by the conflict between good and evil. Thus, they sit in judgment. And in turn, they shall be judged by the same judgment they judge.

As the angel had said of those in the great and spacious building, “**And a great and terrible gulf divideth them, yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God.**” (1 Nephi 12:18) As we are told, God will not be mocked!

SUMMARY

By better understanding the attraction of the great and spacious building as another representation of the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, we can more fully appreciate the magnitude of President Benson’s revelation that the time has come when we are to repent successfully of our vanity and unbelief, cease to live in darkness at noonday, remember the new

covenant and truly become the children of Zion through receiving *a blessing hitherto unknown*. That is very wonderful news indeed!

Chapter XIV

Question 7 - Part I

WHAT IS A STIFFNECKED PEOPLE?

Have you ever had a stiff neck? It usually seems to come on suddenly when the muscles in the neck and shoulders become sore and tight. It even hurts to turn the head. That is also what seems to happen to us psychologically when we feel threatened by being made wrong or we think we need to stand up for our rights.

As was said of king Zedekiah, **“He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God.”** The Psalmist said, **“Speak not with a stiffneck.”** The prophet Jeremiah testified against his people that **“they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.”** Jacob told his wayward people that they **“wear stiff necks and high heads.”**

STUBBORN AND UNYIELDING

The dictionary says that being stiffnecked refers to those who are stubborn and unyielding. The interesting thing about describing people as being stiffnecked is that the term always seems to be used to describe others, not ourselves.

We can all recall that when we have been called stiffnecked (or its equivalent) by others, we automatically resent the label, insisting that we are not stiffnecked but RIGHT; therefore, we are “determined,” “faithful,” “unwavering,” “loyal” and “strong in the faith” for the TRUTH.

Yet, whether it is “them” or “us,” the sad truth is that stiffnecked people are usually blind to the reality of their own inflexibility, unteachableness, stubbornness or other forms of rigidity. The blind are especially blind to their own blindness.

IS NOT THE LOVE OF CHRIST ALSO UNYIELDING?

In turn, we might ask the question, if people who are possessors of the pure love of Christ are determined, faithful, unwavering, loyal and strong in the faith, just as the stiffnecked people “believe” they are, would not the children of Christ be stiffnecked too? The reason that they are not, and it is a critical reason, is that their righteousness comes from meekness and lowliness of heart, rather than pride and the need to be right.

Because such people are flowing with the Spirit, and the Spirit adjusts responses to each circumstance, moment by moment, they are *as flexible as the wind* when it comes to ways of conduct and positions to be held, but unbending when it comes to understanding and compassion for the positions and actions of others. How are they able to do this? The reason is that their perfect love casts out fear, including the fear of “*what will people think*” and the fear of “*being wrong*.” They fully trust in God, the giver of all circumstances, knowing **“that ALL THINGS work together for good in them that love God.”** As Paul said of those who are blessed with charity, they **“bear all things, they hope all things, they believe all things and endure all things.”** Why? Because they are strong in their faith in God's great wisdom, trusting Him in every aspect of their

lives.

CHRIST AND THE PHARISEES

Let's go to the *New Testament* for an example of the contrast between the two spiritual polarities—one proud and fixed in the “knowledge” of God's will and the other meek and pliable in expressing God's perfect love.

Remember when the Pharisees brought to Christ a woman caught committing adultery. They wanted to challenge Him with a very clear, specific part of the Law of Moses, even though they seldom, if ever, enforced it themselves. To hide their unteachableness, they spoke with respect as if they were willing students, saying, **“Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?”**

What did Jesus do? Did He contradict the very law He came to fulfill and bring to an end? Did He attack those clever, hypocritical antagonists who were trying to put Him in a “Catch Twenty-two?”

No. Jesus, to their frustration, acted as though they were not even there. He stooped down and started scribbling with His finger in the dirt. So they kept repeating themselves, insisting that He properly respect them by giving them an answer.

Finally, He stood up and, I would guess, slowly looked at each one straight in the eye and said the famous words, **“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.”**

Then, slowly, without saying another word, He looked back down at the ground and stooped again to doodle more in the dust at their feet. It may have taken ten to fifteen minutes for the silenced challengers to gradually leave. It is interesting to note that John said the older scholars left first, and then finally the young firebrands gave up and left as well.

Then what did Jesus do? He stood up again and spoke directly to the once terrified but now bewildered woman. Christ did not ask her about her sin or where was her guilty male partner who the Pharisees should have brought with her. He merely said, **“Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?”** When she quietly acknowledged that the whole group had left, He said, **“Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more.”** (John 8:4-11)

Let's be honest with ourselves. That is not always what we do in our hearts when we have feelings of disgust and intolerance for those who fail to live honorably, according to our standards of purity, integrity and fairness. But as Jesus might look us in the eye some day and say, **“You who are without sin, go ahead and judge.”** But in our stiffneckedness, we might ask, **“Are we not supposed to look upon sin with abhorrence because it is written in Alma that the sanctified do just that?”** (Alma 13:12)

He probably would not have to explain to us that those who are sanctified judge good and evil from the tree of life where “sin” is perceived totally differently than it is by those who come from the tree of knowledge, as did the Pharisees. More on this later.

CHRIST AND NICODEMUS

So let's take an even more revealing example from Christ's ministry. We remember the confrontation between the Savior and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a “good” Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews as a member of the highly esteemed Sanhedrin. He was honest enough to recognize Jesus as a man of God, but fearful enough to come only at night.

Jesus gave him no deference, but told him, unequivocally, that he must be born again. Nicodemus was ordinarily given great respect as a spiritual leader, so he was shocked and assumed Jesus was talking foolishly about an impossible physical rebirth. But the Savior said:

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:1-8)

On my mission, this was one of my favorite scriptures, and I quoted it often. But what was Jesus really talking about? I had assumed that He was describing how the Spirit comes and goes mysteriously like the wind. But recently I realized that I had not paid close enough attention to what He really said. Actually, He made it clear that He was not talking about the Holy Spirit, itself, but something else.

He is specifically describing, instead, people who are born of the Spirit, explaining how they live free and unrestrained like the wind. They are not hidebound, stuck in some rigid views of reality but are able to bend with circumstances, seeing everyone as a unique manifestation of God. They realize that all people experience reality in their own unique way. In other words, those born of the Spirit are no longer judgmental, vain and stiffnecked. Let's read it again:

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but *canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth*: SO IS *EVERYONE* THAT IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT. (John 3:7-8)

NICODEMUS IS GIVEN THE BEWILDERING KEY

No wonder the shocked Nicodemus said in response, ***“How can these things be?”***

It was in the light of his very honest question that Christ delivered one of His most eloquent statements about the way fallen man is to be redeemed from the fall. But first Christ confronted him even further, when He said, ***“Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”***

Let us carefully and prayerfully read the rest of what Christ said to this remarkable Church leader. John the Beloved is the only one of the four gospel writers who recorded what Jesus told this man because only John wrote extensively on the deeper level of the mystery of Christ, in whom ***“was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.”*** (John 1:4-5)

Jesus, evidently looking Nicodemus straight in the eye, without condemnation and with only love, said:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee [Nicodemus], *we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen*; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, *if I tell you of heavenly things*?

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is IN HEAVEN [now and forever].

And as Moses lifted up the *serpent* in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him* [and His gift] *should not perish, but have everlasting life*.

For God sent not His Son into the world TO CONDEMN THE WORLD; but that the world *through Him might be saved*.

He that believeth on Him [so that he partakes of His divine nature of love] *is not condemned*, but he that believeth not [and does not partake] *is condemned already*, because he hath not believed in the name [and nature] of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that light [pure love of Christ] *is come into the world, and men loved darkness* [fear of being wrong] *rather than light*, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil *hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds* [of hypocrisy] *should be reprov*ed.

But he that doeth truth *cometh to the light* [as Christ is in the light], that his deeds may be made manifest, that they ARE WROUGHT IN GOD [in His love and not in their own wisdom]. (John 3:11-21)

So we see that it was to Nicodemus that Christ referred to the symbolic meaning of the image

of the brazen, flying snake raised up by Moses. Incidentally, I remember how surprised I was when I realized that our modern medical establishment has patterned their professional symbol after Moses' flying serpent image on a pole. You may recall they have a winged staff with two snakes wrapped around it, their symbol of healing, since those who looked at the image were healed.

CHRIST CAME FROM LOVE, NOT LAW

One of the things which mystified the Savior's Church leaders was that He could not be pinned down to the strict Mosaic code of good and evil.

The stubborn and undeviating ways of the stiffnecked were the result of their needing to be RIGHT. They needed to defend and protect what they believed was true against the false, right against wrong, good against evil. In fact, as is the case with all stiffnecked people, they believed that being right was the most important requirement for salvation. However, their rigidity was not love but vanity. They gloried in the rightness of their "God-given" wisdom and understanding. They absolutely believed that they were the elect of God, trusted with the ultimate truths of His word, while all those who did not agree with them were lost.

SUMMARY

Those who are spiritually stiffnecked and unteachable will justify themselves because they believe they are acting the way true believers should act—standing for truth, righteousness, wisdom and even good common sense. Little do they know that the openness, teachability and spontaneity of those born of the Spirit is the result of their being truly free like the wind to flow with life in joy, peace and love.

Chapter XV

Question 6 – Part 2

ARE ALL STIFFNECKED PEOPLE IN THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING?

In the account of his vision, Lehi gave us a description of the stiffnecked, self-righteous and judgmental folks who had successfully attained the great and spacious building. They stood proud and confident, ridiculing those who might dare beckon them to come "down" to the tree of life and partake of the fruit which was precious above all and most joyous to the soul. What a paradox!

But let's acknowledge that the building dwellers must have considered themselves greatly blessed and a happy people. After all, they were housed in and possessors of such a great manifestation of their superior knowledge and testimony of truth. Convinced that they had gained the far better way, they felt that it was their duty to mock and point their fingers of ridicule at those who had foolishly erred. But, in turn, as the angel told Nephi, their wisdom would fail. But what about our wisdom? When we say people are stiffnecked, are we also being harsh critics?

IS IT JUDGING FOR US TO SAY SOMEONE IS STIFFNECKED?

The Savior told us not to judge, for the severity by which we judge others is the way we will

be judged. Obviously, the term stiffnecked has a negative connotation and is not a compliment. Yet, using the word stiffnecked, in and of itself, may or may not be judging. The difference is in the attitude in which the word is used. If we say someone is unteachable in regards to a certain position, the statement can be a description based upon a simple, matter-of-fact observation, or it can be a personal castigation based upon disdain and rejection. One is recognition of a condition and the other is a condemnation of the individual.

As we are using the term stiffnecked here, we are describing those who have chosen to close their minds and take a hostile position to the actions or beliefs of others. Although most of those who are stiffnecked tend to be very judgmental, they are not always so. Some very stubborn people are rigid in their point of view but very generous about allowing others to have differing views. In other words, they are stiffnecked but not contentious.

THE NATURAL MAN WILL BE STIFFNECKED FOREVER UNLESS . . .

When an angel explained to king Benjamin that the natural man was an enemy to God, the messenger was referring to the inherent tendency for all of us to be stiffnecked, saying:

The Lord God saw that *His people* were a stiffnecked people, and [thus] He appointed unto them a law [of good and evil]... But men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as LITTLE CHILDREN, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, [only] in and through the atoning blood [love] of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, UNLESS HE *YIELDS TO THE ENTICINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*. (Mosiah 3:14, 18-19)

Then the angel explained how we are to “yield.” The word means to “*give way to*,” “*to surrender to*.” So we are to surrender to the “enticings of the Holy Spirit.” Most of us want “*to yield*,” of course, and to some degree we believe we have. But what evidence is there that we have really been spiritually yielding?

The angel gave king Benjamin the clear-cut, categorical results of such a surrender. His description of those who have yielded to the Spirit clearly parallels the definition of charity given by both Paul and Mormon. Here it is. Those who YIELD “*becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, FULL of love, willing to submit to ALL things which the Lord seeth fit to INFLICT upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father*.” (Mosiah 3:19)

The heavenly messenger was describing the antidote to being stiffnecked.

NOTHING CAN BE GAINED WITHOUT GIVING SOMETHING UP

So now we are ready to face the real reason we all tend to be stiffnecked. The prerequisite to partaking of the tree of life is to leave and forsake the great and spacious building. The price of gaining the pearl of great price is to sell all the rest of our pearls and buy the one and only prize.

When the spiritual awakening occurs, trust, need and dependence for what the building symbolizes is given away and replaced with what the tree of life represents. I found that this shift is totally spiritual. It is not a matter of belief, but “beyond understanding.” The natural man can hear about it, believe it and work at it, but as long as he is only converted to the concept as an ideal or a belief, he will knowingly or unknowingly cling to the great and spacious building.

The tree of life and its opposite, the tree of knowledge, are absolutely mutually exclusive, in the same way John told us that pure love and fear, or light and darkness, cannot coexist in the same heart.

I must confess that this rather surprising principle was the hardest thing for me to finally get through my proud and hardened heart. Surely, I thought, I was not supposed to forsake all of my hard-won knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error! Isn't that what we came

on earth to learn? Isn't that why God gave us His law of good and evil?

The answer, as I was gradually discovering in Jacob's seventh mystery, is NO! A fixed, rigid and stifling knowledge of good and evil is what we receive when we *look beyond the mark*. We came on earth to discover for ourselves that there is no perfection in the judgmentalness of that kind of knowledge.

There is nothing wrong with knowledge, of course. Once one is partaking of the fruit from the tree of life, it is a wonderful thing to have. As Jacob said, **"To be learned is good, IF THEY HEARKEN UNTO THE COUNSELS OF GOD."** (2 Nephi 9:29) *And what are the counsels of God?* They are sweet, peaceful, moment by moment KNOWING which comes from the promptings of the pure love of Christ. "Knowledge" is built on conclusions. "Knowing" is what comes from an open state of not-knowing, meaning "not concluding." The condition can best be compared to being like a little child. Now, isn't that what Christ said is required?

THE LAW IS THE PREPARATORY GOSPEL BUT NOT THE FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL

But I continued to ask, don't we need to be taught what is good and what is evil? What would we be without it? Wouldn't we be like the animals?

As the answer to those questions finally began to dawn on me, I felt strangely and wonderfully relieved, like a heavy burden was being lifted off my shoulders. Of course, the law was to get us ready to return to the mark, but *cannot take us to the mark*. I began to understand what Christ meant when He said, **"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28) I was beginning to see that this meant complete freedom and rest from those heavy burdens.

The Savior knew that Israel did NEED the law—but only as long as they hardened their hearts and were not yielding to the inner guidance of *His voice of perfect love*. The law was called the gospel, but not the *fullness of the gospel*, just the *preparatory gospel*. The scriptures tell us that the Lord gave Israel **"the preparatory gospel, which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism and the remission of sins and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord IN HIS WRATH, caused to continue with the...children of Israel."** (D&C 84:26-27)

BEING STRIPPED OF ONE'S FIXED KNOWLEDGE IS SYMBOLIZED AS PASSING THROUGH THE FLAMING SWORD

Our fixed knowledge of good and evil is the divine consequences of our refusing to forsake our pride and come out from under the fall. Such inflexibility is the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, not the fruit of the tree of life. The flaming sword which protects us from prematurely reaching the tree of life is there to strip away the illusions of our preconceived conclusions about *what ought and what ought not to be*.

So, I began to see through the mist of my great accumulation of preparatory gospel "wisdom." I began to see that when one is filled with the *pure love of Christ*, one would know *naturally* what is appropriate to choose for each moment. One would not need to look to see where *"it is written."* I gradually became clearer and clearer that righteousness comes only out of the "at-one-ment love" that Christ sheds into our hearts, rather than from the highly desired and prized knowledge of rigid ideals.

GIVING UP OUR TRUST IN THE ARM OF FLESH AND TRUSTING THE ARMS OF HIS LOVE

But isn't that a little scary? Of course it is. The reason is that we worship our fixed conclusions of good and evil instead of our inner guest, the Savior Himself. Our faith is misplaced. As

long as our knowledge is our primary hope for salvation, we stiffen our necks to defend our proud point of view. We are absolutely afraid to LET GO! And as a matter of fact, we had better NOT LET GO—until we are ready to receive His infinite and eternal replacement, *the pure love of Christ*.

That is why we are first fed only milk and not meat. We are not trusted with anything but the preparatory gospel when we are stiffnecked. Why else was Paul restrained from giving the meat of the “**mystery of Christ**,” which is the “**mind of Christ**,” to the Corinthians who were yet carnal, contending among themselves as to who was right. They were not “**peaceful followers of Christ**,” which is how Mormon described those people to whom he was given permission to reveal *the mystery of the rest*. (Moroni 7:3-4)

As we will discuss in greater detail later, the law is very necessary and useful to the stiff-necked, for they need to have fixed definitions of what is allowed and required and what is not allowed. Only by relative obedience to this knowledge can they survive on the earth in their carnal nature. But it is not the solution to the fall, merely the way to survive IN THE FALL.

But those who will move through the flaming sword and thereby lose their dependence on a fixed knowledge of good and evil, become free as the wind. As Christ said, “**The wind bloweth where it listeth... So is EVERYONE that is born of the Spirit.**” (John 3:8)

THE PEACE THAT DEPENDS ON NOTHING

But as I began to experience what it means to give up the knowledge which makes us stiff-necked, I wondered if a person like myself could ever really do it—TOTALLY. Then I found where the Lord had an answer to my question. It was the same answer He gave to His bewildered disciples who “**were exceedingly amazed, saying WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?**” Christ told them. “**With men this is IMPOSSIBLE; but with God ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.**” (Matthew 19:25-26)

The love of Christ is the peace of Christ. That peace does not depend upon anything outside of itself, for it is complete and whole in and of itself. It is totally a free gift. It cannot be earned. It can only be accepted by a heart that is broken and contrite, and *to none else will it come*. So what is it we give up when we forsake the great and spacious building?

We give up all of those things we believe we “need” and “depend upon” from our great temple of wisdom, comfort and pride. We give up our belief that our struggle for self-improvement will create that perfect love and peace which Christ invites us to receive—to hunger and thirst never again. Preparatory to that time of truly forsaking the tree of knowledge, we can open to that love from time to time for relatively brief periods at a time.

WHY THE NATURAL MAN NEEDS GRACE TO GIVE UP THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING

There are so many qualities the natural man believes he needs in order to be worthy and secure in the love of God. These needs are all part of his participation in the demands of the preparatory gospel. They become a part of his nature, almost like breathing, eating and sleeping. Even though he falls far short of these divine ideals, he knows no other way of trying to live because he has believed a knowledge of good and evil IS ALL THERE IS.

As long as we believe in the necessity of being worthy of God’s love, we will ride the roller-coaster of trying to be good enough for the wrong reasons. As long as we believe that it is our righteousness that earns God’s love, whether knowingly or unknowingly, we will continue to harden our hearts, bow our backs and stiffen our necks.

Do we want to acknowledge and surrender our unworthiness to Christ? If we do, we may eventually realize the joyous reality He has promised us. *Simply, He promises us that there will*

be NO more burdens left, for as He said, “I will give you rest.”

SUMMARY

The natural man is stiffnecked because he believes he has needs which only a strong stand in defense of his knowledge of truth will fulfill. He holds to his accumulated wisdom, represented as the great and spacious building, which he defends by mocking those who seem to have chosen a “less responsible,” or “less trustworthy” way. Christ summarized the position of the proud and stiffnecked when He challenged the Church leaders of His day: **“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”** (Matthew 23:13)

Chapter XVI

Question 8 – Part 1

HOW DOES GOD DELIVER THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD?

One of the most surprising aspects of Jacob's declaration about looking beyond the mark is that God, Himself, delivers through His prophets these **“many things”** which His stiffnecked children **“cannot understand”**—so that they **“will stumble.”** These misunderstood things, in turn, become part of the Holy Scriptures.

With this realization that a large part of the scriptures was written on the preparatory gospel level, I found myself no longer viewing all the scriptures as having only complete and literal truth. In turn, I began appreciating more fully the vibrant testimony of Paul about moving from the letter of the law to a more spiritual understanding, when he wrote:

But now we are delivered from the law [knowledge of good and evil, truth and error, right and wrong], **that being dead wherein we were held** [captive to our dogmatism], **that we should serve in newness of spirit; and NOT IN THE OLDNESS OF THE LETTER.** (Romans 7:6)

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES AS REVELATIONS OF GOD'S INFINITE LOVE, RATHER THAN LIMITED, FINITE KNOWLEDGE

Paul was speaking from his own personal experience, of course. He knew what it meant to be trapped in the letter of the law. When his name was Saul, he had been a brilliant, dedicated student of the scriptures, a very strict, pious Pharisee. I presume he had been heavily burdened by the impossible struggle to live God's holy law impeccably. In his attempt to be super-loyal to the law of God, he was driven to attack all those who would compromise the “one and only truth.”

But in Paul's complete turn-around conversion process, which, incidentally, he said took many years of being directly instructed by the Spirit, he discovered that he had used knowledge for bigoted zeal rather than for merciful love. In fact, in his own stumbling over the “law of righteousness,” he had thought *zeal and bigotry was love*.

