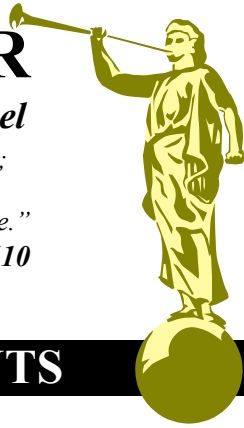


MESSENGER

of the fullness of the Gospel

*“He that will not reason is a bigot;
He that cannot reason is a fool;
and he that dare not reason is a slave.”*

International #2 Winter ‘10



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The “One Mighty and Strong”

Who is this controversial character?

Of all the characters mentioned in scripture, no other figure