So after having found the mark, being in the rest of the Lord and perfected in the pure love of Christ, Paul was able to speak from an entirely different perspective on the scriptures. He taught

Timothy, his fellow companion, how to harvest spiritual union from the scriptures rather than vain, divisive knowledge. He wrote:

Knowing this, that the law [with its promises of rewards and threats of punishment] **is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient** [natural man]. **And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation THROUGH FAITH WHICH IS IN** [the gift of] **CHRIST JESUS.**

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction IN [GOD'S] RIGHTEOUSNESS [the pure love of Christ]: THAT THE MAN OF GOD [not the natural man] MAY BE PERFECT [in love], THOROUGHLY FURNISHED [lovingly inspired] UNTO ALL GOOD [pure and holy] WORKS. (1 Timothy 1:9 & 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

HOW TO READ THE SCRIPTURES FROM TWO OPPOSITE PERSPECTIVES

To clearly understand the up-side-down meaning of Paul's approach from what he had known as a Pharisee, let's review again what he wrote about his orthodox Jewish neighbors:

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness [as taught in their scriptures], **hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? [Why?] Because they sought it not by faith** [in the gift of Christ's love], **but as it were by the works of the law** [through vain, exacting knowledge of outer performances]. **For they stumbled at the stumbling stone;**

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge [of charity]. **For they being ignorant of God's righteousness** [His pure, perfect love], **and going about to establish their own righteousness** [of being right, loyal and "good"], **have not submitted** [surrendered] **themselves** [by being meek and lowly in heart] **unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.** (Romans 9:31-32 & 10:1-4)

BEING HEARERS OF THE WORD BUT NOT DOERS

Paul lived among scriptural scholars who failed to apply this spiritual approach. They even considered themselves divinely appointed lawyers of the law of God. Their favorite phrase was to declare, "It is written..." or to ask, "Where is it written?" They worshipped the letter of God's word. To them, it was their god, an infallible source of eternal life.

Since Paul had once been one of the leaders of the Pharisees, he could speak with blunt clarity and authority. In his letter to the Jews in Rome, he rode rough-shod over their sanctimonious piety. **"Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law, dishonorest thou God."** (Romans 2:23)

To drive in his point, he took the most sacred part of their religion—*circumcision*—a commandment which preceded Moses, being a token as a witness of the covenant between man and God. It was the seal on God's covenant with Abraham. Paul said,

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law [perfectly], **but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision... But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the HEART, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.** (Romans 2:25-29)

As I found myself agreeing with Paul's castigation of his zealous countrymen, I had to remember—who was I to judge them? It was easy for me to point my finger at those Israelites of the meridian of times, but the Spirit whispered to me not to be hasty and sit in judgment. I, too, had been a literalist, choosing to live by the letter of the law in the same way, picking and choosing.

I was reminded again what James said about those who measure their purity by keeping

“most” of the commandments. He warned, **“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, HE IS GUILTY OF ALL.”** (James 2:10) And how frequently I had taken solace, as Israel did in the days of Moses, in my free and easy willingness to covenant before **“God, angels and these witnesses”** that I would keep ALL the commandments, yes every one of them—and, as the natural man, I not only failed to fulfill all of them, I could not!

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES FOR IN THEM *YE THINK YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE*

We often refer to the Savior's instructions that we are to search the scriptures. Of course, that is very true. However, when we read the full context of His statement, we find that what He said was not an instruction to search the scriptures, for His listeners did not need that counsel, but a very serious indictment laid at those who did so without the Spirit.

Christ chastised those scriptural scholars because they falsely believed that knowing and honoring the scriptures, along with full participation in the ordinances and performances, would assure them eternal salvation. He warned them, instead, that their scripture study and performances were a sure path to damnation.

Why? Because they searched the scriptures to become “wise,” rather than for finding how to receive the gift of Christ's love. In their literalism, they saw the forest, but missed the *tree of life*. They never found the *pearl of great price* hidden among the other pearls. Jesus accused them of being blind in their scriptural studies, saying:

And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath born witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His [inner] voice at any time, nor seen His shape.

And ye have not His word [and the word is Spirit] abiding in you; for whom He hath sent [to give the gift], Him ye believe not.

[You] Search the scriptures; for in them YE THINK [believe falsely that] ye have eternal life; and [yet] they are they which testify of Me.

[But] Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have [eternal, perfecting] life... I know you, that ye have not THE [pure] LOVE OF GOD IN YOU...

How can ye believe, which [proudly] receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, IN WHOM YE TRUST. For had ye [truly] believed Moses [by the Spirit], ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. (John 5:37-46)

So Christ taught that the blind search the scriptures after “knowledge” to gain their own righteousness instead of God's righteousness, which is the stumbling stone. But those who “see” find a doorway to be granted the pure love of eternal life that Christ brings with His indwelling presence.

FINDING TRUE SAFETY IN THE SCRIPTURAL MINE FIELD

So if those zealous students of the word of God found spiritual death instead of spiritual life, how are we to study the scriptures? Since the scriptures purposely contain all those divinely designed “booby traps,” which make the vain stumble, how are we to gain the *real prize*, instead of the *booby prize*?

Since we have just reviewed what Paul and Christ said on the subject, let's see what Peter had to say. Peter gave warning that the scriptures can be easily misleading. He said:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light [of love] that shineth in a dark place [of fear], until the day dawn, and THE DAY STAR [pure love of Christ] arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy [teaching] of the scripture is of ANY PRIVATE INTERPRETATION [of the mind]. (2 Peter 1:19-20)

What that statement began to mean to me is that if I continued to study the scriptures for

knowledge by which I could judge good from evil, then the warning of Jacob that I could be led to stumbling would inevitably apply, and I would continue to drink condemnation to my soul. But if I did not look beyond the mark and kept my eye on the prize, in gratitude and praise, every step of the way, the many spiritual blessings of the scriptures would continue to come into my life.

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES FOR THE ONE AND ONLY KNOWLEDGE THAT COUNTS

Let's talk about this thing called KNOWLEDGE. Have we not been told many times that we are saved only as we gain knowledge? Our modern revelations tell us:

And if a person gains more *knowledge and intelligence* in this life through his *diligence and obedience* than another, he will have so much *the advantage in the world to come*. (D&C 130:19)

Now, I have just quoted a well-known scripture on the eternal advantage of knowledge. But what does it really mean?

Like most of the scriptures, it can be read from the viewpoint of the *tree of knowledge* or from the viewpoint of the *tree of life*. In both cases, the words are the same, of course, but the meanings are exactly the opposite of each other.

The Savior scolded the Scribes and Pharisees because they were interpreting their scriptures from the tree of knowledge, i.e., they believed that one must become “wise” in knowledge of the ways of the Lord to be blessed by the Lord. So they would understand the above scripture about gaining knowledge as further encouragement to learn everything they could about the things of God, which is to gain an ever greater knowledge of *exactly* what is good and *precisely* what is evil. Yet, Christ was seriously calling them on their self-deceit, vanity and hypocrisy.

ALL KNOWLEDGE, WITHOUT THE ONE CRITICAL GIFT OF KNOWING GOD, COUNTS FOR NOTHING

Paul gave the same emphatic warning about the impotence of most spiritual knowledge in his sermon on *charity*. He said:

Though I have the *gift of prophecy*, and understand ALL MYSTERIES, and ALL KNOWLEDGE... and have not charity, I AM NOTHING! (1 Corinthians 13:2)

So if we have little advantage in compiling an ever increasing knowledge of good and evil without the gift of Christ's pure love, what kind of knowledge will be to our great advantage in the world to come?

It took me a long time to understand how this scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants was to be seen from the viewpoint of the pure love of Christ, i.e., the tree of life rather than from the great and spacious building. When I finally did “see,” the answer was so obvious that I wondered why I had been blind so long.

I received my answer one day when I was reading Christ's great prayer at the Last Supper. He said to the Father, “*This is life eternal, that they might KNOW THEE, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent.* (John 17:3)

As we have mentioned before, there is only one way to know God and His son, and that is to have His love bestowed upon us by it being poured into our hearts. Then, to know the pure love of Christ is to *know both Him and His Father*. Those who are like little children, who are no longer under the law, are the only ones who receive this treasure of *knowledge*. Then, what other knowledge is required to have eternal life? The answer is, none!

SUMMARY

Paul taught us that the zealous searching for knowledge to become wise will not give us the

gift of God's righteousness. Christ warned the scholars that they searched the scriptures without the love of God in them. If we read Peter's instructions with the realization that he was actually writing about the *mark*, then we see that he was counseling the Saints to study the scriptures by letting the light of the Spirit, which is divine love, shine in dark places, until *the day star* of the pure love of Christ arises in our hearts. Paul assures us that only the *knowledge of His love* is the *source of eternal life*.

Chapter XVII

Question 8 – Part 2

HOW TO HOLD LIGHTLY WHAT GOD DOES DELIVER

During the many years that I was sincerely and dutifully looking beyond the mark, I still had many blessings of insight while studying, meditating and praying. But what did I do with those insights? I gratefully stored them in my mind by taking them over to decorate my ever-growing tree of knowledge. Consequently, I became quite an authority on the gospel in general and the scriptures in particular. When my mind would be opened up to breathtaking enlightenment, I had joyfully added it to my store of prized treasures of fixed and certain conclusions.

YET NO END TO MY HUNGER AND THIRST

In doing so, I grew in my love and appreciation of the Savior, His Church and His plan of salvation. On several occasions, especially after times of fasting in the desert, mountains or on the sea shore, I experienced being filled with overwhelming love, just like that described by Nephi in his lament when he testified that he had, on occasions, been filled with His love, “**even unto the consuming of my flesh.**” (2 Nephi 4:17-35)

Yet, like Nephi in that painful lament, long before he let the law become dead (2 Nephi 25:25), I found that I still continued to hunger and thirst. I hungered because I believed the promise that there should come a day in this life when I could so completely feast upon the *fruit of the tree of life* and drink of the *fountain of living waters* that I would *never hunger or thirst again*. Now, I do not just “*believe*” *any more that this is a blessing for this life!* The reason is that now I KNOW that it is a blessing available in this life. As Alma would say, it is no more faith, but perfect knowledge which comes from the experience of that which they described.

THE GREAT DIFFERENCE WHEN ONE ENTERS THE REST OF THE LORD

I now understand more clearly why we must become as a little child or we cannot enter. I had often pondered how it was possible for grown-ups to truly become as little children. The fact is that children are not stuck in all of their conclusions. Therefore, they are truly teachable. They KNOW that they do not KNOW! Our problem, and it is the source of our pride and vanity, is that most of us think we KNOW so much.

So now, when it comes to the scriptures, I experience them very differently. Of course, I still search the scriptures, but there is a difference in that study. I still pray, but my praying is also totally different. I still believe in following those in authority to faithfully and gratefully fulfill Church assignments, but again, these activities are to be experienced in a totally different way.

But what makes the difference?

The difference is that now everything is a gift rather than a chore—a privilege rather than a duty. And within those gifts of daily life, one chooses, moment by moment, what is experienced as appropriate for the situation.

The most significant thing that makes one feel more like a little child is that one discovers something very shocking at first, but at the same time, very peaceful and restful. One begins to realize that one does not really know anything—absolutely—except *what one has personally experienced*. The actual experience is what one “knows,” but when we try to explain *what* the experience *means* and what it *proves*, our explanation is only *a perception, a belief, actually, an assumption*.

The primary *perception* about life that I found myself “choosing” is that everything that is happening in my life, pleasant or unpleasant, can be gratefully received as a fully orchestrated, beneficial gift of a loving God. As the Prophet Joseph declared,

The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth...The past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, ONE ETERNAL “NOW”. . . HE ORDERED ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE COUNCIL OF HIS OWN WILL. (The teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 220)

Those “all things” become experienced as conscious, loving gifts from a totally participating Christ. One realizes that we do not *deserve nor have we earned a single blessing*. One also discovers that one really does not *know, absolutely, anything as fixed, unalterable conclusions*. And even more amazing, one realizes that one doesn't *need* to know anything else. As Paul wrote, when that which is perfect—the experience of perfect love—is come, then **“KNOWLEDGE SHALL PASS AWAY.”**

Of course, one would still have all that information in one's head. One would still know the stories and messages of the scriptures. But it *all stops being heavy, fixed, concrete stuff*. It becomes light and fluid, free to bend like trees in the wind.

INTERPRETING ALL INSPIRATION AS LOVE, NOT CONCLUSIONS, IS THE DIVINE KEY

As for my own experience, I found that it was no longer critical whether I believed something as allegorical, mythological, factual or somewhere in between. So now when I receive bursts of inspiration, and I do more than ever, I do not rush over to decorate my tree of knowledge and say, “Wow! Now I know the ultimate reality.” I accept it gratefully as an interesting possibility, yes, but not as a final conclusion.

How could I do that? Simply. I stopped expecting the Lord to provide me with more tinsel on my tree of knowledge. In other words, in gratitude, I accept a spiritual experience as a gracious gift of love from our Heavenly Father and His Son. By holding inspiration in this *tentative way*, I take it *gratefully to my tree of life*. Isn't this the counsel Jacob gave us in revealing the headline to his first of the Seven Mysteries:

Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How *unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of Him*; and it is *impossible* that man should find out ALL His ways. And no man knoweth of His ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God. (Jacob 4:8)

What I continually find is that God has *multiple and various ways* for us to view *anything and everything*. When we lock onto just one, we cut ourselves off from the inspiration to see others. In this state of rest, I find myself far more understanding and appreciative of the views of others, and thereby, truly loving them in their unique reality, even though it differs from the interpretation I am choosing to have about my experience.

BEING LIBERATED FROM THE IMPOSSIBLE BURDENS OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

Now, what do I mean when I say that one stops knowing anything that one has not directly experienced? Doesn't one still know about what happened during the various dispensations, from the Garden of Eden, to the flood, to Moses, to Christ and to the restoration? Of course, one knows all about those things. But this information tends to stop being fixed, limited knowledge. Instead, they become wonderful stories which teach how mankind has been *walking in darkness at noonday*, and what the *noonday is really like*.

What about all the other aspects of knowledge? Doesn't one still know about the principles of spiritual living or the technical knowledge about the everyday world? The answer is, of course one does. But this knowledge, too, becomes more tentative and less dogmatic—in every aspect of life.

One might ask, “You believe the scriptures, don't you?” Of course, but in a totally different way. As Paul said, they are great treasures for “**doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction**” in the righteousness of the pure love of Christ. But not necessarily for opinions regarding exact facts, trying to determine the one and *only* way things are, have been and will be.

In other words, one can now appreciate the scriptures more than ever because they describe, literally and symbolically, these blessings of grace one is now enjoying. Otherwise, we can be so bound to the letter that we can miss much of what was being described as the true blessings of the Spirit.

But doesn't one still want to know which of all the stories from all these nations and cultures are actual facts? No. Strange as it sounds, that no longer makes any difference. And that was a big jump for a zealous intellectual like me.

Actually, when one has found the *pearl of great price*, one “sells” all the other pearls of knowledge to buy that one prize. One joyfully deserts the *fixed knowledge* that made one “wise” enough to be *a critical judge of one's fellow man*. That is the process that allows one to become *thankful for ALL THINGS*, whether comfortable and convenient or not, and truly rejoice in the gift of being here on the Lord's wonderful earth.

And most amazing of all, out of this NOT KNOWING, one finds something gradually growing within one. One is able to experience what Paul testified to about charity. In fact, we include this way of seeing things in our Thirteenth Article of Faith. It is that *through perfect love*, one BELIEVES ALL THINGS! Not just *some*, but *ALL*. We will discuss this seemingly impossible state in more detail in Book II, Finding the Mark.

THE GOSPEL HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HISTORY OR FASHION

Now if this all sounds weird to you, and it really should if you are where I have been for most of my life, then let me refer again to the talk by President Howard W. Hunter, when he spoke on the universality of the gospel. He said,

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST..IS NEITHER CONFINED, NOR PARTIAL, NOR SUBJECT TO HISTORY OR FASHION. (Ensign, November 1991, p. 18)

As I said, not many years ago, I would have politely taken issue with such a statement. I would have said, “The gospel has EVERYTHING to do with *history*. It is very *confined* to those who have authority to teach and administer the ordinances. It is very *partial*, for we must believe in truth rather than error. Even *fashion*, though not referring to frivolous fashion but the way people conduct themselves in decency and respectfulness, is symptomatic of their being good, obedient and righteous.”

But thank you, President Hunter. I can't argue with your sentiments any more. Yes, the true and pure gospel of Jesus Christ, in its fullness, is not partial to any one people's history or culture.

The gospel is simply one very precious, all purifying thing, and if that one thing is replaced by anything or everything else, it is not His gospel. Let's repeat again, *CHARITY is the ultimate treasure that really counts*. As Paul testified,

Charity never faileth, but whether there be *prophecies*, they shall *fail*; whether there be *tongues*, they shall *cease*; whether there be KNOWLEDGE, IT SHALL VANISH AWAY. For [without that which is perfect] we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect [charity] is come, then that which is *in part shall be done away*. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)

SUMMARY

President Hunter assures us that the gospel offers us the gift that puts us in harmony with the truths vested in all people, for the fullness of the gospel is God's loving work with all His children and is not CONFINED NOR PARTIAL NOR SUBJECT TO HISTORY OR FASHION. At least that has been my experience in my rather recently found freedom and liberation in Christ. We will deal with this subject in greater detail in Section II which follows next.

SUMMARY OF SECTION I

At this point, we have considered eight of the twelve questions regarding Jacob's insightful declaration on looking beyond the mark.

1. What is the mark?

The pure love of Christ represented by the tree of life.

2. What does looking beyond the mark mean?

Thinking a knowledge of good and evil is the way to perfection, the pride of the great and spacious building.

3. How did Israel despise the words of plainness?

By believing that the way to righteousness had to be hard and complex, not simply surrendering to Christ's love.

4. How did God take away their plainness

He gave them a strict and complex law of ordinances and performances, with a curse if they did not obey all of it.

5. What did they seek but could not understand?

That if they were given all of God's commandments, they could and would be a holy people.

6. Why does doing so cause blindness?

Because such knowledge creates judging, i.e., vanity.

7. What is a stiffnecked people?

Thinking their truth is the only way to please God.

8. How did God deliver their stumbling-stone law?

Through His prophets who were commanded to write them as their sacred scriptures.

QUESTIONS NINE THROUGH TWELVE

The final four questions, nine through twelve, will be answered in Section II. Those answers will help us understand the global significance of Jacob's declaration, along with a better appreciation of what we in the Church must do to come out from under the Lord's condemnation, scourge and judgment.

Section II

Understanding How Israel's Example Applies To Us and the Whole World

Chapter XVIII

Question 9 – Part 1

WHY DID THE JEWS “NEED” TO FALL?

Jacob, in his seventh mystery, said about the Jews, that “**because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, THEY MUST NEEDS FALL.**” We can read this statement from the “*viewpoint of the tree of knowledge*” or from the “*viewpoint of the tree of life*.” Both would be accurate from each tree's perspective, but only one leads to the Lord's rest.

WHY ISRAEL'S PURPOSE AS SEEN FROM THE TREE OF LIFE HAS BEEN HIDDEN

Our choice, of course, is to discover what Jacob meant from the *viewpoint of the tree of life* because that understanding is what his landmark “*mystery*” is designed to reveal to us. The mysteries of God have to do with understanding that which is not obvious to the “wise” because the “mysteries” have been carefully and purposefully *hidden to protect the unprepared*.

So that leads to another question one might ask. If these things are hidden, then why do I feel free to be writing about them? The reader will have to be the judge of that, but from my point of view, since we are living in the time when the Saints must come out from under their condemnation, these are the kinds of insights which must be taught more freely among individual members of the Church. As these truths of greater liberation are discovered and shared among us, I believe we will grow closer to receiving the “blessing hitherto unknown.”

Paul declared to the Ephesians that the ultimate mystery, *the mystery of Christ*, was being revealed in those days to the public at large for the first time. He wrote:

Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as IT IS NOW REVEALED unto His

holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. (Ephesians 3:4-5)

ALL WHO SPEAK BY THE HOLY GHOST, SPEAK AS A PROPHET?

As for being a prophet, we know there is only one who speaks by the Lord's authority to the Church. However, we are also told that all who speak by the Holy Ghost should be doing so as prophets. (D&C 68:2-4) For example, Moses chastised Joshua for objecting to several men prophesying in the camp. He said: **“Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them [all].”** (Numbers 11:29)

Although I am not writing for the Church in any way, I have felt impressed to bear my testimony to those truths which called me *to repentance* from the “vanity and unbelief” which had kept me under condemnation. What these truths have helped me do in my own life is to see where I had, unknowingly, misunderstood the Lord's strange and marvelous ways.

VIEW OF ISRAEL FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

So what is the basic *tree of knowledge* view about Israel? It is obvious to the “wise” that since the Jews really were stiffnecked, despising the words of plainness, killing the prophets, being blind to the ways of the Lord, they deserved to be pulled down from their high and mighty stance and punished. And as their sacred history has shown, that is exactly what happened.

Judging their history from this point of view, it is a whole series of tragedies which add up to an awful waste. Just think of the missed opportunities. The Lord promised the Israelites that they could have been a blessing to all other nations. They could have changed the course of history. Never before, as far as we know, had such a large group of people been so carefully sired, nurtured and miraculously preserved.

So dare we ask, from the point of view of the tree of knowledge, as to whether the Lord really did all that He could and should have done to wake them up? Couldn't the Lord have been more open and candid with them, rather than so cryptic and indirect? Didn't Jacob remind us in his second mystery that the Lord does everything **“according to His own will and pleasure?”** Surely, since the Lord did not want them to be lost, couldn't He, in His own omnipotent power, have saved them from their terrible series of disasters?

THE UP-SIDE-DOWN VIEW OF FREE AGENCY, AS SEEN FROM THE TREE OF LIFE

The standard answer we give to those questions about why the Lord does not do more to wake us up is that He is committed to let us have our *free agency*. But is there a different way to see their history other than God being limited in His options because of protecting man's free agency?

Yes, there is a *radically* different point of view. From the tree of life, there is another way to understand what free agency really means. But first, we would all agree that free agency is having the freedom to make our own choices. We choose, however, *because of who, where and what we are*, right? So who made us *who* and *what* we are and who put us *where* we are? From the tree of knowledge, we are eternally separate and have always been independently different. But from the tree of life, we see that spiritually, we are all unique individualizations of the one Infinite Spirit of God, called the Spirit of Christ.

GOD'S HAND IS LITERALLY IN ALL THINGS

From this point of view, we are all unique by *infinite design*. Are we not told that God is our Creator? Remember, the Savior told Moroni, **“I give unto men weakness that they may be humble.”** (Ether 12:27) The Psalmist said, **“Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that hath made us,**

and not we ourselves.” (Psalms 100:3)

Even Moses made this point very clear. He said it is God, not we ourselves, who opens or closes our hearts, eyes and ears. When in the world, one might ask, did Moses say that?

Moses taught this deep understanding in his closing farewell address, after restating the demands, blessings and curses of the law. He assured the hosts of Israel that they *would fail to obtain those wonderful blessings* the Lord had offered, and instead, they *would receive the terrible curses*. In other words, in essence, he was telling them to their faces that *they must needs fall!* Why? This is how he answered that question:

Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles [for forty years]. YET THE LORD HATH NOT GIVEN YOU AN HEART TO PERCEIVE, AND EYES TO SEE, AND EARS TO HEAR, UNTO THIS DAY.

(Deuteronomy 29:2-4)

ONLY GOD OPENS OUR HEARTS TO PERCEIVE AND OUR EYES TO SEE

Yes, my friend, those are Moses’ words. He made it very clear that it was the great Jehovah, Himself, who had chosen NOT to open their hearts to perceive, their eyes to see, or their ears to hear, unto that very day!

Looking at that idea from the tree of knowledge, *does that seem fair?* Isn’t God trying to wake everyone up? Isn’t He trying to help us create heaven on earth? Does God have a double standard—some He helps and some He doesn’t? The answer must be NO, but it can begin to look that way. So let me tell you how the Lord helped me understand better the **“depths of the mysteries of him...which no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him.”** (Jacob 4:8)

This principle, that *the hand of God is literally and actively in ALL THINGS*, exactly the way they are and the way they are not, will be covered in greater detail in *Book II, Finding the Mark*, so be patient if you find this *up-side-down view of free agency* difficult to handle at this time.

In the last chapter, I shared my personal experience of being in the *rest* for a few years now. But that blessing was preceded by many years of gradually breaking one chain after another which was holding me firmly to the forbidden tree of knowledge.

As I look back over those difficult, preparatory years of my life, the first major breakthrough took place back in 1966 when I was forty-five years old. But first, I would like share a bit of the long search that I had been conducting for many years which helped me become a little more open to that liberating and fulfilling experience.

HOW TO PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE BAPTISM OF FIRE AND THE HOLY GHOST

In 1966 I was first counselor to a great bishop in a fine ward in Southern California. I was also the founder and president of a prosperous business which covered four western states. Twenty years before I had authored an inspirational book titled *“How to Pray and Stay Awake.”*

Encouraged by the spiritual blessings people were finding through reading my book, I felt impressed to write another book on a subject which I did not yet understand well myself. It was how to receive *the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost*. I had heard the Brethren teach that when hands are laid on our heads we are instructed to receive that precious gift. They stress that we are not guaranteed that the Holy Ghost will come unless we do our part. So I realized that the ordinance was an invitation, perhaps even a command, to receive the Holy Ghost, but not an automatic blessing.

THESE SIGNS SHALL FOLLOW THOSE WHO BELIEVE

I had read many of the experiences in the scriptures and the early days of the Church about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, so I had created some opinions about what it would be like. Yet, in all my forty-five years, that blessing had never happened to me. Oh yes, I had received many other blessings. I had felt healing go out of my body to bless the sick. I had felt the comfort of the Lord's presence. I had felt energy, like electricity, flowing through my bones. I had felt inspiration and guidance.

But people of many faiths enjoy those kinds of blessings. I believed that we, through the priesthood and its ordinances, had something much more powerful being offered to us. Yet I was quite sure that I was among those receiving only a small percentage of what the Lord is offering us.

I often reflected upon these words:

For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in Him who is the giver of the gift. (D&C 88:33)

So for fifteen years, through the fifties and first half of the sixties, I had searched and prayed for better understanding of how we were to prepare ourselves to be richly blessed by *the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost*.

Oh, I thought, if only more of us could be worthy of such blessings in these last days, think what we could do to fulfill our call to prepare the way for the Second Coming of the Lord. As I had studied the scriptures, I saw many examples of great servants of the Lord ministering in wonderful power. As Christ had said, **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, *the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*”** (John 14:12)

THE MIRACULOUS MISSION OF THE SONS OF HELAMAN

One of the events in the *Book of Mormon* which deeply impressed me over the years was the incredible missionary experiences of the two sons of Helaman, named Nephi and Lehi. They went on a mission to their murderous and barbaric Lamanite enemies and were instruments of the Lord in converting most of the nation—in a single year! The converted Lamanites were so filled with the power of the Holy Ghost that they even sent missionaries out to reconvert the “Jack-Mormon” Nephites.

We are told that Nephi and Lehi **“*had power and authority given unto them that they might speak, and they also had what they should speak given unto them.*”** But yet they were thrown into a prison and suffered great suffering and abuse for a long time. Finally a large mob of blood-thirsty Lamanites assembled to witness their execution. Then, suddenly, **“Nephi and Lehi were encircled about as if by fire, even insomuch that they [the Lamanites] durst not lay their hands upon them.”**

Then thick darkness filled the room and a voice spoke which shook them to their bones. The mob overcame their fear enough—

to cry unto the voice of Him who had shaken the earth, yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed... When they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea, every soul, by a pillar of fire...

And they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words...

Behold, they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them. (Helaman 5:18-52)

Because of this miraculous experience and their spiritual empowerment, Nephi, Lehi and the three hundred new Lamanite converts went forth. Most of the savage nation of Lamanites were converted within less than twelve months.

WHEN ARE WE GOING TO TRULY REPENT?

Year after year I was burdened with the question, “Why don't we have faith to do the works that these two servants of the Lord performed through the power of the Holy Ghost?” I wondered how long we were going to remain under our condemnation as outcasts of Zion? When would we holders of the priesthood honor our calling enough to be “chosen” worthy of walking in the light at “noon day?” When would we go forth as we had been commanded: *“to prune my vineyard for the last time, that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh?”* (D&C 95:4)

During those fifteen years, from 1950 to 1965, of special concentration on the subject of how to be *baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost*, I had searched, fasted, prayed, taught and served in a number of positions in the Church. Although many blessings had come, I still felt the burden, collectively and personally, of our lack of spiritual attainment. I inwardly pondered, “Why doesn't the Church get on the ball?” But even more personally, “Why don't I?”

DECIDING TO DO MORE THAN STRUGGLE— IT WAS TIME TO SURRENDER

So it was in the spring of 1966 that I finally began to discover more clearly what my real problem was. I could see more powerfully than ever before that I had never let loose, surrendered, trusting solely in His will. Instead, I had felt that it was my struggle, my self-improvement, my determination, my task to become worthy of His most choice blessing.

I knew that Nephi had taught that we were saved by grace, but only *“after all we could do.”* (2 Nephi 25:23) So if grace could come ONLY after ALL we could do, I KNEW that even after all my efforts, I had certainly NOT done ALL I could do, by any means. So I had continually carried the burden that if I was going to receive the promised blessings, my only solution was to just strive to do *more and better*. Does that sound familiar?

Suddenly one day, I understood Nephi's statement in a totally opposite way. From what Nephi wrote just following this statement, which was about the law becoming dead, I realized that he was really saying, *“Even after ALL we can do, WE ARE STILL SAVED, TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY, BY GRACE!”*

So I was finally realizing that there really is ONLY one thing the natural man *can do in innocence*, and that is to YIELD the burdens of both the flesh and the natural mind, in meekness and trust, to Christ and His Holy Spirit. I could see that my task was not to conquer the natural man, but to surrender him to the Spirit. I was seeing more and more clearly that I had never really done so before. So that was exactly what I was determined to do.

What I did about it became a major turning point in my life. In the next chapter, I will share my account of that experience.

SUMMARY

Viewed from the *tree of knowledge*, the history of Israel appears to be one of the earth's greatest tragedies. But viewed from the *tree of life*, it was exactly what the Great Jehovah had contemplated and ordered into existence, His wondrous and mysterious work to perform. By closing the minds, eyes and ears of the children of Israel, *the real purpose of the earth would stay in place*. That purpose is for mankind to experience *the opposite to heaven*. The spiritual key, if we want to comprehend the light which shines in darkness, is to yield ourselves totally to His

will, in meekness and lowliness of heart. It was this that the Israelites were unable to do. As for us, we are being invited to give up our struggle and burdens which are caused by our vanity and unbelief. In faith, hope and meekness, we are simply to surrender in trust that Christ knows what He is doing with our lives.

Chapter XIX

Question 9 – Part 2

WHY ALL MANKIND NEEDED TO FALL

Once I had realized that **“to come unto Christ”** was to cease struggling and surrender, I wanted to answer the question, “How does one surrender?” In my case, being a workaholic, I decided that I could best do so by taking some time off alone in the wilderness. So with a relaxed, peaceful but determined intent, I made preparations for an extended journey of several months. Since I lived in Southern California, my choice was to go down to one of the wide, open beaches of Baja California in Mexico. I would go with no agenda, no struggle, no expectations or demands. I would truly release my life and totally surrender it into the hands of the Lord.

ON A LONELY BEACH JUST NORTH OF ANGEL’S POINT

First I obtained permission for a brief leave of absence from my assignment in the bishopric. Then I cleared eight weeks off my business and speaking schedule. I loaded my car with a tent, cot, gas stove, scriptures and an eight week supply of food and water. I went forty miles south of the border to a favorite place where I had previously spent days in fasting and prayer, trying to do as Enos in the *Book of Mormon* had done, but without similar results. (Enos 1-12) It was a long, fairly vacant three mile-long beach just north of, would you believe, Angel's Point. This time, I made up my mind there was to be no agenda, no demands, no pleading and no expectations.

So as I was peacefully putting up the tent, to my surprise, a strange and disturbing thought came into my mind, almost like a voice. After trying to put it out of my mind a few times, I finally wrote it in my diary and made the comment, “I don't like this thought!”

The thought was this: ***“The last thing in the world the Lord will allow is for the gospel to perfect the earth before its time.”***

I rejected the thought as coming from a false, negative source, assuring myself that the whole concept couldn't be true. Of course the Lord wants to perfect all of His children. Surely, if those two sons of Helaman could be instruments in the Lord's hands of converting most of such an unlikely people as the Lamanites, all in a single year, why doesn't He want us to do similar things in this day? Certainly the Lord is willing, if we were only more worthy servants.

HAVING THE SCRIPTURES OPENED TO MY MIND

However, to my happy amazement, over the next seven days, before experiencing the incredible blessing of the baptism of fire, and then for the two weeks following, after leaving the beach, I was led to see many things in the scriptures in ways I had never understood before. I experienced the joy and thrill of a whole, liberating shift in my understanding of what the Lord is doing with this earth. The resulting enlightenment took away much of my zeal-created burden. I

could also finally see why it had been absolutely essential that the restored Church, almost since its beginning, had to be put under the severe restraint of the condemnation, scourge and judgment.

Upon returning home some weeks later, I reported the experience to my Stake President, who was so pleased with my sharing it with him that he asked me to share it with the High Council, which I was delighted to do.

THE PURPOSES OF GOD PROVIDING OUR EXPERIENCE OF DARKNESS

So what was my new point of view? It was to me a completely different way of understanding the strange and marvelous ways the Lord blesses His children. To start with and to my surprise, I began to realize that if the earth were perfected before its time, it would no longer be the school of darkness it needed to be.

Let's review again the words of Lehi to Jacob. He said that the earth was created to give the children of God the opportunity to experience the opposite to light, which is darkness, and the opposite to holiness, which is sin. (2 Nephi 2:11-25)

Experiencing these opposites requires our being under the fall, which gives us the chance to know what it means to be a natural man, an enemy to God. This experience can only be available to us, of course, as long as the fall is held in place over much of the earth. Then, only after these purposes are fulfilled, should there come a totally different agenda. That different agenda is called the Millennium.

NO ONE WILL BE ALLOWED TO PERFECT THE PLANET BEFORE IT IS TIME

I could see that in spite of the fall, all of us are invited, individually and in this life, to come out of the darkness into the pure light of Christ by surrendering to the gift of the atonement. But an interesting thought came to my mind. What if some great prophet, like Enoch or the sons of Helaman, continued to escalate a spiritual chain-reaction? I could see how the whole earth could be quickly perfected in just a few years. What I was shown was that if that were allowed to happen, then the earth would no longer provide the critical and necessary experience of the darkness which is opposite to the light.

So I understood that although no one is denied access to the fullness of His blessings, either individually or collectively, the momentum of conversions must not proceed beyond a certain point. In science, we call it "critical mass," when the "whole" shifts in alignment with one of the expanding "parts." So if such a spiritual momentum was about to reach critical mass, it could rapidly cleanse the earth. To keep that from happening, the Lord would have to either hold back further blessings, which it appears He often does, or remove the group from the earth before they "ruin" the divine school. There is a name for that process of taking perfected people from the earth. It is called "being translated."

TRANSLATION OF THE CITY OF ENOCH

From this point of view, I was able to better understand why the city of Enoch had to be translated. Over the years, this great prophet had led his once wicked people to a state of faith, hope and meekness so that the pure love of Christ was joyfully resident in their hearts. There were probably many thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, in the city. With that number of spiritually reborn, empowered people, I could see that Enoch had a spirit-filled missionary force that could have staved off the wickedness which brought on the flood. So Enoch and his people were "beamed" to another place. Since his writings remained, those who were left behind could still know how to be sanctified by the Spirit. We are assured that all who did so were caught up

to join the city of Enoch, right up to the time of the flood. (Moses 7:27)

TRANSLATION OF THE CITY OF SALEM

Then many years after the flood, Melchizedek, king of the wicked city of Salem, finally brought his people to the same level of holiness. Abraham did not live in the city, but he knew and honored the great man of righteousness, paying his tithing to him. But you can imagine Abraham's shock and disappointment when he found that the city had been taken and he did not get to go with them. In fact, the Lord, at a much later time, added to Abraham's almost unbearable burden by commanding him to take Isaac, his only heir, to the center of where the city had been, at a hill called Moriah, and offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. (Genesis 22:2) As we all know, a ram was provided at the very last, desperate moment. Centuries later, the temple of Solomon was built on that very hill. Of course, by that later time, a new city had been built around the hill, and it was called Jerusalem, in other words, the New Salem. (2 Chronicles 3:1)

THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Abraham was visited by the Lord and assured that there was an important reason why he had been left to stay here on this less-than-heavenly place. He was promised that he would father a great nation out of which a blessing would be provided for the whole world. That nation was sired through his grandson, Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. Israel's twelve sons became the twelve tribes and were taken into Egypt, where in four hundred years they had become a great nation of over six hundred thousand adult male slaves. It was when I began to review their story and related it to some of the gems from the *Book of Mormon*, that I found my greatest clarity in how the Lord does all things, “**according to His will and pleasure,**” all for the ultimate benefit of His children.

HOW THE LORD SET ISRAEL UP FOR CONDEMNATION

It was during this study that I began to understand better the incredible story of the forty-year exodus of Israel. As I poured over the pages of the four books which cover their early history, I was amazed at the magnitude of blessings the Lord had offered the Israelites. If they qualified, they were promised a blessing of being free of disease, drought and war. I was surprised when I noticed how the Lord was willing to fight their battles with *hornets* and drive out the wicked nations occupying the promised land as fast as the Israelites could multiply to inhabit. I also began to understand what *the plainness* was that they were despising, and how failing to enter into His rest resulted in their fall.

I could see that when Moses led the vast Israelite multitude out of Egypt, they were invited to repeat the state of perfection experienced by Enoch and Melchizedek. Even more tempting, they were offered a chance, if worthy, to stay here on earth to bless all nations. My, oh my, did that get their attention!

Little did they know the strange up-side-down way they were to fulfill God's covenant to Abraham. In their vanity and unbelief, they were sure they, themselves, were worthy of receiving those great, ostentatious blessings. But even Moses bluntly prophesied to them that they would not keep the six hundred plus statutes and commandments that they had so desired to receive and covenanted to obey. He told them plainly that they would be a cursed people and eventually suffer the devastation of being scattered throughout the nations of the world. (Deuteronomy 29 & 30)

As we now know, they were not dispersed until a thousand years later, after they completed their one most important assignment. They were to be blind and wicked enough to kill their own Messiah, thus enabling Christ to do that which had been prepared from the foundation of the world.

ONLY THE CHOSEN PEOPLE WOULD PROVIDE THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

As Jacob told his people almost six hundred years before it happened:

Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ...should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; [because they had so much given to them] and they shall crucify Him—for thus it behooveth our God, and *there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God.* For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations, they would repent and *know that He be their God.* But because of priest-crafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will *stiffen their necks* against Him, that He be crucified. (2 Nephi 10:3-5)

Thus I began to see why it was that the children of Israel were not given hearts to perceive, eyes to see and ears to hear. When Christ did come to them, their prophet and high priest, Caiaphas, used the Mosaic Law to indignantly condemn Christ and justify putting Him to death:

Now Caiaphas was he which gave counsel to the Jews, [and truly prophetically saying] that *it was expedient that one man should die for the people...* (John 18:14)

Actually, there was really nothing they could do to Christ if He chose otherwise. As He firmly counseled Peter, who in Christ's defense had just cut off an ear of one of the priest's guards, by saying:

[Peter,] put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than *twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, *THAT THUS IT MUST BE?* (Matthew 26:52-54- *Twelve legions would be over seventy-two thousand angels.)

WHY DID NOT THE RESURRECTED CHRIST CLEANSE THE EARTH?

One of the questions that I had asked for many years and was answered for me at the time was this: “Why didn't the resurrected Christ go forth and heal the world like He did the Nephites?”

It had seemed obvious to me that if He had ministered to the Jews like He did to the Nephites, including the destruction of the wicked, it would appear that the eventual results would have been the purification of ALL the nations. So why didn't He do it?

I could now see the answer. If He had, it would have destroyed the mission of the earth during the remaining two thousand years. Nor did He permit the pure and holy Nephites, during those glorious two to three hundred years, *to return in power to the old world.* Instead, He kept them confined to this hemisphere.

So I began to see the trail running all through the scriptures. The purpose of the earth is to enable us to experience, for ourselves, the opposite to light, happiness, love, holiness and righteousness. We could only do that by walking for a time in the darkness of fear, vanity, unbelief, selfishness, ungratefulness, hate and other forms of wickedness. Again—we did not come down here to create heaven on earth. We came here to experience the opposite, which is gross darkness covering the earth, exactly as planned.

IN THE PRE-EXISTENCE, THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL MUST HAVE AGREED TO PAY THE PRICE

After I experienced those three weeks of inspirational study, I could appreciate a totally different way of seeing how the hand of the Lord does move in ALL THINGS, including the darkness that fills the earth, as well as Israel's great darkness. I was experiencing a much greater love

and joy for this world, just the way it is and just the way it is not.

Let me make it clear, however, that even with these blessings of understanding I received at that time, I was still *far* from *entering into the rest* of the Lord where *perfect love casts out all fear*. Nevertheless, I was overjoyed by this totally new way of comprehending the Lord's infinite timetable. I could see that it was in God's great wisdom and mercy, strange as it had seemed to me before, that Israel's foolish desires were granted, that they were given many things which they could not understand and obey. Since much was given, much would then be expected of them. They received, therefore, the fully justified penalty of being a zealous but stumbling people.

In this painful way, Israel serves as a demonstration to the whole world. Just as God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, He also put His special covenant people under condemnation as part of that sacrifice. Their history is a testament to the terrible price which results from being stiffnecked and despising the words of plainness.

In the end, however, their pent-up frustrations of having fallen will also be their intense motivation as they are called forth to march with modern Israel, to—

bring to pass my STRANGE ACT, to pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. (D&C 95:4)

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in ALL THINGS OUT OF TEMPTATION. (D&C 95:1)

THE *BOOK OF MORMON* ASSIGNED A CRITICAL ROLE

For Israel to fulfill its greater role, they were set up to pay a greater price. The disastrous history of the Nephites and Lamanites, which was just one of the broken-off branches of Israel, is a graphic description of how great that price has been down through the pages of time.

The sacred record of the *Book of Mormon* was revealed in these last days so that the dispersed children of Israel might be brought back to an understanding of the *mark*. For that to happen, of course, those of Israel in the restored Church must first make the discovery for themselves. Then the Elders can take the “good news” to the children of Israel, as well as to the Gentiles.

So why did the Jews need to fall into condemnation, scourge and judgment? Because those elect and chosen spirits must have agreed to come down to that lineage to fulfill the assignment which only they were made ready to do.

ISRAEL TO BE SAVED

When we review the long, agonizing history of Israel as revealed in the *Old and New Testaments*, as well as in the *Book of Mormon*, we marvel at their cruel dispersion into so many nations. There they have continually suffered terrible persecutions, including the Holocaust, which took place in this modern and so-called enlightened Twentieth Century. What a price they must have volunteered to give.

And believe it or not, they will be taken care of very wonderfully. Although Israel fell, the Lord has promised them that they will not be lost. **“Israel shall be saved in mine own due time; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led, and no more be confounded at all.”** (D&C 35:25)

That promise would certainly have to effect more than the last generation or two of Israel. It would certainly include ALL of their generations. As Joseph Smith taught, **“To say that the Jews would all be damned that do not believe in Jesus would be...absurd.”** (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 221)

SUMMARY

By the *view from the tree of life*, the pure love of Christ allows us to see the perfection of the earth in its teaching assignment as a *school of darkness*, called the fall, whereby we are exposed to darkness so that we can comprehend the light. The cities of Enoch and Salem were translated

so that they would not stop the earth from being a school of darkness. Israel was left here and set up to fulfill an essential, though painful, part of the atonement sacrifice and will receive their magnificent blessings in due time. But to fulfill their mission, as a nation, they had to fall.

Chapter XX

Question 10 – Part 1

WAS JACOB REFERRING TO THE SAME CONDITIONS IN THE WHOLE WORLD?

When we read Jacob's statement about the Jews looking beyond the mark, it is natural that our first thought is that he was referring only to one group, the small nation of Israel, and the statement had nothing to do with other nations. But the *Book of Mormon* gives us a much wider understanding.

We have already dealt with some of those references. For instance, we found that Nephi quoted the Lord as saying:

I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH... both in the *east*, and in the *west*, and in the *north*, and in the *south*, and in the *islands of the sea*, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world. (2 Nephi 29:7 & 11)

PRESIDENT HUNTER'S CONFERENCE TALK ON THE GLOBAL REVELATION OF TRUTH

We have already mentioned the first part of the talk given in the October, 1991, General Conference by President Howard W. Hunter, who was then President of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. He opened his talk by emphasizing that “**the Gospel of Jesus Christ...is *neither confined nor partial nor subject to history or fashion.***”

As I have previously mentioned, many years ago I would have wanted to disagree with that statement, but since experiencing a transformation in my own life, I could not agree more. In this chapter, we will go further into the contents of his talk. President Hunter first quoted from a landmark editorial written by Joseph Smith for the April 15, 1842 *Times and Seasons*.

President Hunter continued:

“The prophet Joseph Smith said: But while one portion of the human race is *judging and condemning* the other without *mercy*, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the *whole* of the human family with a *fatherly care and paternal regard*. He views them as His offspring, and without any of *those contracted feelings* that influence the children of men, cause His sun to rise on the *evil* and on the *good*, and sendeth rain on the *just* and on the *unjust*.

“He holds the reins of judgment in His hands. He is a *wise lawgiver*, and will judge all men, not according to the *narrow, contracted notions of men*, but ‘according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,’ or whether these deeds were done in *England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India.*” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 218) (*Ensign*, November 1991, p. 18)

GOSPEL MUST CIRCUMSCRIBE ALL TRUTH

President Hunter next introduced a statement made by Brigham Young:

Brigham Young once said about such a *broad and stimulating concept of religion*: “For me, the plan of salvation *must...circumscribe the knowledge that is upon the face of the earth, or it is not from God*. Such a plan [of salvation] incorporates *every system of true doctrine on the earth, whether it is ecclesiastical, moral, philosophical, or civil*.” (*Journal of Discourses* 7:148) (*Ensign*, November 1991, p. 18)

GOD HAS HIS INSPIRED TEACHERS IN EVERY NATION

President Hunter then quoted from a 1921 Conference address by President Orson F. Whitney, a member of the First Presidency under Heber J. Grant. President Whitney explained that many great religious leaders around the world were inspired directly by God. This is the quote given by Elder Hunter.

[God] is using *not only* his covenant people, but *other peoples* as well to consummate a work, stupendous, magnificent, and altogether too arduous for this handful of Saints to accomplish by and of themselves...

All down the ages men bearing the Holy Priesthood—patriarchs, prophets, apostles and others, have officiated in the name of the Lord, doing the things that he required of them; and outside the pale of their activities other good and great men, *not bearing the Priesthood*, but possessing profundity of thought, great wisdom, and a desire to uplift their fellows, *have been sent by the Almighty into many nations*, to give them, not the fullness of the gospel, but *that portion of truth that they were able to receive and wisely use*. (In *Conference Report*, April 1921, pp. 32-33) (*Ensign*, November 1991, pp. 18-19)

President Hunter's emphasis on the global nature of the gospel is a timely reminder for us, as Latter-day Saints. Many times we have been prone to believe in the same type of exclusive, tunnel vision Christ found among His fellow Jews. They thought they were the only people with whom God had any major concern or given revelation.

PAUL'S TESTIMONY THAT GOD IS CLOSE TO EVERY ONE OF HIS CHILDREN

In contrast to the narrowness of the Jews in the days of Christ, Paul had given the same universal approach as Elder Hunter in addressing the citizens of Athens when he said:

God that made the world and all things therein...hath made of one blood *all nations* of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the *times before appointed*, and the *bounds of their habitation*; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be *not far from every one of us*, for in Him we live, and move, and have *our being*. (Acts 17:24-28)

JUSTICE OF THE GREAT LAWGIVER

In President Hunter's talk quoted in the early part of this chapter, he stressed a very critical point about God's intimate and incredible love for EACH of His children. “The Great Parent of the universe looks upon the *whole* of the human family with a *fatherly care and paternal regard*. He views them as His offspring, and without any of *those contracted feelings* that influence the children of men.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 218)

President Hunter was quoting from an amazing editorial written by the prophet two years before his death for the Church's weekly paper, *Times and Seasons*. In that editorial, Joseph also made some other critical remarks about those who believe they have a unique corner on God's only truth. Here is more of what Joseph Smith wrote:

The great designs of God in relation to the salvation of the human family are very little understood by the professedly wise and intelligent generation in which we live...

The Mussulman [Mohammedan] condemns the heathen, the Jew, the Christian, and the

whole world of mankind that reject his Koran, as infidels, and consigns the whole of them to perdition. The Jew believes that the whole world that rejects his faith and are not circumcised, are Gentile dogs, and will be damned. The heathen is equally as tenacious about his principles, and the Christian consigns all to perdition who cannot bow to his creed and submit to his ipse dixit [absolute assertion]... He will not judge them...according to what they have not, but according to what they have. Those who have lived without law will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law...

The idea that some men form of the justice, judgment, and mercy of God, is too foolish for an intelligent man to think of... The plans of Jehovah are not so unjust, the statements of holy writ so visionary, nor the plan of salvation for the human family so incompatible with common sense...

To say that the heathen would be damned because they did not believe the Gospel would be preposterous, and to say that the Jews would all be damned that do not believe in Jesus would be equally absurd. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 218-221)

CARRYING THE AWESOME BURDEN OF OUR LATTER-DAY MISSION

Yet, of course, His Gospel is His Gospel. As all faithful Latter-day Saints know, the Lord placed a very great responsibility on the Church in these latter-days to carry the restored Gospel to all the Gentile nations, to every tongue and people. In addition to that, we are to build another Zion, the pure in heart, and gather in the chosen people. We are to take the Gospel to the Jews and the Lamanites. While we are at it, we are to search out our ancestors and perform the temple work. Along with all the other demands of life, that is quite a heavy load for any people to carry.

When I was on my mission in up-state New York during the early part of World War II, we were baptizing in the mission, on the average, only *one convert a year* for each pair of missionaries. Personally, I felt greatly burdened by the magnitude of our task. When my companion and I were assigned to open up the town of Fulton, New York, to missionary work, I felt heavy laden because of our inability to really build the kingdom. When visiting other churches in the town and talking with their clergy, I appreciated their professionalism but certainly experienced that disdain the prophet Joseph warned us about as “contracted feelings.” In speaking of God’s love for all of His offspring, that He reminded us that God has “**none of those contracted feelings that so often influence the children of men.**”

As I naively saw the outside world, those “masters of priestcraft” were the competition, keeping people outside the saving principles and ordinances of the true kingdom of God. And, by golly, polite as we were, we were out to rescue every member of their congregations from the “darkness of the apostasy” to the “light of the restoration.” And although my companion and I were able to organize a small branch, I felt our success in that part of the Lord’s vineyard was more a defeat than a victory. After all, 99.9% had not accepted the Lord’s message.

Many times I felt like Alma when he said those often quoted words:

O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! (Alma 29:1)

When Alma wrote these words, he was expressing the burden which comes from seeing the world from the viewpoint of the *tree of knowledge*. In the next chapter, we will review the interesting account of how Alma was immediately prompted by the Spirit to shift back to the *viewpoint of the tree of life*. This turn-about enabled him to experience the peace and joy of seeing that God is already taking care of His world.

SUMMARY

President Howard W. Hunter has added his testimony to Nephi, Joseph Smith, Brigham

Young, Orson F. Whitney and Alma. They all testified that the Lord sends his messengers with His word to all nations, and that His Gospel includes all truth given to all people.

Chapter XXI

Question 10 – Part 2

ALMA TAUGHT THAT GOD TEACHES HIS WORD TO ALL NATIONS

When Mormon abridged the history of the Nephites, he recorded more on the life of Alma than on any other prophet. Alma was one of the two men in the Book of Mormon who were translated. He taught the global nature of how God is continuously proclaiming His word to *every* nation. Before we consider what he wrote on the subject, let us review some very important aspects of Alma's life as it relates to the burdens of the tree of knowledge and *the rest* received from *the tree of life*.

ALMA WAS CONVERTED BY A ROARING, EARTH-SHAKING ANGEL

You will recall that Alma's father, Alma the older, was one of the wicked priests of king Noah and was the only priest converted by Abinadi. Eventually, he established the Church among all the Nephites.

As a boy, Alma the younger must have been a great admirer of his father and would have been very active in the Church. But as he grew older and became “wise,” he decided his father was a fool. He rebelled against him, his Church and his God. While he and the four nearly as “wise” sons of king Mosiah were out to destroy the Church, an angel appeared and, with a voice of thunder which shook the “whole earth,” commanded him to cease and desist.

The angel declared that the only reason he had come was to answer the prayers of his father and other members of the Church. Then he shouted,

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 [and go to hell]. (Mosiah 27:16)

Alma went into a state of shock, becoming comatose. After his spirit was tormented with the pains of hell for three days, he experienced the wonderful liberation of being spiritually reborn.

THE REDEEMING JOY OF BEING BORN OF GOD

Alma would never again be the same. He joyfully proclaimed:

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*. (Mosiah 27:29)

As an older man, Alma described more of the details of this life-transforming experience to Helaman, one of his sons.

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

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were

my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, *there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.*

Yea, me thought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, *God sitting upon His throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God, yea, and my soul did long to be there.*

But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been *born of God.* (Alma 36:20-23)

BEING SPIRITUALLY BORN OF GODS IS THE FIRST COMFORTER

Alma had truly been *wrought upon by the Holy Ghost.* Like Nephi when he was a young man, Alma had tasted the redeeming power of the Savior. He had experienced the purifying power of His love. But as Nephi learned, being wrought upon by the Holy Ghost is not the end of the journey, but only the beginning.

So it would be well at this point to realize that after Alma's miraculous conversion, he still required much further growth and experience in the wisdom, struggle and burden of being subject to the preparatory gospel of the spiritual law of good and evil. I remember how surprised I was to first learn that there is a great difference between the First Comforter, which is **“being wrought upon by the Holy Ghost”** and what the scriptures describe as the Second Comforter, which is **“entering the rest of the Lord.”**

AT FIRST, ALMA HAD TO CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE AND GROW IN THE SPIRIT

So Alma was converted by being painfully humbled and then wrought upon by the Holy Ghost. But he had much further growth to experience, of course, for which he labored diligently. Notice what he said nine years after his conversion:

And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I KNOW of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself.

And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and *this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.* (Alma 5:45-46)

So although Alma had been given a perfect knowledge of the redeeming power of the atonement at his conversion, he had found that there was much more to be learned, which he received by humbling himself in great study, fasting and prayer.

As the years went by, Alma served an incredibly fruitful life, succeeding his father as high priest over the Church. About twenty-five years after his conversion, Alma was praising God for the blessings of the gospel and, at the same time, grieving that so many would not hear and be converted. So he offered a prayer from the bottom of his heart that he could be given the power to do for the whole world what the angel had so forcefully and effectively done for him. He was in agony over his impotence and wished the Lord would give him power so that he could convert the world. Here are his famous words.

“O THAT I WERE AN ANGEL!”

O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

Yea, I would declare unto *every soul*, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should *repent and come unto our God*, that there *might not be more*

sorrow upon all the face of the earth. (Alma 29:1-2)

Although I had quoted his prayer many times in talks, I had never noticed that immediately after Alma had said these pleading words, he reversed his position from an agonizing burden to the opposite, a peaceful, trusting, joyful rest in the omnipotence of God.

THE SPIRIT REMINDED ALMA THAT WHAT HE WAS DOING WAS A “SIN”

After acknowledging the burden of that great desire, the Spirit must have whispered to him to cease his prayer of lament. He reported how this remembering totally reversed his perspective and caused him to repent.

But behold, I am a man, and *do sin in my wish*; for I OUGHT TO BE CONTENT with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. 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. (Alma 29:3-4)

Alma realized that what he was doing WAS A SIN! Why was it a sin? He declared, “**For I ought to be content!**” When I first noticed this confession by the great prophet Alma, I wondered why such a desire for what appears to be the most righteous of causes, which was to eliminate unbelief and sorrow from the face of the earth, could be so wrong that it was a SIN?

Well, on the tree of knowledge it probably would be little noticed as a sin. But from the tree of life, which is all about the pure love of Christ, Alma was momentarily taking serious issue with “*what is*.” The opposite viewpoint to this comes from the *tree of life*. There one sees that since the hand of the Lord is moving IN ALL THINGS, *God really is in absolute control of what is*, including the earth being filled with darkness and sin. Yes, each of us is being called by the light within us to *wake up* and catch onto God's great wisdom and purposes. Out of that “**comprehending all things**,” we are thus filled with *light* (love, joy and peace), having *no darkness* (fear, frustration or discontent). That is why we are commanded to “**make a joyful noise unto the Lord**,” thanking “**the Lord for ALL THINGS**,” JUST THE WAY THEY ARE AND THE WAY THEY ARE NOT. (D&C 59:7; 88:67 & Psalm 100)

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE PULL FROM THE TWO OPPOSITE VIEWS

The Spirit must have nudged him to recognize his error. He released the heavy view which was coming from the tree of knowledge and remembered how to see the world from the view point of the tree of life. So let us see how his experience can be a lesson for us in understanding how to shift from a heavy view of God's work to a much lighter, more joyful one.

First, let us ask the question, why was Alma grieving? Simply, he was burdened because things were not as heavenly and ideal as *he thought they should be*. He was *comparing* the “imperfections” of “what was” to how things should be if they were ideal, i.e., “more, better or different.” That is what the natural mind is programmed to do continually. But if we have truly yielded to the Spirit, we can recognize the mind's sincere but foolish game of trying to second-guess the Creator. When that happens to us, what are we to do? Well, first we can politely thank the mind for its serious efforting and return to listening to the inner voice of the Spirit. The Spirit leads us back to experience the true “love, joy and peace” in the *Lord's masterwork* which is abundantly revealed before us in *everything* we behold.

ALMA ALREADY HAD THE TREE OF LIFE GROWING IN HIS HEART

Of course, even though his mind was momentarily playing the “*what ought to be*” *mind-game*, Alma had a heart that knew all about partaking of the precious and delicious fruit of the

tree of life. Obviously Alma had long before entered into the rest of the Lord. We might recall that two years after this experience, he went on a mission to the apostate Zoramites and told their humbled poor about the *miracle of growing the tree of life* in their own hearts. (Alma 32) A year after that mission, he was translated, probably to join the glorious cities of Enoch and Salem. (Alma 45:18-19)

CAN THOSE IN THE REST STILL SIN?

How can one be in the *rest* and still sin? If so, what do those who are in the rest do about their sins? *What did Alma do about his sin of discontent?*

First, we want to realize that the scriptures witness that no human being, in or out of the rest, lives without sin or error, which means being less than they know how to be. In this same way, Jacob acknowledged that even with their great blessings of faith and power, “**God showeth us our weaknesses.**” (Jacob 4:7)

John the Beloved, in his letter about those who have fellowship with God because they walk in *the light as He is in the light*, wrote that *even those in the light* have sins for which they need to be cleansed. This is what John proclaimed:

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood [love] of Jesus Christ His son CLEANSETH US [moment by moment] FROM ALL SIN.

If we say we HAVE NO SIN, we DECEIVE OURSELVES, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (I John 1:7-10)

ALMA REPENTED THROUGH GRATITUDE

Alma, in his “turn about face,” acknowledged, “**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.**” Let’s remember, when we choose to live by the *tree of knowledge* of what “*ought to be*,” it is called *the tree of death*, meaning that it keeps us *cut off, separated from truly knowing God*, while only the *tree of life* can give us the experience of *eternal life, knowing God*, while still in this mortal life.

As Alma repented of his sin, he immediately went into gratitude, confessing God's infinite work over all the earth. He explained what the Spirit had brought back to his mind:

Now, seeing that I know these things, WHY should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? WHY should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth? (Alma 29:6-7)

ALL NATIONS RECEIVE GOD'S WORD

It is at this point that Alma shares his understanding of how all nations are receiving the same care that is being given to the COVENANT people of Israel. This is what he wrote:

For behold, the Lord doth grant unto ALL NATIONS, of their own nation and tongue, TO TEACH HIS WORD, yea, in wisdom, ALL THAT HE SEETH FIT THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE; therefore we see that the Lord DOTH COUNSEL in wisdom, according to that which is JUST AND TRUE. (Alma 29:8)

Alma testified that God does not play favorites, for He responds to every nation with justice and truth. We might ask a question, however. If God is having His *word* taught to every nation, then why are not all nations teaching the same gospel? We will consider that subject in the third part to the question of whether Jacob's declaration about the Jews looking beyond the mark can also be applied to the whole world.

SUMMARY

Alma's experience of returning from a state of burden to a state of spiritual rest was only possible when he was brought back to remembering that God really is in charge of the affairs of His global family and that everything is right on schedule. His experience of being converted by his baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost demonstrates to us that through his initial experience of being wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, he continually prepared for the day when he could receive the Second Comforter, which was to have permanently bestowed upon him the perfection of the love of Christ, making *his calling and election sure, thus entering into the rest of the Lord from that time on.*

Chapter XXII

Question 10 – Part 3

HAVE ALL NATIONS LOOKED BEYOND THE MARK?

If all nations, on the east, west, north and south, have received the word of God, as Alma and Nephi wrote, we might ask this question: “Have any of the other nations been any better than Israel in *not despising the words of plainness and looking beyond the mark?*” Apparently not. But why?

Let's remember what Lehi taught Jacob, that all people are taught a knowledge of good and evil so that by their “**LAW no flesh is justified...Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good.**” (2 Nephi 2:5)

So it becomes reasonably clear that every nation has been nourished and counseled by the Lord through His chosen spokesmen living among them. But since the people of *all nations are under the fall*, and, by their fallen natures are *enemies to God*, it would be natural to expect that all peoples, with very few exceptions, *tend to have despised the words of plainness*. In their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they, too, must have *desired many things which they could not understand*. And as was the case with the children of Israel, God would have also taken “**away His plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.**” (Jacob 4:14)

It is also reasonable that God, being a “wise lawgiver,” would have also given every nation information about the “mark,” since the *gift of God's pure love is the only way to be released from the fall*.

WHY THERE ARE SO MANY CONFLICTING RELIGIONS

So, if God took away His plainness from a people, would the plainness of the mark also have been replaced with strict laws and performances, with diverse ordinances and teachings? And, in turn, since the purpose of each nation's particular law of good and evil would be given so they would “fall,” it is certainly possible that the stumbling stone given to one nation could and would have been quite different than that given to any other nation. But is this true?

We don't have to wonder. We can look at the world and its many divisions and splinters within every religion to see that just as God *confused the tongues of men*, so did He *confuse their divine laws* of do's and don'ts by which they were not only “cut off” from His presence but sepa-

rated intolerantly from each other. But we might cry out, do not the scriptures declare *that God is not the author of confusion?*

IS GOD THE AUTHOR OF SUCH CONFUSION?

Paul tells us, **“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”** (I Corinthians 14:33) Jacob similarly testified in one of his seven mysteries that the Lord willingly **“speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls.”** (Jacob 4:13)

But when a people reject the gift—the *mark*—then the results are that God will give them many things which they desire but *cannot understand*. Why? So that they might *stumble*. Since fallen mankind looks beyond the mark because of their *vanity and unbelief*, then each group would be told that their particular divine law was the **ONLY AND ABSOLUTE LAW** of God so that they would be caught up in their zeal and enthusiasm.

Is there any other way to get a people to take their law seriously? They must believe that there is no *other way to please God*. So God's spokesmen in a nation would be led to believe that their nation was God's only chosen people and that they would be damned if they pollute His holy law. Sound familiar?

God did that to the stiffnecked Jews. And we notice that every major religion also teaches that they have the *only true word of God*.

THERE CAN BE NO FALL WITHOUT DARKNESS

Let's remember again the statement contained in the Revelation on Priesthood, **“And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin.”** (D&C 84:49) We must not forget that *darkness is confusion*. So after stating that the whole world is in darkness and therefore confusion, it would be well to note what Section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants says next. **“And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto Me.”** (D&C 84:50)

I have wondered what does it mean, **“they come not unto Me?”** From the tree of knowledge, it is usually understood that they come not unto His Church, meaning “my” church. From the tree of life, my experience is that “not coming unto me” means that they will not *look to the mark and receive Christ dwelling in their hearts, bringing His pure love, His still, small voice, telling them all things that they are to do in perfect love*.

Again, the revelation continues,

And whoso receiveth not My voice [of perfect love] is not acquainted with My voice, and IS NOT OF ME. And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness [confusion] even now. (D&C 84:52-53)

WHY THERE IS ONLY ONE NAME BY WHICH MAN CAN BE SAVED

In our scriptures, which is the word of the Lord given to ancient and modern Israel, we are clearly told many times that there is only *one* name by which man can be saved, which is the name of Jesus Christ. So, we might ask, if all nations are receiving His word and all will be judged by the word given to them, then why do not all religions know about the name by which they must be saved?

Finding the answer to that question is very important if Christians, including Latter-day Saints, are to move from sectarian separateness to a spiritual global brotherhood of the Lamb of God. The answer has to do with moving from the *letter* of the law to the *spirit* of the law.

We can get all tied up in the name that Christ bore on earth, or we can realize that a name, anciently, had to do with one's nature. For example, Christ changed the name of Simon to

Cephas, which is Peter in Greek, because it stands for rock. The writer of Acts first called Saul by his original name and then changed it to Paul when he was converted. There, too, the new name described his new nature. (John 1:40-42, Acts 13:9)

When we say that we are to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ and *do not take upon ourselves* the actual *nature* of Jesus Christ, which is His pure love, enabling us to “**walk in the light as He is in the light**,” “**having no darkness**” being “**as He is, so are we in this world**,” then as John says, “**WE LIE**”. (1 John 1:5-6)

So is merely believing in and honoring the *name* of Christ the critical factor? Or is the receiving of the *divine nature of Christ* what He means by “*coming unto the Father*.” In reality, is not His love the **ONLY** thing which frees us from condemnation and truly brings us under His atonement?

One thing is for certain, there is only **ONE NATURE** by which we can be saved, call it what we will. (2 Peter 1:3)

ARE THERE PEOPLE IN OTHER NATIONS WHO ARE SANCTIFIED?

So we might ask a question that seems to be frightening to many. It is this: “*Are there those in other nations, religions or belief systems who have had their calling and election made sure?*”

In 1831, a few months after the Church had moved to Ohio, Joseph Smith received a revelation which stressed the need for all the people throughout the world, including us, to repent. But the Lord added a special exception to the universality of that need. This is what He said:

Wherefore, I will that ALL MEN SHALL REPENT, for ALL are under sin, EXCEPT THOSE WHICH I HAVE RESERVED UNTO MYSELF, HOLY MEN THAT YE KNOW NOT OF. (D&C 49:8)

What a revealing statement! Yes, we see “**that ALL men are under sin!**” But there is a very significant exception! “**HOLY MEN THAT YE KNOW NOT OF,**” “**THOSE WHICH I HAVE RESERVED UNTO MYSELF.**”

Holy men, perhaps many thousands of men and women, were in the world who had no further need to repent because they had been sanctified and their calling and election had been made sure. The Lord was not referring to John the Beloved or the Three Nephites, for Joseph knew about them. Evidently, those were people in other nations and, possibly our own, who were totally outside the work of the restoration of the Church, but not outside the redeeming and purifying power of Christ.

It is for this reason, it would seem, that President Hunter was stressing that—

the validity, the power, of our faith is not bound by HISTORY, NATIONALITY, OR CULTURE. It is not the peculiar property of ANY ONE PEOPLE or any one age... It embraces all truth. It circumscribes all wisdom—all that God has revealed to man, and all that he will yet reveal. (Ensign, November 1991, p. 19)

THE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR MISSIONARY APPROACH

So the next question is this: “*Then why are we commanded to do missionary work? And does coming from the viewpoint of the tree of life produce a different approach?*”

As to the first question, let's remember what Abinadi taught about the Mosaic Law. The purpose of having a demanding “**law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, [is] TO KEEP THEM IN REMEMBRANCE OF GOD AND THEIR DUTY TOWARDS HIM.** But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.” (Mosiah 13:30-31)

THE REQUIRED PERFORMANCE OF SPREADING GOD'S WORD

In order for the preparatory gospel to work on the people's hearts and for the Church to be there when the “things to come” will take them from the tree of knowledge to the tree of life, we also had to be given many precise things to perform to keep us “**in remembrance from day to day.**” One is the command to take His message to all the world, with the promise that those who were converted and became totally obedient to the law of the gospel would be saved and those who did not believe would be damned.

Mere “performances” are an *essential* but *lower part* of the preparatory law. We want to remember that the advanced preparation required for a people to move over to the tree of life is not achieved while living at the bottom levels of the tree of knowledge. So we have a necessity to first move up higher on the tree of knowledge, going *from burden to praise and celebration*.

Generally speaking, the works on the lower levels are performed out of a sense of *need*, which comes from *fear*. The next level is more out of pride and desire for the promised rewards. Then finally, high on the tree of knowledge, obedience is more from God's grace and the love of serving the Lord. It is on that *higher level of the tree of knowledge* where one is more apt to be *wrought upon by the Holy Ghost* and *receive the baptism of fire*.

As most of us know, there are many blessings in spreading the gospel and bringing people into the discipline, support, teachings and ordinances of the kingdom of God, no matter at what level of the gospel those individuals function.

But what happens when, as Nephi finally discovered, the *law becomes DEAD and one becomes fully ALIVE IN CHRIST?* As we saw with Nephi, even though the law had already become dead to him, he still desired to obey the commandments simply **BECAUSE THEY WERE COMMANDED.** (2 Nephi 25:25 & 30) In other words, though the law was dead, he still respected and honored that which was no longer seen as the basis of his eternal salvation, since salvation comes directly from the grace of Christ. (2 Nephi 25:24-27)

ARE MOST LATTER-DAY MISSIONARIES WALKING IN DARKNESS AT NOONDAY?

It is at this point, however, that we can see that when we are doing missionary work while still bound to the tree of knowledge, we will still remain part of the darkness that covers the earth. The Lord cautioned us by saying,

Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained? To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth... Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of Me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth *he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?* AND IF IT BE BY SOME OTHER WAY *IT IS NOT OF GOD.* (D&C 50:13-18)

Although we have quoted part of the following scripture several times, let us read the full text of how the Lord scolded those holding the priesthood who had been doing extensive missionary work without the full blessings of the Spirit:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love *I also chasten* that their sins may be forgiven, for *with the chastisement* I prepare a way for their deliverance *in all things* out of temptation, and I have loved you—wherefore, ye must *needs be chastened and stand rebuked before my face...*

But behold, verily I say unto you, that there are *many* who have been ordained among you, whom I have called **BUT FEW OF THEM ARE CHOSEN. *They who are not chosen have sinned a very grievous sin,* **IN THAT THEY ARE WALKING IN DARKNESS AT NOONDAY.** (D&C 95:1-2 & 5-6)**

So God is saying that when He has NOT “bestowed” upon us the *light of the pure love of*

Christ, we still walk somewhat in the confusion of darkness. Let's read it again. ***"They who are not chosen have sinned a very grievous sin, IN THAT THEY ARE WALKING IN DARKNESS AT NOON-DAY."***

So when we are still walking in darkness at noonday, how do most of us do missionary work? We go out to get people to join us, with the help of the Spirit, of course, to believe what we believe. And when they do join the Church and go to the temple, what have they become? They have become covenant breakers and have also joined us under our condemnation, scourge and judgment.

I am not saying that all of this does not bring blessings, for we know it does. Nor am I saying that it is not going to work for good, because as Paul declared, ***"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*** (Romans 8:28)

But as President Benson has warned us, we are not to stay under this condemnation any more. And the first step in coming out of condemnation, I believe, is to see how darkness and blindness *differs* from being in the light as Christ is in the light.

CHRIST DENOUNCED PROSELYTIZING FROM DARKNESS

To help us understand our "grievous sin" of ***"walking in darkness at noonday,"*** let us see what Christ had to say to the Jewish leaders of His day about their missionary effort. These very tough and brutal words are the third part of seven blistering denunciations He delivered to His Church leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, before a huge crowd in the temple. Each statement started with these challenging words, ***"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"***

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves! (Matthew 23:15)

When I used to read this third "Woe," I thought the reason their converts had become twice the children of hell was because they had joined an "apostate" church. This meant to me that when people were converted to Judaism, they also became apostates. But as I began to realize that all churches, including my own, are under condemnation, even though they are being used by the Lord to further His marvelous work, I understood Christ's words differently. Really, He is talking about ***"the blind leading the blind and they all fall in the ditch."*** (Matthew 15:15) In other words, none come out of darkness into the light at noonday. In fact, in His first of the seven denunciations, He said just that:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven [the tree of life] against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. (Matthew 23:13)

This picture Christ presents reminds me of Lehi's vision. Yes, these zealous believers gloried in their "great and spacious" institution originally created by divine revelation and would not go to the tree of life, themselves, nor allow any others who desired to do so. We can remember the mockers in Lehi's vision, and how they discouraged some of those at the tree, who then fell away, because of the ridicule, into forbidden paths.

HOW CHRIST EMPOWERED HIS FIRST SEVENTY

So I asked myself, as we come out of our condemnation, how would we be doing our missionary work differently? Personally, even while serving my mission, I had wished we could be doing our work more like Christ instructed His first group of Seventy when He said:

After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two be-

fore His face into every city and place, whither He himself would come.

Therefore said He unto them, *The harvest truly is great...* Go your ways. Behold, I send you forth *as lambs among wolves*. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way.

And unto whatsoever house ye enter, first say, *Peace be to this house*. And if the Son of Peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall turn to you again.

And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as...are set before you; **AND HEAL THE SICK THAT ARE THEREIN**, and say unto them, *The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you..* (Luke 10:1-9)

It is thrilling to contemplate what a difference that quality of missionary work would bring to our world assignment. But meanwhile, before our missionaries are again endowed with the gifts to that degree of discernment and healing, what do we do while we are still growing in grace?

MY NEW MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

In my experience, there is now a great difference in the way I find myself approaching others. Instead of seeing them as “prospects,” I see each and every one as a blessed and precious son or daughter of my Heavenly Father. I see them in the way Alma described, that **“the Lord doth grant...to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.”** (Alma 29:8)

So my first step with individuals is to find out where they are in their own personal quest. I want to get to know how they have been personally nurtured and counseled by the Spirit. As they share their views, experiences, beliefs and questions, I feel a full, vital empathy with them, silently praising God in my heart for the process He is bringing these precious children of His through the valley of pain and darkness. My purpose, at this point, is not to try to move them from one “law” to another “law,” but first to encourage them in the path that God has chosen for them up to this point.

PEOPLE RESPOND TO BEING MADE “RIGHT”

The results are that the people sense my true acceptance of them, just the way they are and the way they are not. Usually, *they do not sense that I am thinking they are wrong or that I am trying to change them*. As they experience me, instead, as a warm, loving friend, willing to support them enthusiastically in their own quest, they are more willing to share some of those hidden blessings which they usually dare not speak about openly. As we grow in friendship, the Spirit may whisper to me regarding a further step in their spiritual path right where they are.

But when do I talk about the restored gospel? Well, of course, that depends. My goal is not to invite them into the great mission of the Church unless they are ready for that kind of commitment toward further spiritual cleansing and empowerment. What often happens, however, is that when they feel the warmth and joy of my unconditional love for them, they usually want to know about me, my blessings and views. And what they hear from me is the real truth about the great latter-day work of the Lord.

There is no whitewash, making them think that everything is “ideal” in Zion. What I share with them is the process of how the Lord is preparing the Church to come into the noonday light of perfect love. I emphasize that they do not need to wait on anyone else in the kingdom. They are free to go all the way—from the great and spacious building to the *joy of the perfection in Christ, feasting on the fruit of the tree of life and drinking from the fountains of living water*.

SUMMARY

God is not the author of confusion when we look to the mark, but, *otherwise*, He gives many

things people want, yet do not understand. This confusion is part of the darkness that is designed to cover the earth. Eventually, our stumbling in the darkness may *strip us of our vanity and unbelief*. We will then see that each nation is chosen for a special purpose. Eventually, all are to find that there really is only one gate, the indwelling grace of the Creator's pure and perfect love. In sharing the gospel with others, we can recognize that all those we meet, with but few exceptions, are at some level on the tree of knowledge. So we make true friends with them right where they are. We show them our unconditional love and appreciation for their progress on *one of God's diverse paths of returning to the mark*. Then, if they ask, we invite them to see the marvelous work and a wonder the Lord is bringing about through the *full restoration of His Church in our day*.

Chapter XXIII

Question 11 – Part 1

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A WHOLE PEOPLE TO STUMBLE?

When Moses was one hundred and twenty years old, having led his people in the wilderness for forty years, he read the entire law again before the great assembly. We have it recorded in the *Bible* as the fifth book of Moses, called Deuteronomy, which means the second giving of the law.

As he repeated the law which was to bare his name, he told them frankly exactly how the Lord was offering them blessings beyond their fondest dreams, but at the same time, that they would lose these blessings and receive an incredible curse in their stead. As we read this part of the sad history with twenty/twenty hindsight, it seems so strange that they did not catch on. But, we might ask, have we done any better? So let us read the report of Moses' final words to his people.

GOD'S CONDITIONAL PROMISES OF GREAT BLESSINGS TO ISRAEL

First Moses repeated in vivid detail the blessings which were available through perfect obedience, which the people still thought they *could* and *would* do, in spite of his prophecies to the contrary. He said:

IF THOU SHALL HEARKEN DILIGENTLY UNTO THE VOICE OF THE LORD THY GOD, TO OBSERVE AND TO DO ALL HIS COMMANDMENTS WHICH I COMMAND THEE THIS DAY...

the Lord thy God will set thee on high above ALL nations of the earth...

The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto Himself, as He hath sworn unto thee...

The Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods,

[The Lord shall make thee plenteous] in the fruit of thy body,

[The Lord shall make thee plenteous] in the fruit of thy cattle,

[The Lord shall make thee plenteous] in the fruit of thy ground...

The Lord shall open unto thee His good treasure,

The heaven to give the rain unto thy land in His season...

Thou shalt lend unto many nations,

Thou shall *not* borrow.

And the Lord shall make thee *the head*, and not the tail;

**And thou shalt be *above only*, and thou shalt not be
beneath—**

***IF THAT THOU HEARKEN UNTO THE LORD THY
GOD, WHICH I COMMAND THEE THIS DAY, TO
OBSERVE AND TO DO THEM [ALL].*** (Deuteronomy 28: 1-14)

Let's remember that in addition to these blessings, the children of Israel were to be given their land free and clear by the old inhabitants being removed by great swarms of hornets, so Israel could have been given possession of those rich cities, farms, homes and herds for instant prosperity.

The Lord was not making idle nor impossible promises. If they had humbled themselves, willingly and gratefully submitting to being tried in all things and received His precious gift of His VOICE, which is His love, they would have fulfilled the law and the covenant.

THE PROMISES OF CONDEMNATION

That was the gloriously bright side of their call. However, Moses immediately reminded them of the other side, the very dark, painful side of the law. Following are just some of the elements of their curse found in thirty two verses in Chapter 28 of Deuteronomy. The Jewish people have had these devastating words in their sacred *Torah* for three thousand years. Moses declared:

**IF YOU WILL NOT HEARKEN UNTO *THE VOICE* OF THE LORD THY GOD, TO
OBSERVE TO DO ALL HIS COMMANDMENTS AND HIS STATUTES WHICH I
COMMAND THEE THIS DAY, THAT ALL THESE CURSES SHALL COME UPON
THEE,
AND OVERTAKE THEE...**

**The Lord shall send upon thee *cursing, vexation, and
rebuke*, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do...**

Thy heaven that is over thy head shall be *brass*...

**The Lord shall cause thee to be *smitten before thine
enemies*...**

And shalt be removed into ALL the kingdoms of the earth...

**The Lord shalt smite thee with *madness, and blindness,
and astonishment of heart*:**

And thou shalt grope at *noonday*, as the blind gropeth in darkness—

**AND [THESE CURSES] SHALL BE UPON THEE FOR A *SIGN* AND FOR A
WONDER, AND UPON THY SEED FOREVER. BECAUSE THOU SERVEDST *NOT*
THE LORD THY GOD WITH *JOYFULNESS, AND WITH GLADNESS OF HEART,*
*FOR THE ABUNDANCE OF ALL THINGS.*** (Deuteronomy 28:15-47)

Anyone familiar with the history of the Jewish people will understand the depth and accuracy of these sad and devastating warnings. In the light of Jacob's proclamation that Israel was given what they desired, which was a detailed knowledge of good and evil, it is true that their incredible trials down through the generations stand as a witness and testimony. Notice that their failure was not only in their inability to live the letter of the law, but their failure to serve the Lord with "joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for *the abundance of all things!*"

HOW COULD JEHOVAH PLAN ALL THIS SUFFERING AND STILL BE A GOD OF LOVE?

When many people read the *Old Testament*, they often feel like saying, “*If that is what God is, He is no God to me!*” It is so easy for us to believe we could and would create a much better, kinder, more loving way to run the earth than that. In a sense, we tend to sometimes say to ourselves, “*If I were running the world, I wouldn't let people starve, children die, criminals hurt people, terrible wars, etc., etc.*”

It is a natural tendency for people, when they are hurt or suffer loss, to feel violated and betrayed, not just by the source of the injury, but by life, the universe or God.

IF I RULED THE WORLD, IT WOULD BE SUCH A BEAUTIFUL PLACE

There was a musical comedy some years ago that had a hit song in it with an interesting title, *IF I RULED THE WORLD*. The words seem absolutely beautiful and so reassuring.

*If I ruled the world,
Ev'ry day would be the first day of spring,
Ev'ry heart would have a new song to sing,
And we'd sing of the joy ev'ry morning would bring.*

*If I ruled the world,
Ev'ryone would be as free as a bird,
Ev'ry voice would be a voice to be heard.
We would treasure each day as it occurred.*

*My world would be a beautiful place,
Where we would weave such wonderful dreams.
My world would wear a smile on its face,
Just like the man in the moon when it beams.*

*If I ruled the world,
Ev'ryone would say the world was their friend.
There'd be happiness that no one could end.
No, my friend, not if I ruled the world.*

*Ev'ry head would be held up high.
There'd be sunshine in ev'ryone's sky.
If the day ever dawned when I ruled the world.*

Words by Leslie Bricusse Music by Cyril Ornadel, copyright 1963

Isn't that song beautiful! Glorious! Right?

No, wrong!

DO WE OFTEN SING SATAN'S SONG?

Did you ever wonder how Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, won over one third of the hosts of heaven? Well, in essence, he must have sung them a song like that. He had a dream. He wasn't going to let anyone or anything hurt anyone. He would not let there be darkness, sadness, despair, greed and all the evils which go with them. He was going to see to it that everyone was nice to each other so everyone could be happy.

What was so wrong with all of that?

First, Christ knew that Satan's plan would not supply the one critical element which had been missing for us *in our heavenly home*. That one thing was the darkness which we needed to experience so that we could then comprehend the holy light that we are. And darkness could exist only under the fall.

IS OUR ETERNAL JUDGMENT TO BE BASED UPON THIS SHORT MOMENT ON EARTH?

As we broaden our understanding of the purposes of the fall, these seemingly cruel and tragic conditions God planned for our mortality do begin to make more sense.

However, that raises the next question. Why then does this brief exposure to mortality, with the Creator giving us our weaknesses and closing our minds, eyes and ears, weigh so heavily in our eternal judgment? Are we not told that we will be permanently classified in the great and last judgment based upon our deeds in the flesh?

Yes, we are told that fact many times and in many ways. But who are the “we” that has been delivered this information? Are we not Israel who has been looking beyond the mark, thus given many things which we cannot understand?

THE MYSTERY OF ETERNAL DAMNATION

But, many might ask, in what way have we been confused by the Lord. Let us take just one example—**eternal damnation**. Certainly “eternal damnation” has been one of the most frightening doctrines found in the scriptures—to say that those who die unrepentant are damned and go into an incredibly horrible, everlasting torment.

The *Book of Mormon* is particularly full of it. As Lehi warned his two wayward sons, Laman and Lemuel.

Shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the *eternal gulf of misery and woe*. (2 Nephi 1:13)

Jacob warned in his great sermon on those who break the law:

They that are filthy are of the devil and his angels; and they go away into *everlasting fire, prepared for them*; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end. (2 Nephi 9:16)

Nephi warned those of us in the last days:

The devil and ALL that have been *seized therewith* must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is *endless torment*. (2 Nephi 28:23)

How clear can words be!

Yet, wait! The Lord may not be saying exactly what it sounds like He is saying.

DOES ETERNAL MEAN FOREVER?

In our latter-day revelations, the Lord has shown us why we cannot always take His words literally. The example He gives us is that when God uses the word “**eternal**,” it does not necessarily mean forever and ever. But how do we know that? It is an interesting story of how this mystery was revealed to the Church.

In the early days of the restoration, Martin Harris broke his signed covenant regarding handling of the first one hundred and sixteen pages of the *Book of Mormon* manuscript. The result was that the one and only copy was lost. Martin was sure he was going to hell forever and ever. After all, the scriptures, the word of the Lord, declared such sinful covenant-breakers would be lost eternally. If he knew anything, he knew that for sure.

The following spring when Martin Harris was visiting the prophet, totally depressed and discouraged, a revelation was received which gave all of them a totally different view of eternal damnation. The Lord said,

Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written

endless torment... Wherefore, *I will explain unto you this mystery...* For behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore—Eternal punishment is God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment. (D&C 19:6, 10-12)

TO WORK ON THEIR HEARTS

So why has the Lord had His prophets stress for untold generations that, like Mormon declared, “Woe unto such, for they are in danger of *death, hell and an endless torment*.” (Moroni 8:21)

Well, in that revelation to Martin Harris, the Lord revealed why. Here is the reason:

Again, it is written ETERNAL DAMNATION; wherefore it is *more express than other scriptures*, that IT MIGHT *WORK UPON THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN OF MEN, ALTOGETHER FOR MY NAME'S GLORY*. (D&C 19:7)

So the Lord was technically accurate, but He tells us why His prophets made it “**more express**” than other scriptures. Let's face it. That language was being used for its frightening effect, to work on the hearts of the wicked for their own good and for the glory of His work. Then the Lord says, “**I will explain unto you *this mystery*,**” which, as quoted above, He does. (D&C 19:8)

As I began to understand the magnitude of this shift in comprehension, I thought to myself, “Wow! How many more of these semantic *mysteries* does the Lord have in His word?” Well, as Jacob has shown us, when we are stiffnecked and look beyond the mark, the Lord will deliver to us all kinds of information which is totally beyond our understanding.

WHAT ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF THE WICKED?

People often ask, is there a hell? One brilliant minister with a great sense of humor would smile and say, “Oh my! Of course. Or where else would the people go who can't go to heaven?” To start with, there is already a great deal of hell right here on earth, and, as we have reviewed, there certainly is value in suffering, not only here, but in the world to come.

In that same revelation given to Martin Harris, the emphasis was placed on the fact that outside of the mercy of Christ, those who are unrepentant will have to supply portions of their own atonement to a very painful degree. (D&C 19:13-18)

It fits! Those who dish out misery get to experience it coming back from the opposite direction. Free agency does not exclude, in this life or the next, freedom from consequences.

SUMMARY

Though the religious, natural man believes the Lord expects him to produce heaven on earth, the real work of the Father is to feed our vanity so that we can stumble in the darkness and confusion enough to possibly wake up, accept the atonement with a broken heart and receive His gift of perfect love. Otherwise, His word would have us believe there is no end to our suffering. Fortunately, the Lord in our day has revealed that since “eternal” is the name of God, the use of the word can mean God's damnation, rather than damnation without end.

Chapter XXIV

Question 11 – Part 2

HOW CAN A PEOPLE STOP STUMBLING?

Time after time, the Lord has warned us that the only way we can escape the scourge of His wrath is to keep each and every one of His commandments. When we realize that we are given many things which we cannot keep perfectly, then how can we obey everything? Paul emphasized that no one can keep all of the law. (Romans 3:19-20) Lehi stressed that by the law, temporal and spiritual, ALL are inevitably cut off. (2 Nephi 2:5)

THERE IS NO PERFECTION ON THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

As we have already seen, the tree of knowledge is designed to give us experience, not victory. In other words, there is no perfection on the tree of knowledge. But the natural man keeps believing that he could do it eventually if he really tried hard enough. Well, as for us, we have been trying for over the last one hundred and sixty years and are evidently as far or farther than in the beginning.

For example, President Kimball came up with a list of ninety-two areas of which most of us have reason to repent. Let's take just one, which is a lack of gratitude. Whereas all of us are grateful for some things, we could make a list of thousands of things for which we should be grateful, yet we take very much for granted. In addition, are we grateful for those things which bring pain, inconvenience, loss or devastation? Yet, we are commanded to be thankful FOR ALL THINGS. (D&C 59:7) Another commandment is to ALWAYS rejoice. How many times are we not into rejoicing?

There are so many things we are commanded to do which we neglect at great peril. In addition, when we concentrate our time and effort on obeying certain areas of the commandments, it is necessary to neglect others. So what do we do with our need to keep ALL the commandments? It looks like we are caught in the proverbial Catch Twenty-two. Being a zealot myself, that was a burden I carried for so many years.

Since there is no way anyone can keep all of the commandments found on the tree of knowledge, then let us ask, *“What kind of commandments are found on the tree of life?”* Thankfully, that is an entirely different picture. As we have seen, *the tree of life deals only with love*. But then what do we do with all the other laws?

As we have mentioned, Nephi gave us the critical key for moving to the tree of life when he said that the law, meaning the law of good and evil, had *become dead* to them *in their joy and aliveness in Christ*. So what did Nephi want us to do with the law?

We were not to ignore the law nor were we to be burdened by it, for he said we should keep the law as far as it was *expedient*. But we all know that the law, in and of itself, *allows no tolerance for expediency*. It is to be obeyed perfectly OR ELSE, right? Yes, unless a wonderful miracle of grace has occurred. And that miracle is to experience the liberty in Christ, to vacate the great and spacious building of the tree of knowledge and feast on the precious fruit of the tree of life.

THERE IS ONLY ONE COMMANDMENT ON THE TREE OF LIFE

Now, as we come to the tree of life, we find that there is carried over from the tree of knowl-

edge only *one* of it's many commandments. That one commandment is divided into three parts. Christ explained this when He was asked, "**Master, which is *the* [one] great commandment in the law?**" We all know what He said.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Matthew 22:36-39)

In other words, the second commandment is really the same as the first, being "**like unto it,**" meaning the "**same thing.**" *Can a person love God and not love His children? Can we love God and not truly love ourselves?* To truly love one is to truly love the other. So it is the same instruction applied in three different directions, *to love God, to love ourselves and to love our neighbor.*

Then Jesus made one more additional point which I had read often, but now His words have taken on a greater significance. He said, "**On these two commandments HANG ALL THE LAWS AND THE PROPHETS.**" (Matthew 22:40)

I began to see that ALL THE LAWS AND PROPHETS, meaning the teachings of the prophets, are separate appendages to the ONE GREAT COMMANDMENT. In other words, all the rest are *add-ons*, to spell out what would not really be needed if one actually obeyed *the first*. If we do not obey the ONE LAW, which is charity, the pure love of Christ, all the rest count as NOTHING! Without the pure love of charity as the source of obedience to the commandments, THEY ALL TURN OUT TO BE VANITY, THUS HYPOCRISY.

Then I began asking a further question. Can I have perfect love simply because I am commanded to have perfect love? Isn't love similar to faith? Can I self-produce *perfect* faith just because I am commanded?

The answer, of course, is NO! Both love and faith are gifts bestowed upon us by our Heavenly Father through His Son. Because the greatest gift Christ GIVES us is His pure love, we do not earn or achieve it out of obedience. It flows naturally, instead, like a river out of our hearts, like *an artesian spring of living water to those who have a broken heart*. From that love and only from that love, hang all the purposes of the laws and teachings of the prophets.

I came to see that the commandment to have perfect love is not a demand that we can obey like paying our tithing or keeping the Word of Wisdom. So then what is it? Although this commandment to love God with all one's heart, mind and soul is found auspiciously placed in the law (Deuteronomy 6:5) on *the tree of knowledge*, it is an impossible demand for the natural man to obey. In this way, it is designed to expose the hardness of our hearts. In contrast, on *the tree of life*, it is really not a commandment at all, but simply a description of the essential ingredient of eternal life. *Eternal life, which is God's life, is a gift given to man which comes only from partaking of the fruit of the tree of life.*

THEY FAILED TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY WERE TO BE CLEANSED

After the Israelites were set up to merit the scourge and the judgment of the law, the Lord continued to give them wake-up calls. After they received the law of Moses, as the angel told king Benjamin, "**many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed He unto them, concerning His coming [into their hearts]; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth *nothing* except it were through the atonement of His blood.**" (Mosiah 3:15)

THE SYMBOLIC USE OF BLOOD SACRIFICES

The most revealing of the symbolical rituals given to Israel were the many ways blood was used in their ceremonies. The priests shed the blood of their sacrifices and then sprinkled it on the people. (Exodus 24:8) Also the yearly Passover was a celebration of the angel of death passing

over their houses in Egypt because they had smeared the blood of the sacrificial lamb on their door posts. (Exodus 12:7) But here, again, the true symbolic meaning of the blood was not understood.

The *Book of Mormon* not only emphasizes the redeeming power of Christ's blood but also its purifying power. Through the Sacrament prayers, we are reminded that Christ's blood is a central factor in the gospel. However, like so many of us, I used to think this principle referred only to the mortal blood which Christ shed on Calvary. But it became increasingly clear to me that His *blood* is symbolical of a much deeper meaning. Could it be, I wondered, that it represents His *infinite, purifying love*, as does the *tree of life and fountains of living water*?

I notice how Alma warned, **“There can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from ALL stain, through the blood of Him.”** (Alma 5:21) Nephi was told by an angel regarding the twelve disciples whom Christ would choose from among the Nephites, **“And behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in His blood.”** (1 Nephi 12:10) The prophet Ether prophesied about the New Jerusalem to be built in this land in the latter days. **“Blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb.”** (Ether 13:10)

So I asked the question: “If these references to blood are only physical, how does red blood make garments white?”

EAT MY FLESH AND DRINK MY BLOOD

For many years I had marveled about the way Jesus talked to his disciples about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. On one occasion, He spoke so bluntly to them that *most* of His **“disciples went back and walked no more with Him.”** To understand why, we might remember that one of the most terrible aspects of many idolatrous religions of that day was human sacrifice in which they literally ate the bodies of the victims and drank their blood. No wonder His disciples were horrified when Christ said:

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, YE HAVE NO LIFE IN YOU. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day... He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, DWELLETH IN ME, AND I IN HIM...

IT IS THE SPIRIT THAT QUICKENETH; THE FLESH PROFITETH NOTHING: The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life. (John 6:53-63)

I used to ponder as to what He really did mean when He said to eat His flesh and drink His blood? Does it only refer to partaking of the Sacrament with an appreciation that Christ physically suffered and died for us? I was sure that it also had a much deeper, spiritual meaning than that. I noticed that when Jesus said those words, He emphasized to His disciples that this talk about His flesh and blood was not about His physical flesh and blood. **“He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him... It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.”** As we have seen, the indwelling of His Spirit is nothing less than the pure love of Christ.

Now I realize more fully that a mere belief that Christ lived, died, was resurrected and has restored His Church is of little value if Christ's perfect love is not allowed to dwell in our hearts. As Paul and Mormon reminded us, we can have all faith and knowledge, yet still be so impoverished spiritually that we are tinkling brass and sounding symbols. Being purified of all sin **“IN and THROUGH the atoning blood”** means more than just His blood being spilt at Gethsemane, as important and critical as that was.

IT IS CHRIST'S INFINITE LOVE, REPRESENTED BY HIS BLOOD, WHICH IS SHED

One day I had a startling realization about two things that I had never associated together. I noticed that the scriptures almost always refer to *His blood being SHED*. For example, even in the Sacrament, it states “**that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of Thy Son, *which was shed for them.***”

Yes, His physical blood was SHED. But it was shed so that His *purifying, cleansing, redeeming LOVE could literally be SHED into our hearts*. It was then that I related these two concepts to what Nephi was shown about the tree of life. The symbolic meaning of the tree of life is that “**it is the love of God [Christ] which *SHEDDETH ITSELF ABROAD IN THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN OF MEN.***”

I began to realize that His true, infinite love actually functions as *His spiritual blood*, which He said flows like water from the fountain of living waters and like the sweetness of fruit of the tree of life. Of course! It was so obvious! Can I say that I “drink His blood” if I have hardened my heart so that *Christ's love does not shed itself into my heart*? It is *only the sanctification and cleansing power of His love* that could make my garments “**whiter than the driven snow.**”

Let us restate the plainness of the mark again, that the one and only way to be released from the fall is through the gift of the pure love of Christ. When we, the children of men, have sufficient faith, hope and meekness, His pure, unconditional, unrestricted love is shed into our hearts, thus *we dwell in Him and He in us*.

SUMMARY

As long as we believe that we must and can obey ALL the law, we will remain victims of our own vanity and unbelief. The answer is to let the law become dead, even though we continue to respect and obey the commandments as far as they are expedient. We do this as we move to *the tree of life* where we are filled with *His love*, which is symbolized by His holy, infinite blood shedding itself into our hearts. Thus we feast upon that love, *never to hunger or thirst again*.

Chapter XXV

Question 11 – Part 3

HOW DO WE LATTER-DAY SAINTS CEASE LOOKING BEYOND THE MARK?

Since our principle text has been the Seventh Mystery revealed by Jacob, the major emphasis of this book has been to better understand the history of Israel so that we can see how their story applies to our own situation, as modern Israel. So how similar are our problems to theirs? Let's review again what President Ezra Taft Benson declared in his first official conference in April, 1986.

Now, in our day, *the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the Book of Mormon to get the Church and all the children of Zion out from under condemnation—the scourge and the judgment. This message must be carried to the members of the Church throughout the world...*

I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and abide by

its precepts, God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown—and *we will plead to the Lord* that he will *begin to lift* the condemnation—the scourge and judgment. Of this I bear solemn witness. (Ensign, May 1986, p. 78)

Then in the following conference, October 1986, the new prophet emphasized the subject even further.

I reaffirm those words to you this day. Let us not remain under condemnation, with its scourge and judgment, by treating lightly this great and marvelous gift the Lord has given to us. Rather, let us WIN THE PROMISES associated with treasuring it up in our hearts. In the Doctrine and Covenants, Section Eighty-four, Verses Fifty Four to Fifty Nine, we read:

“And your minds in times past have been *darkened* because of *unbelief*, and because you have *treated lightly* the things you have received—which *vanity and unbelief* have brought the whole church under condemnation.

“And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, *EVEN ALL*.

“And they shall remain under this condemnation until they *repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments*, which I have given them, not only to *say*, but to *do* according to that which I have written—

“that they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father's kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a *scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion*.” (Ensign, November 1986, p.7)

“The children of Zion, *EVEN ALL*” could only mean the total membership, from the top to the bottom. Just as Moses was not allowed to enter the land of promise, the Lord emphasized that our leaders would be included along with the membership in being under the scourge and the judgment. It would appear that these restrictions would also include, for the Lord's divine purposes, even the Prophet Joseph.

WERE WE, AS MODERN ISRAEL, ALSO BEING SET UP TO BE CHASTENED?

We might ask, then why did the Lord raise up the Prophet Joseph to bring forth the *Book of Mormon*, receive the priesthood and restore His Church, only to have us fall under the curse of condemnation and remain there for these many years?

We have a clear answer to that question given by the Lord to Brigham Young when the Saints were literally flat on their backs at Winter Quarters after being expelled from Nauvoo. Here are the words of the Lord:

My people must be *tried in all things*, that they may be prepared to receive the GLORY that I have for them, even the GLORY OF ZION; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom...

Therefore, marvel not at these things, *for ye are not yet pure; ye cannot yet bear my glory; but ye shall behold it if ye are faithful in keeping all my words* I have given you, from the days of Adam. (D&C 136:31 & 37)

PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND COMING

In turn, why did the Lord reveal to a new Prophet, Seer and Revelator in 1986 that now, at last, is the time for us to cease walking in darkness at noonday?

The Father knows the day of His Son's Coming and the world-wide role the Church will serve in that tremendous event. Just as ancient Israel was set up to create the crucifixion, the Lord says that we are set up to prune His vineyard for the last time. To do that, we must be a meek and humble people of great faith, well disciplined to work together in cohesive action, possessing great power in the priesthood, without exercising unrighteous dominion. To prepare “this people” to perform such “**a marvelous work and a wonder**” has taken a great deal of chastening. As Joseph Smith wrote from prison.

We have learned by sad experience that it is *the nature and disposition* of almost all [natural] men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise *unrighteous dominion*. Hence *many are called, but few are chosen*. (D&C 121:39)

As part of our latter-day preparation, we have been allowed to struggle under the weakness of our pride and unbelief. In this stumbling, we have been receiving the seasoning that comes only from tribulation and sacrifice.

Then, as the Lord needs us to come forth, we will be *joyously* humbled by these weaknesses He has given us. As we are stripped of pride, we will be able to endure both the sacrifices and the glory of performing His strange act?

WERE WE ALSO WARNED OF A SCOURGE?

The Lord warned us, as he so specifically warned Israel, that where much is given, much is required. As Moses commanded Israel to be a holy people or pay the consequences, we, too, in these latter-days, were commanded to establish Zion, THE PURE IN HEART, or pay the penalty.

Almost a year after the Lord delivered the message of condemnation, He expressly revealed the consequences we would be called upon to bear if we did not observe all of His commandments:

Vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it? ...Nevertheless, Zion shall escape IF SHE OBSERVE TO DO *ALL THINGS* WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED HER. But IF SHE OBSERVE NOT TO DO [all things] *WHATSOEVER* I HAVE COMMANDED HER, I WILL VISIT HER ACCORDING TO ALL HER WORKS, WITH SORE AFFLICTION, WITH PESTILENCE, WITH PLAGUE, WITH SWORD, WITH VENGEANCE, WITH DEVOURING FIRE.

Nevertheless, let it be read this once to her ears, that I, the Lord, have accepted of her offering; and if she *sin no more* NONE OF THESE THINGS SHALL COME UPON HER. (D&C 97:22-27)

So there we have it! *Sore affliction, pestilence, plague, sword, vengeance and devouring fire*. Because of our failure to fully repent, we were delivered over to the full brunt of these scourges.

OUR HISTORY TELLS THE STORY OF ALL SIX SCOURGES

Our courageous but painful history, especially during the first seventy years, witnessed clearly to the literal fulfillment of all six of those prophetic warnings given to us in the summer of 1833. The Lord's scourge began that very winter with the disastrous expulsion of the Saints from Zion in Jackson County and went on from there. Let's take them one by one:

THE SCOURGE AND THE JUDGMENT

1. SORE AFFLICTION – Expulsion from Jackson County, Missouri (1833-34), take-over of Kirtland, Ohio, by mobs of apostates (1837), then expulsion from Clay County, Missouri (1839), and finally being driven out of Nauvoo, Illinois (1846). All these trials and tribulations occurred in the middle of bitter winters.

2. PLAGUE – Deadly cholera in Zion's Camp (1834), malaria during the founding of Nauvoo (1839) and mountain fever in Utah (1847).

3. SWORD – Governor's extermination order in Missouri (1838), Battle of Nauvoo (1847) and the costly Utah War (1857).

4. PESTILENCE – Devastating freezes, droughts, and frequent cricket infestations with no saving seagulls (after the first time in 1847) until the turn of the century.

5. VENGEANCE – Theft of the Kirtland Temple (1837), imprisonment and impending execution of Church leaders in Liberty Jail (1839), murder of Joseph and Hyrum (1844), imprisonment of many members and leaders for polygamy (1880) and costly federal confiscation of all Church property (1880-90s).

6. DEVOURING FIRE – Torching of the magnificent Nauvoo Temple shortly after its sacrificial completion and sacred dedication (1847).

EASING OF THE SCOURGE AFTER 1900

Only after the Manifesto by Wilford Woodruff in 1890, rescinding the practice of polygamy, and the watershed revelation of Lorenzo Snow in 1899, replacing the law of the United Order with the less-than-Zion law of tithing, did the relentless pressure of the scourge and judgment begin to ease. Since 1900, the Church has gradually cast off the mantle of a pariah which existed at that time, when six million of our fellow countrymen signed petitions to have the Mormon Church totally outlawed the way we later outlawed the Communist Party.

By the middle of the Twentieth Century, the heavy burdens of severe persecution had been replaced by growing but guarded respectability and the Church began to multiply. At the same time, the poverty and sacrifices required by having to carve homes and communities out of the desert also greatly eased. Over ninety percent of our present stakes have been created since 1950.

NOW IS THE TIME

So in this century the members, by and large, were able to forget that we were under the Lord's condemnation. Most members were greatly surprised when their new prophet brought the little known fact to their attention at his first conference in 1986. Now we might better understand why each of our preceding generations were not allowed to return and redeem Zion, as they thought they might. Yet, even still, many members now believe that these latter years of the Twentieth Century are the times of our greatest righteousness and blessings. As the saying goes, "It is hard to be humble when one is so great!"

As President Benson reminded us by quoting from the revelation pronouncing our condemnation, we are to repent of our (1) *vanity and* (2) *unbelief*, then (3) *remember the new covenant* and (4) to not just say, but to truly *do as we say*, i.e., walk our talk. (D&C 84:55-57)

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT FOR THE DEEPER MESSAGES

We might wonder that if we have not been able to make real progress in our repentance in the last one hundred and sixty years, how are we to get that job done now? Well, the secret to the answer, as President Benson is assuring us, is to be found in the pages of the *Book of Mormon*. That has certainly been the case for me.

Those answers, however, are revealed in protective layers of truth. Not all of the answers are lying out on the surface, easily seen and applied. Actually, the most meaningful and essential steps required for our victory are often the most carefully concealed, for they are the true *mysteries of godliness*.

On the surface, the *Book of Mormon* is written for those in the great and spacious building who are steeped in the preparatory gospel. On that level, the messages are helpful for spiritual self-improvement of the natural man. The Spirit can only work on the natural man's heart through creating a sense of need.

The preparatory gospel stresses the *absolute* necessity of struggling to gain the promised rewards of righteousness and escaping the promised punishment of wickedness. Its teachings are

called “the first principles” and are designed to appeal to us on the natural man's range of motivations.

These are the gospel teachings which I was responding to over my earlier years and which kept me somewhat on a spiritual roller-coaster. The sense of the burdens of my weaknesses would come and go, but at the same time, the extent of my spiritual highs increased, even though I continued to hunger and thirst after greater righteousness.

THE HOLY GHOST WILL HELP US ONE STEP AT A TIME

So we might ask, will the Holy Ghost assist us, even though we are still proudly clinging to the great and spacious building and sometime ridicule those who are partaking of the tree of life? The answer is, yes, of course! Is it not the Holy Ghost which will reveal the truth of the *Book of Mormon* to the sincere seeker and will continue on until the truth of ALL THINGS are revealed? (Moroni 10:4-5)

Since just about ALL the world, including those in every church, are under condemnation because of their own vanity and unbelief, the work of the Holy Ghost is to reveal truth to any of the children of God under the fall who sincerely seek.

As we have already considered, king Benjamin was given the key word—YIELD. My experience was that I could only partially yield while still clutching the chains of vanity and unbelief. My vanity was that I thought I, the natural man, COULD DO IT if I but gained enough knowledge and applied enough effort. My unbelief came from the fact that I didn't believe CHRIST would or could do it for me until I was sufficiently worthy.

As I finally began to understand the meaning and significance of the *mark*, I recognized that what I was to *give up* was my mistaken belief that I could earn the great reward by my zeal and struggle.

As vain and erroneous as that idea sounds now, at the time it was *almost like letting go of my mind*. Actually, since *the mind is our tree of knowledge*, letting go of the mind is exactly what letting go of “need” really is. Truly, the experience can be *disorientating*, to say the least. Yet, when we do let go of the false belief that we are incomplete and separate from Him, it is then that we may *softly melt into the tender arms of His infinite love*.

PARTAKING OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Peter acknowledged that many of his fellow Saints had received this precious gift of divine empowerment and sanctification. President David O. McKay loved to quote from these magnificent words of Peter in the New Testament.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have OBTAINED like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ...according as his DIVINE POWER hath given unto us ALL THINGS THAT PERTAIN UNTO LIFE AND GODLINESS...that by these ye might be partakers of the DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust [vanity]..

But he that lacketh these things is blind [unbelief], and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to MAKE YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. (2 Peter 1:1-10)

Over the years, before understanding the deeper meaning of surrender, I had read Peter's glorious testimony and wanted to believe that as a blessed, active member of the restored Church, I was one of those he was referring to as a partaker of the divine nature. But in my more recent studies, I began to see that I was still one of those who “**lacketh these things [and] is blind, and cannot see afar off.**” (2 Peter 1:9)

REPENTING OF MY VANITY

Yet, try as I did to cure my own vanity, my self-righteousness and unbelief persisted. The reason finally dawned on me. I saw that my struggle to forsake my vanity and achieve humility was actually motivated by pride. I could see that the more I tried to get rid of one and gain the other, the more hidden vanity I had and, in reality, the less genuine humility. Suddenly, I saw that the vainest thing in the world I could do was *to try to be humble*. The reason is that my struggle for humility was motivated by MY wanting to qualify for celestial blessings. One might ask, “Well isn't that what we are taught?”

Yes, of course, because we have only known the preparatory gospel which deals with our sense of needs, which comes from fear. Simply, under these first principles of repentance, it often turns out that the better we become at *doing*, the prouder we are of the blessings we are *having*. I was even proud that I knew more than most about grace. Imagine that!

HUMILITY IS ABOUT DISCOVERING OUR ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

Eventually I found that humility is *not about doing or having, it is about being*. What I had to experience is that I, as a natural man, had absolutely no worthiness, whatsoever. Anytime I compared myself to anybody, I was exercising my inner vanity! Anytime I felt impatient, inferior, superior, slighted, envious or discouraged, I was in vanity. Vanity is needing to “have,” not freely choosing to “give”—with no thought of a reward. As we read in Ecclesiastes, “**Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; ALL IS VANITY.**” (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

Even Moses had this great awakening bestowed upon him when he was permitted to see the glory of the Lord and His works.

And the presence of God withdrew from Moses, that His glory was not upon Moses; and Moses was left unto himself. And as he was left unto himself, he fell unto the earth. And it came to pass that it was for the space of many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man; and he said unto himself: NOW, FOR THIS CAUSE I KNOW THAT MAN IS NOTHING, WHICH THING I NEVER HAD SUPPOSED. (Moses 1:9-10)

TASTING OF HIS LOVE THROUGH OUR NOTHINGNESS

This knowing of our total nothingness is a gift, just as is perfect faith, hope and charity. For example, when king Benjamin gave his sermon to his subjects, they had been faithful and self-righteous inhabitants of the great and spacious building under the Law of Moses. But as they were wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, first they became exceedingly fearful, and then they received the amazing gift of humility.

They had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them. And they viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth...

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 their exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ...

[King Benjamin then declared:] **For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state...that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love...the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures...ye shall always rejoice and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins.** (Mosiah 4:1-12)

NO SUCH THING AS RIGHTEOUS PRIDE

In calling the Church out from under our condemnation, President Benson recognized that

our vanity would have to give way to a higher source of motivation. He declared:

May I now discuss a subject of grave concern that deserves deeper development than we have time. It is the subject of pride. In the scriptures *there is no such thing as righteous pride*. It is always considered *as a sin*. We are not speaking of a wholesome view of self-worth [as an eternal spirit child of God], which is best established by a close relationship with God. But we are speaking of *pride as the universal sin*, as someone has described it...

When the earth is cleansed by burning in the last days, the proud shall be as stubble. *The great and spacious building which Lehi saw was the pride of the world where the multitude of the earth was gathered*. Those who walked the strait and narrow path and held onto the word of God were mocked and scorned by those in the building. The humble followers of Christ are FEW...

Pride is characterized by “What do I want out of life [in this life and the next]?” rather than by “What would God have me do with my life?”... As we *cleanse the inner vessel*, there will have to be *changes* made in our own personal lives, in our families, and in the Church. (Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness And A Warning*, Deseret Book, 1988, pp. 77-79)

REPENTING OF MY UNBELIEF

The major question I had to ask myself as I went deeper in my *Book of Mormon* research in response to President Benson's challenge was this, “What is it that I have failed to believe?”

I found an interesting paradox. *Vanity comes from unbelief and unbelief comes from vanity*. Only gradually did I discover that I had believed incorrectly that obedience to the preparatory gospel could produce *the perfection in Christ that He requires of us*. I found that I did not believe enough in the gift of Christ's perfect love.

This is not because I did not understand surrender, somewhat, which I had learned through the blessings I received in 1966. But my renewed search of the *Book of Mormon* taught me that I also could surrender my trust and belief in the law, the belief that I knew “*what ought to be*” and “*what ought not to be*.” I could surrender my self-righteousness and judgmentalness. I could forsake the great and spacious building, letting the flaming sword which turned every way strip me of my judgmentalness from the tree of knowledge.

ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE A BROKEN HEART AND CONTRITE SPIRIT

So my final leap in coming out of condemnation was to realize that I would never grow the tree of life in my heart by just trying to do more of what I had been doing. I recognized that the blessings I had been receiving were much less than those the Lord has prepared for each of us. Only when I trusted totally in the promises of the new-covenant did I truly come unto Christ and experience IN HIM the perfection of His love.

SUMMARY

If we, as children of Zion, are to come out of condemnation, we will let our “law,” our great knowledge of good and evil, become dead—meaning it is no longer experienced as the proof of our righteousness. By understanding the price of the Lord's judgment upon us, we will turn about and try something different. We will truly YIELD up our natural man of vanity and unbelief, which is based on “*pride*,” “*fear*” and “*need*,” to the ever-present, all purifying gift of Christ's love. Out of that revelation of the “**nothingness**” of our flesh and the “**fullness of glory**” of ourselves as spiritual offspring of God, we will open our broken hearts to His power and redemption. We then become as children—pure, holy, without spot. This is the “**covenant of the Father**” we are to remember and fulfill, not only to say with our lips, but to do with our hearts.

Chapter XXVI

Question 12 - Part 1

HOW CAN WE KEEP FROM KILLING OUR PROPHETS?

Just days before Christ's trial and execution, He stood up in the temple and bluntly chastised the leadership of the Church, those who He acknowledged were functioning under the sacred authority of the Aaronic priesthood, thus actually sitting in Moses' seat. (Matthew 23:2-3) His closing words were said with a great burden of sadness for these people He loved so much.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, and ye would not!* (Matthew 23:37)

LET US NOT JUDGE LEST WE BE JUDGED

It is easy for us to look down our noses at these people because most of them finally rejected Christ, but let's remember, they were one of Israel's most faithful generations. They greatly prized their sacred law, the holy priesthood, the Sabbath, the essential sacraments, the divinely decreed rituals, the glorious temple and were especially loyal to their prophet, the high priest. They were under condemnation, meaning blindness, just as we have been and they couldn't see it any more than most of us.

Let us remember who is the source of the blindness. As the Lord had Moses tell the people of the Lord, it is God in His great wisdom who **"hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day."** (Deuteronomy 29:4)

John the Beloved described the blindness of the covenant people in the days of Christ:

But though He [Christ] had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him, that the saying of Esaias [Isaiah in Greek and English] might be fulfilled... Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,

He hath *blinded* their eyes, and *hardened* their heart; that *they should not see* with their eyes, nor *understand* with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him. (John 12:27-39)

Then John wrote an interesting footnote about the fact that there were some of the top leaders who did believe in Christ but were too "prudent" to speak up and offend their fellow rulers. John wrote:

Nevertheless among the *chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of* [excommunicated from] *the synagogue.* (John 12:42)

Can we blame the people, even the "chief rulers," for supporting their leaders who were emphatically declaring that this Nazarene had to be a false prophet because He did not seem to be fulfilling all of their prophecies about the Messiah? Besides, just as we have been warned in the last days to beware of false Christs doing great miracles, so had they. (Matthew 24:24) And of course, if this Jesus was a false prophet, their sacred law demanded that He be put to death.

Under God's law there were many crimes which were capital offenses. Let's again review some of the laws which required the automatic penalty of being stoned to death.

THEY SHALL SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH

Here is only a partial list:

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, *shall be surely put to death.*

He that *smiteth* his father or his mother, *shall be surely put to death.*

He that *stealeth a man* and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, *he shall surely be put to death.*

He that *curseth* his father or his mother *shall surely be put to death.*

Whosoever *lieth* with a beast *shall surely be put to death.*

He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, *he shall be utterly destroyed.*

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

CHRIST'S CONVICTION WAS FOR BLASPHEMY, A CAPITAL OFFENSE

One of the most serious crimes was blasphemy, such as claiming to be a prophet when one was not. It was on that basis that the Sanhedrin felt justified in sentencing Christ to death. After all, Jesus came with no ecclesiastical authority. He showed little reverence for their highly esteemed "General Authorities." The scribes and presiding elders carried the heavy burden of protecting the Church at all costs under their exacting Mosaic law. So try to put yourself in their shoes as we read the account of Christ's trial.

Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound Him, and led Him away to...Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year... The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine.

Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world... In secret I have said nothing. Why ask-est thou Me? Ask them which heard Me...

And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, *Answerest thou the high priest so?*

Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me? (John 18:12-24)

Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death; but found none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee?

But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, *I adjure thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*

Jesus saith unto him, *Thou has said.* Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, *He hath spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?* They answered and said, *He is guilty of death.*

Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him, and others [blindfolding Him (Luke 22:64)] smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, *Prophecy unto us, thou Christ! Who is he that smote Thee?* (Matthew 26:57-68)

JESUS HAD BEEN WARNING HIS OWN GENERATION

During the time of Christ, the Jewish Church leaders were very proud of the fact that they were different from their forefathers who had killed their prophets. But earlier in Christ's proclamation in the temple that last week (Matthew 23), He reserved His last of the seven rebukes for that

very subject:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the *children of them* which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you *prophets, and wise men and scribes*; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city, that upon you may come **ALL** the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias...

Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon **THIS GENERATION**... (Matthew 23:29-36)

Yes, it was in that very generation, thirty-six years later, around 70 AD, that the major desolation and scattering of the Jews took place.

Now, what about our day? Will we also be called upon to choose between the saving grace of the Church or the saving grace of Christ? I do not ask the question lightly. We are warned, just as they were warned, that we might be coming close to the Lord with our mouths while our hearts are far removed from Him. If we, the children of Zion, were not guilty of such inner disbelief, would we still be under condemnation for our *vanity and unbelief*? Well, we do not need to wonder. Just as the great prophet Isaiah prophesied about Christ's generation, he also prophesies about ours.

A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER

Both Isaiah in the *Old Testament* and Nephi in the *Book of Mormon* warned those of us in the last days about how easy it is to believe in God without fulfilling His offer to let Him abide in our hearts.

Actually, Nephi (2 Nephi 27 & 28) repeated many of the words of Isaiah in his warning about the last days—"Woe be unto him that is at ease in Zion!" So let's see what Isaiah was told by the Lord about our day. This warning is given in Isaiah, Chapter 29, the famous chapter our missionaries quote to show the prophecies concerning the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*.

And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed.

And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith, I am not learned. (Isaiah 29:11-12)

COMING CLOSE WITH OUR MOUTHS BUT FAR FROM HIM WITH OUR HEARTS

Immediately following those words given to Isaiah, the Lord made a promise about the last days which most of us know by heart. It is that **"He will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder."** However, just *before* the Lord mentions the great and marvelous work, He described the spiritual condition of *"this people."* We usually think of people *"who come close to the Lord with their mouths but far from Him with their hearts"* as the Christian world around us, for that is what Joseph Smith was told in his first vision. However, more to the point, the Lord is talking about modern Israel, for He preceded these prophecies about the sealed book with a severe denunciation of the leaders of "this people" who would read the new book:

Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: They are drunken, but not with wine. They stagger but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon YOU the spirit of

deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes; the PROPHET AND YOUR RULERS, THE SEERS HATH HE COVERED. (Isaiah 29:8-10)

Now, dear reader, please do not be offended. What other people besides the Latter-day Saints are so bold in their claim to being modern Israel and having living prophets? Yes, we love our leaders. They are dedicated men who serve God with great zeal. But in the days of Christ, so were the Church leaders honored and respected by the covenant people of God.

We cannot have it both ways. *Either we are under condemnation or we are not*, but if we are, then the next verse describes why, as President Benson said, we have yet to repent of our *vanity and unbelief* and come out from under our own judgment.

ARE WE “*THIS PEOPLE*?”

So notice what Isaiah was told, immediately after speaking of the sealed book, regarding “*this people*” who would read this sacred record.

And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith, I am not learned.

WHEREFORE the Lord said, Forasmuch as *this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men.*

THEREFORE, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among **THIS PEOPLE**, even *a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid...*

And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. (Isaiah 29:13-14 & 18)

As President Benson pleaded, the Saints are to find those essential precepts out of that book, the *Book of Mormon*, so that we can cease our “**walking in darkness at noonday.**” (D&C 95:5-6) It is in the Nephite record that we are to find the great truths which will enable us “**to become true followers of Christ,**” wherein “**the blind will see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.**”

Isaiah’s next verse is particularly revealing:

The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 29:19)

It is the *meek* who “**shall increase their joy in the Lord**” for they will receive His greatest gift. But it is “**the wisdom of their wise men [of *this people* which] shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.**” That is what happened in the days of Christ and, as we are warned, it will happen among the “chosen people” in the last days.

SO DO *YOU* LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART?

Remember, in our earlier Chapters IX and X, when we talked about the blindness which is caused by looking beyond the mark, we mentioned that those who are spiritually blind are the last ones to know it. Well, *sincerity* is not the test. *Activity* is not the test. *Sacrifice* is not the test. A *testimony* is not the test. The Jews had all of these, for as we have read Paul’s declaration:

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but...they being ignorant of God’s righteousness [His pure love to be shed into the heart], and going about to establish their *own* righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:2-3)

So would you like a simple test? In the workshops that I do, I have a way of letting people find out if they really love God with all their heart like they THINK they do. So, if you are interested, I will show you how you can find out the answer to this important, personal question for yourself

YOU HAVE YOUR OWN TRUTH DETECTOR

In the last several decades, we have learned much about the brain. Most of us now know that our left hemisphere of the brain is the conscious mind which does our thinking. It is the side that sleeps at night. The right brain is our subconscious, which is the way we sense things. It has total recall and never sleeps. All of our manual skills are performed from the right brain, including the way we sense life. In the scriptures, it is called the heart.

I want you to discover that an interesting change takes place in your physical strength when you are speaking an untruth, even if it is only your heart that knows that what is being said is untrue. You have your full strength when your heart knows that you are speaking the truth and you become weaker when your heart knows you are speaking an untruth. The same is true when you have a positive or negative feeling.

To demonstrate, you need a partner who will act as your “tester.” Your tester sits in a chair, facing you. Place your hand down solid on one of your knees, pushing down and have your tester, using thumb and forefinger at your wrist, try to slowly but firmly pull your hand up from your knee. You should be able to lock your hand tightly to your knee. If you cannot lock, have your tester move up higher on the arm to give you more leverage.

DOING THE NAME TEST

Now we are ready to do a demonstration, called the Name Test. Have your tester ask, “Is your name (stating your name)?” You say, “Yes!” and push your hand tightly on your knee. You should lock firmly. Then have your tester ask, “Is your name (giving you a false name, usually of the opposite sex)?” You say, “Yes!” and lock. You should go weaker so that you can no longer lock your hand firmly to your knee. However, if you can still lock, your tester may have to stand up to have better leverage to be able to break your hand free, at least a little distance. Or you might try the test using your other arm.

The point is that your body works on minute, electrical signals going out from your brain. If you are in truth, the signals go out without interference, but if you are in an untruth, this causes static or confusion in the brain and will ordinarily weaken the signals. Although you still have strength in your arm, you will be weaker to some degree. The purpose of the Name Test is to demonstrate this interesting way of finding out if your answer is the truth or not the truth.

DOING THE MIND AND HEART TEST

Now we are ready to use this method to find out what is going on in your mind (left, conscious brain) and what is going on in your heart (the right, subconscious brain). So have the tester ask you two questions, one is what you “think” about what your heart feels and then we will ask the heart, directly, what it really “feels.” You do this by having your tester ask the same question twice, but changing one word, from “think” to “feel.” Since the left brain *thinks* and the right brain *feels*, what may be true to your mind may not be truth to your heart. It is in this way you can check to see if you are *double-minded*.

Your tester asks, “Do you **THINK** you **LOVE** God with **all** your heart?” You answer, “Yes!” and resist. You should be strong. Then your tester asks, “Do you **FEEL** you **LOVE** God with **all** your heart?” You answer, “Yes!” and resist.

Ninety-nine out a hundred Latter-day Saints (and about everyone else, I might add) go weak when the “Feel Test” question is asked. So the truth is that most of us think we love God with *all of our hearts*, but our hearts tell us otherwise. Oops! Yes, it does look like we might be “*this people*” spoken of by Isaiah after all.

The next test you can do is whether you “think” and “feel” *God loves you*. Remember, thinking is our conscious, feeling is our subconscious. Most people *think* that God loves them, but,

surprisingly, subconsciously, they do not *feel* in their heart that God does loves them totally, only partially.

Why is this? Because our heart has total recall and remembers a time when we felt abandoned and vulnerable in a frightening circumstance. At that time we very likely made some definite, negative decisions with strong feelings (in the heart). Since the right brain never forgets, those *decisions became the rule of our attitude and actions from then on unless and until we identify and alter them.*

If you have difficulty doing these tests, give me a call. Be sure someone is present to be your tester. My phone is 530-676-7327 or 800-600-7327. I can quickly walk you through the test.

THE MIND *THINKS*, THE HEART *SENSES*

You see, most of us believe in a subconscious—*except for our own personal selves.* We really believe we know what is going on inside our heart, but the heart is not conscious in the way the mind is. The right and left hemispheres really are two separate brains. As we find in Proverbs, **“For as he thinketh *IN HIS HEART*, SO IS HE.”** (Proverbs 23:7)

Scientists tell us that 90% of our mental functions are processed by the right brain, only 10% by the left brain. Think of that! So now we can understand the truth of Isaiah’s prophecy about our day. **“*This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me.*”** (Isaiah 29:15)

In the next chapter we will examine some of the warnings God has provided through Isaiah and Nephi regarding the sins we may sincerely, but unknowingly, commit in our zeal to come close to the Lord with our talk, even when we are far from Him with our hearts.

SUMMARY

Christ honored the Church of God in His day, acknowledging its covenants, divine priesthood, sacred scriptures, holy sacraments and worship services. Only during His last week did he call its leaders to task in His seven denunciations—**“Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites.”** Just as Isaiah prophesied accurately describing their blindness, so has he prophesied about our generation, declaring that we would come close to the Lord with our talk, prayers and service, but our hearts would be far removed from Him. He also declared that we would find the answers to our blindness in a book, that we believe is the *Book of Mormon*, which was to be delivered to one who is unlearned. Then we are to no longer teach fear of God by the precepts of men, for the wisdom of the religious scholars will perish—*while the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord.*

Chapter XXVII

Question 12 – Part 2

A WARNING TO THOSE WHO WATCH FOR INIQUITY

As we have been examining the prophecies of the 29th Chapter of Isaiah, it is well to remember that Nephi also dealt at length about the conditions in the last days, especially regarding the Church. After Nephi quoted verbatim most of Isaiah’s 29th Chapter, he described the wickedness

of the worldly churches in the last days. Then, interestingly, he turned to write about the people of Zion.

And others will be 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...

Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion! Yes, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost! Yea, wo be unto him that saith; We have received, and we need no more!! (2 Nephi 28:21 & 24-27)

WE LOVE TO HEAR POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT THE CHURCH

Notice how your heart warms when good things are said about our Church and examples are given wherein our people excel. We do not get the same feelings when we are reminded of how we as a people are under severe condemnation by the Lord.

President Benson's thrilling call to the Saints, unfortunately, is rapidly fading into distant memory. Even at the time, many of those in high places did not agree that the Church, after all these years, was still under condemnation, if it ever had been.

In 1991, while President Benson was still alive, long before writing this book and before Elder Dallin Oaks gave his landmark address at BYU about the importance of President Benson's message, I was honored by an interview with a prominent member of the quorum of Twelve. As we were exchanging pleasantries, I smilingly referred to the Church being under condemnation. He responded with a serious countenance, looking very disturbed. *"What do you mean, the Church is under condemnation?"* When I quickly referred to President Benson's strong position, his face quickly changed and the subject was immediately dropped.

Evidently, even then, many of the Brethren preferred to emphasize a totally positive view of the Church rather than dwelling on the negative side of how the Lord looks upon the children of Zion. Actually, I totally agree. Unless we know how to fix the problem, and for most members, we do not, then we are probably just as well off ignoring the whole subject. So let's look at the positive side, for there is much to rejoice about.

AS A CHURCH, WE ARE LOOKING GOOD

Now, in 1997, we're really on a wonderful public relations roll. As one of the General Authorities put it, President Gordon B. Hinckley has a mission. That mission is to bring the Church out of obscurity by raising an ensign to the nations as we never have done before. As we all know, it is working.

Our beautiful commercials span the TV spectrum. A recent cover story in Time, August 4, 1997, is a PR's dream. Sixty Minutes' report with Mike Wallace and President Hinckley was incredibly positive. In my area, Northern California's largest newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, had half the first page and a two full page centerfold on the world-wide scope of Mormonism. The feature article continued in two more consecutive issues, making three in all. The in-depth coverage was candid, balanced and positive.

It is obvious that the Lord has seen to it that we are led by great men. I believe that one of the most remarkable and amazingly prepared leaders is President Hinckley. His inspiring biography is a book every member should read. At the same time, we should know that our obvious blessings may allow us to ignore some of our critical inner weaknesses which the Lord wants us to examine.

WHEN ALL MEN SPEAK WELL OF YOU

As strange as it may seem, this may be a time of our greatest testing as members of the Church. As Christ warned:

Woe unto you that are full! For ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! For ye shall mourn and weep.

Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:25-27)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Lord gave Isaiah some critical information for our day. Isaiah also had some additional warnings to give to “this people” who “come close to the Lord with their lips but far with their hearts?” These words of warning are very specific and revealing about how quickly we are to judge one another. Let’s carefully read the words of the Lord to Isaiah about our day.

And the scorner is consumed, and ALL THAT WATCH FOR INIQUITY are cut off THAT MAKE A MAN OFFENDER FOR A WORD, AND LAY A SNARE FOR HIM THAT REPROVETH IN THE GATE, AND TURN ASIDE THE JUST FOR A THING OF NAUGHT. (Isaiah 29:20-21)

THE TEMPTATION TO GOVERN BY THE POWERS OF HEAVEN

The children of Israel had a theocratic government wherein their judges and administrators were to be prophets to the people and administer the law inspirationally, honestly and judiciously. But the priesthood, itself, was restricted to the tribe of Levi and the sons of Aaron. They were in charge of the priestly functions, but not the government. But as time went on, the priesthood had begun to “**look for iniquity**” in the form of heresies and what they considered dangerous teachings.

The Church leaders did that to Jeremiah whom the Lord sent to the presiding prophets and priests of the Church. The Nephite leaders did the same to Samuel the Lamanite who also came without high office. And in the days of Christ, the presiding high priest and ruling elders did the same to their Messiah, still confident that they were doing God’s holy will. It is so easy for those who have been called to high office to zealously “**watch for iniquity,**” to “**make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate.**” The problem is called exercising *unrighteous dominion*. What is *unrighteous dominion*? It is when we exceed the bounds of what priesthood authority is designed to do, for—

The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven...but when we undertake 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. (D&C 121:36-37)

The Lord has said that through the priesthood what we bind on earth is bound in heaven and what we loose on earth is loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19) But what about an act where “**the heavens withdraw themselves?**” Is the action binding upon heaven? Apparently not.

TEMPORAL CONTROL AND SPIRITUAL CONTROL

Governments must exercise some control over the actions of their citizens. Church leaders must do the same to hold the integrity of the organization. But that is very different than to “exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the SOULS of the children of men, which is to control what they think, what they believe, what they read, what they choose to hear, what they choose to speak and who they choose to associate with.

The temptation is great to control religious freedom of speech, especially when the “offender” is fulfilling the roll of a “reprover in the gate,” as Isaiah was told. To prevent abuse, the Lord has given the priesthood very strict instructions in our day. It’s function is to use its power to influence by persuasion, yes, and even reproving at times with sharpness, but then showing love and kindness. Here are the words many of us have heard often:

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.

Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

No power or influence CAN OR OUGHT TO BE MAINTAINED by virtue of the priesthood, *ONLY by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—*

***Reproving* [not commanding] *betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou has reproved lest he esteem thee to be his enemy.* (D&C 121:39-43)**

CONDEMNING THOSE AMONG US WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY BLESSED

As Christ emphasized, there are other ways by which zealous believers, in a sense, can “kill the prophets,” those who are “filled with the Holy Ghost.” They can do so by such simple things as vicious gossip, persecution and driving them out from among the people. Other times, some will be content to merely ridicule their messages. But even more subtly, many times prophets are just ignored.

When one of our members begins to walk in the light of joy and revelation, how is that person often treated by others of us in the congregation? Hasn’t there been a tendency by those of us who were clinging to our judgmental knowledge of *what ought to be and how it ought to be*, to treat those spiritually blessed people as strange and, heaven forbid, unorthodox?

Sadly, I have seen some of these blessed and renewed Saints often driven into silence, sometimes even from activity in the Church. Some have gone to a more friendly and understanding environment and been welcomed there. Shame on us. So in a way, we, too, may have “killed” some of our most spiritually blessed.

When I first wrote this volume, *Book I, Looking beyond the Mark*, in 1993, I was not nearly as blunt in these two chapters as I have been in re-writing them. There is a reason why I have chosen, this time, to really stress how easily it is for God’s chosen people to harvest the intolerance which comes by missing the mark and never be aware of it.

LET THEM GOVERN THEMSELVES

Probably no one has articulated against this problem of trying to control what our people read, hear or say than, of all people, Elder Boyd K. Packer, since he is generally perceived as being a rather strict disciplinarian. Yet he was chosen to give an important talk on the subject in 1990 to all our Regional Representatives about our tenancy in the Church to over-regiment the spiritual lives of the Saints. His talk was titled, “*Let Them Govern Themselves.*”

For generations we have taught that temporal salvation of the Saints depends upon independence, industry, thrift and self-reliance... On the other hand, is it possible that we are doing the very *things spiritually* that we have been resolutely resisting temporally; fostering [spiritual] dependence rather than independenc?

“Teach them correct principles,” the prophet said, “and then let,” let—a big word, “them govern themselves.” Our members should not, according to the scriptures, need to be commanded in all things...

I quickly admit that there are risks involved when we simplify instructions or loosen up on regimentation. It is no different than what we face when our *own children* begin to mature and venture out into the world.

Wise parents loosen the apron strings and help children to leave the nest to start anew the cycle of mortal life. If we teach them correct principles rather than *overburden them with too many instructions...* they can be both free and spiritually safe in any nation... If we indulge them too much, we weaken them morally, then they will be *compelled by nature itself to find the wrong way.*

Thank you, Elder Packer. You help us remember that the priesthood’s function is to counsel, even chastise and rebuke, but not intimidate or threaten with reprisals.

FREE TO ACT WITHOUT BEING ACTED UPON

It is so easy to forget that it is not the function of those holding the priesthood to demand agreement. Wickedness must be dealt with appropriately, of course, but failing to agree with an authority is another matter. People must be free to hear counsel without threats, and then choose for themselves without fear of reprisal. Elder Packer also addressed this issue, making a significant reference to what Lehi told his son Jacob about people being free to act without being acted upon. He said:

Local leaders have been effectively conditioned to hold back until programmed [given instructions or orders] as to what to do, how, to whom, when, and for how long.

Can you see that when we overemphasize programs [instruction or orders] *at the expense of principles*, we are in danger of losing the *inspiration, the resourcefulness*, that which should characterize Later-day Saints. Then the very *principle of individual revelation is in jeopardy* and we *drift* from a fundamental gospel principle!

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”

That much-quoted verse in the *Book of Mormon* is followed [immediately] *by this one*:

“And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that He may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because they are redeemed from the fall they have *become free forever*, knowing good and evil; **TO ACT FOR THEMSELVES AND NOT BE ACTED UPON.”** (2 Nephi 2:25-26. Taken from a booklet by Max B. Skousen, “Let Them Govern Themselves,” Section 2 quoting a talk by Boyd K. Packer.)

I used to recommend that if people would like the full talk given by Elder Packer to a conference of Regional Representatives, that they call his office and have a copy sent. However, those who have done so in recent years have found that all of the material I have quoted has been deleted. However, much more of those parts of his talk are available in my booklet titled, “Let Them Govern Themselves.”

SUMMARY

Those holding the priesthood are advised to resist the natural temptation “to exercise unrighteous dominion,” “hence many are called but few are chosen.” The Jews in the days of Jesus felt they were far above rejecting and killing their prophets, but Christ reminded them that they were more guilty than they knew. We, in turn, do not ordinarily welcome those among us who witness to their experiencing the glory of God. And in turn, we may be personally suppressing the development of the Christ-self which we are called to grow within our hearts. Why? Be-

cause we cling to our judging instead of rejoicing in seeing the hand of the Lord in ALL THINGS, including the Church and its members being where they need to be at this important time.

Chapter XXIII

FINDING THE MARK

Now that we have considered all twelve of the questions I had asked on Jacob's Seventh Mystery about looking beyond the mark, we are ready to introduce the subject of looking toward the mark so that we might partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life—

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. (Alma 32:42)

“A BLESSING HITHERTO UNKNOWN” SERIES IS TO SHOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND COMFORTERS

The *First Comforter* is what we are to receive on the Spiritual Level of the tree of knowledge. It is the personal witness of the Father and the Son to us by our being wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, thus tasting His love from time to time. The *Second Comforter* is the direct experience of the oneness in Christ through His gift of being given *the mind of Christ*. (1 Corinthians 2:16) The two greatest revelations we have in our scriptures on the subject of the Second Comforter are Sections 88 and 93 in the Doctrine and Covenants. Section 88 begins:

Wherefore, I now send upon you ANOTHER COMFORTER, even upon you my friends, that it MAY ABIDE IN YOUR HEARTS, even the HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE...

This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the Celestial Kingdom, *which glory is that of the Church of the Firstborn*, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ his Son. (D&C 88:3-5)

Section 93 begins:

Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that *every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments*, SHALL SEE MY FACE AND KNOW THAT I AM, and that *I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*. (D&C 93:1-2)

THIS SERIES DESCRIBES THE STEPS SHOWN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As I have mentioned, this series on a blessing Hitherto Unknown consists of four books. Each of the first three is or will be drawn primarily from different basic texts in the Book of Mormon, as follows:

Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark, is written around Jacob 4:14 in which I explain that the mark is the tree of life, the fullness of the gospel, which we look beyond to become “wise” on the tree of knowledge, called the preparatory gospel. The first edition was published late in 1993 and this revised edition is being published late in 1997.

Book II, Finding the Mark, published early in 1997, is written around Alma 32 wherein Alma explains how we can grow the tree of life in our own hearts, thus fulfilling “the new covenant” which can only be revealed directly from the Father because it is His gift of knowing *we not only have but are eternal life* by possessing the pure love of Christ.

Book III, Entering Into the Rest of the Lord, which became available in 2001. It was going to be written around Moroni 7, a sermon given by Moroni’s father, Mormon, in which he shows how we can enter the rest of the Lord from this very day by being bestowed the pure love of Christ, never to hunger or thirst again. However, it was written using a movie, *The Matrix*, as an allegory of the process of going through the flaming sword which is preparatory to partaking of the fruit of the tree of life. However, much of the material on Moroni 7 is already available on four, one hour audio cassettes, which are a recording of several discussions I had on Moroni 7 about entering into the rest. They are available from the author.

Book IV, Perfection in Christ, which should be available in the year 2002, will study what the Lord has revealed about the transformation of the Church on a spiritual level in preparation for the Second Coming. By better understanding the critical lessons of our Church history and our modern revelation, we will learn how the Brethren might eventually lead the whole Church out from under the Lord’s condemnation and the children of Zion, even all, will receive a blessing hitherto unknown.

REACHING THE “TREE OF LIFE” IS A FOUR PHASE PROCESS

Let’s remember again the vision of the tree of life by Lehi. There were four key elements in the vision, which can be understood as four steps or levels.

First Level, The great and spacious building, the wisdom and pride of the world, which was suspended in the air and housed, among others, the hosts of Israel as the Church of God with their divinely revealed law and priesthood authority.

Second Level, The strait and narrow path which led to the tree, but became obscured by a thick mist of darkness so that those on it wandered off and became lost.

Third Level, The iron rod which lay along the path, which allowed those who were still blinded by the mists of darkness to move, if they chose, all the rest of the way to the tree of life.

Fourth Level, The tree of life, the beautify therefore was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty, and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of driven snow. The fruit was desirable to give one love, joy and peace, never to hunger or thirst again.

MAKING IT ALL THE WAY

However, it is well to remember that reaching and partaking of the tree is not the end of the journey. Lehi’s vision has one final and critical lesson for us. It has to do with how we respond to opposition, even bitter opposition.

Let’s remember what happened to the first group that made it *all the way to the tree of life*. They had courageously ventured forth from the safety and approval of their fellow Israelites in the *levitating, great and spacious building*.

They had found the *strait and narrow path* which led directly to the tree of life, and when the mist of darkness blinded their view of the path, they had dropped to their knees to find *the end of the iron rod*, crawled hand over hand in the darkness, until they had finally *reached the tree*.

Let’s read again the account of those four stages in the words of Lehi.

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 I saw numberless concourses of people, *many of whom* were pressing forward, they might obtain the path which led to the tree.

And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness [temptations to be “wise” instead of “meek and lowly”] (1 Nephi 12:17); **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*.**

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.** (1 Nephi 8:19-24)

YET HOW EASILY THEY BECAME ASHAMED

After all that faithfulness, diligence and persistence to reach the tree and experience the incredible blessings of personally partaking the pure love of God represented by the fruit, what happened? Lehi must have been dumbfounded as he watched the vision:

And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ASHAMED.

And I also cast my eyes round about, and behold, 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...*

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.** (1 Nephi 8:25-258)

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WOULD DO SUCH SCOFFING?

Those in the building, which represented “**the world and the wisdom thereof, yea, behold the house of Israel,**” were undoubtedly old friends and family of those who had made it to the tree. These good folks, “**both old and young, both male and female, and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine,**” must have been greatly concerned about their loved ones who had dared to leave the safety and obvious blessings of the magnificent palace. In great alarm, the complainers were trying two approaches, one was ridicule, called “**scoffing,**” and the other was to give them warning, called “**pointing their fingers.**”

As could be expected, neither approach induced those at the tree to “repent and return” to the so-called “safety” of the building. Instead, the well intentioned ridicule drove them away from the tree and into *forbidden paths*. We call this “*crashing,*” which, hopefully, was temporary. And what about those good citizens in the great structure. Even though they did not know it, their future was in great peril.

The great and spacious building was the pride [vanity] 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, tonques, and people, that *shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* (1 Nephi 11:36)

WE NEED NOT BE ASHAMED OF FEASTING ON THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE

We need not apologize or be ashamed for believing in and receiving Christ’s greatest gift. The wonderful and incredible descriptions of the fruit are not overstated. The gift is exactly as

Alma described it, and just as John, the Beloved, also testified. Let's read John's wonderful words again about the greatest gift of Christ—His love!

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in [this] love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

(1 John 4:17:18)

As Paul Declared,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation [purification in His love] to everyone that [truly] believeth." (Romans 1:16)

BEING MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART

Mormon taught that we cannot have bestowed upon us this sanctifying gift of Christ's pure love in vanity, which is the lack of meekness. So Mormon added:

And again, behold, I say unto you that he cannot have [acceptable] faith and hope save he shall be meek and lowly of heart. If so, his faith and hope is in VAIN for NONE is acceptable before God save the meek and lowly in heart. (Moroni 7:42-44)

Now we can see why, in Lehi's vision, the first group that reached the tree were ashamed. Evidently, they were no longer meek and lowly. So this critical key to being meek and lowly of heart is not only for the journey, but even after actually finding the precious prize.

So, how do we have strong enough faith and hope while being meek and lowly as a little child? It must be easy if only little children can do it, and they do it so naturally. But what is the formula? How do we *humbly* aim directly at the mark?

THANKFUL FOR ALL, MEANS ALL

The answer is straight to the point. All it takes is simply this: REJOICE AND BE THANKFUL FOR ALL THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING TO US RIGHT NOW, including our weaknesses, problems, humiliations and disappointments. That is not something we can do through will-power, effort or struggle. Thankfulness is something which happens automatically when we experience that this world is not only created **BY CHRIST**, but it is also made **OF CHRIST**. (D&C 88:10 & 93:10) In other words, the capacity to be truly thankful for all things is a *new way* of EXPERIENCING His world.

Let's think for a moment about a person who is thankful for absolutely everything that is happening in his or her life all the time, every moment. Is there any way such a person, while being thankful for ALL things, could be greedy, fearful, angry, selfish, unkind, impatient or depressed? No! Because such conditions of "*darkness*" can only exist in a person who is either ungrateful, or, at best, only grateful for the preferred things.

I have found that being meek and lowly in heart is truly experienced only when I am thankful for ALL that is going on every second, in every factor, in every feeling, in every sight, in every happening, in every event, in every circumstance and in every thought. In other words, all that is necessary is simply to do what the Lord commands us to do: "**Thou shall thank the Lord thy God in ALL THINGS.**" (D&C 59:7)

THE SIMPLE KEY—JOYFUL GRATITUDE

Through the eyes of Christ, it is easy. It is that simple? But as we all know—for most of us to be thankful for all things is neither easy nor simple. But Christ said that *His way is easy*! And

He is right! He really is right! When we really come unto Him, seeing as He sees, His yoke really is easy and his burden really is light.

So we are to be thankful, not only when it is easy to feel that we are encircled in the arms of His love, but especially when difficult circumstances occur and we don't feel His nearness. That takes faith that His love always has been and always will be there, lovingly providing all that we are experiencing, whether we feel His love at the time or not. Remember, the pure love of Christ is NOT A FEELING. It is HIS POINT OF VIEW.

There is no other way to meekly seek and reach the tree of life. Neither is there any other way to retain the gift of abiding in His love.

SUMMARY

These four books in the series of fulfilling President Benson's promise of receiving *a blessing hitherto unknown* are written to show the carefully designed plan the Father has to transform the natural man, who still has fear, into a spiritual man who is filled with the pure love of Christ which casts out all fear. The First Comforter is provided within the preparatory gospel while the Second Comforter requires coming into the fullness of the gospel. This is the at-one-ment which requires a broken heart and a contrite spirit, i.e., being meek and lowly, not being offended by the rebukes and scoffing of those who may be a little further back on the road to eternal life.

Chapter XXIX

CONCLUSION

The Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the gospel because it contains the most useful and powerful instructions for receiving the one, all-encompassing, all important and all fulfilling gift of the gospel, the pure love of Christ. That one essential ingredient is the FULLNESS. Without it, regardless of anything else, we are mere sounding symbols. With it, in it, by it and through it—everything else becomes complete.

PRESIDENT BENSON'S FINAL PLEA TO THE SAINTS

In October, 1988, at his sixth and final call for all of us to come out from under the Lord's condemnation, he pled with the Church in these inspiring words:

Now, my good Saints, we have a great work to perform in a very short time. We must flood the earth with the *Book of Mormon*—and get out from under God's condemnation for having treated it lightly...

I have a vision of homes alerted, of classes alive, and of pulpits aflame with the spirit of *Book of Mormon* messages.

I have a vision of home teachers and visiting teachers, ward and branch officers, and stake mission leaders counseling our people out of the most correct of any book on earth—the *Book of Mormon*...

I have a vision of the *whole Church getting nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon.* (*Ensign*, November, 1988, pp. 5-6)

ELDER DALLIN OAKS RENEWS THE CHALLENGE

Of all the General Authorities, none has been more articulate and forceful in picking up President Benson's urgent theme than Elder Dallin Oaks of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.. A

little more than a year before President Benson's death and five years after he made his final plea, Elder Oaks gave a landmark address to a huge assembly of students and faculty at BYU. The talk was broadcast by satellite throughout the Church in June, 1993, and published in the March, 1994 issue of the Ensign. We quoted part of his talk in Chapter I. Here are some of the additional points made by Elder Oaks:

In short, in order to escape condemnation, we must come unto Christ and enter into the gospel covenant, not only "to say" but also "to do according to that which [the Lord has] written." We must give diligent heed to the words of eternal life and live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God...

Men and women unquestionably have impressive powers and can bring to pass great things. But after *all our obedience and good works, we cannot be saved from death or the effects of our individual sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ.* The *Book of Mormon* makes this clear. It teaches that "salvation doth not come by the law alone." *In other words, salvation does not come simply by keeping the commandments.* "By the law no flesh is justified." Even those who try to obey and serve God with all their heart, might, mind and strength are "unprofitable servants." Man cannot earn his own salvation. He cannot be cleansed by personal suffering for his own sins." (Ensign, March, 1994, p. 60-67))

What a powerful witness to the power of Christ's gift of love provided by His grace. As Elder Oaks also testified, the Church needs to be and is becoming more conscious of the grace of Christ:

In too many of our classes, in too many of our worship services, we are *not* teaching of Christ and testifying of Christ in the way we should... Fortunately [however], we are doing better. For more than a decade we have more consciously and more effectively presented ourselves in our true light as followers and servants of Jesus Christ...

Recent LDS gospel scholarship clearly shows a greatly increased emphasis on the Savior and his atonement...Individual LDS scholars, principally in religious education at BYU, have published brilliant and inspired books that have made important additions to our literature on the Savior and his atonement. For example, Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ*; Robert L. Millet, *Life in Christ* and Bruce C. Hagen, *The Broken Heart*. I hope such books are read and pondered, not just purchased and possessed.

Our General Authorities and auxiliary officers and local leaders have given more frequent and more in-depth attention to our sacred mission of testifying of Christ and explaining the doctrines of his atonement.(Ensign, March, 1994, pp. 60-67)

Yes, the Church is moving. We are beginning to see through the darkness that denies the light of Christ at noonday

COME UNTO CHRIST AND BE PERFECTED IN HIM

Elder Oaks closed his talk by witnessing to the perfecting power of Christ as revealed in the *Book of Mormon*:

And so we say to all, in the words the prophet Moroni wrote as a conclusion to the *Book of Mormon*:

"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 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."

Elder Oaks, after quoting Moroni's sacred seal on the plates, clearly testified that this is the new covenant that the saints must remember to come out from under the condemnation that has restricted us for all these years. Here are his own concluding words:

THIS IS THE NEW COVENANT, as explained in the Book of Mormon. May we follow the commandment to give diligent heed to those words of eternal life; may we follow our prophet's challenge to remove the condemnation that comes from treating this new covenant lightly; may we be true to our sacred responsibilities, I pray, even as I testify to the truth of these things, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.(Ensign, March 1994, p. 67)

NOW LET US REJOICE IN THE DAY OF SALVATION

Elder Oaks' powerful testimony makes a fitting conclusion. In this Book I of this series, *A Blessing Hitherto Unknown*, I have considered twelve of my own questions about the Jews looking beyond the mark and how their condition relates to us as the latter-day Israel. Book II will deal with the next logical question, if the answer is not already apparent, *how do we find the mark once we stop looking beyond it?*

So, dear reader, it is my prayer that these pages which have highlighted some of the less familiar teachings of the *Book of Mormon* have given you a greater understanding of the price we have been paying for looking beyond the mark. If so, you may now find it much easier to see the hand of God in ALL THINGS, especially in the darkness we have chosen to experience through the essential blessings of the FALL, thus opening our hearts to singing and making "**a joyful noise unto the Lord,**" serving "**the Lord with gladness,**" knowing "**that the Lord He is God; it is he that hath made us** [exactly the way we are, weaknesses and all], **AND NOT WE OURSELVES!**"(Psalms 100)

In the other three books on President Benson's invitation to receive a blessing hitherto unknown, I will share more scriptural insights into the joys of *finding the mark and entering into the rest of the Lord*.

May our infinite and eternal Savior so bless you, I pray in His glorious name, even the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.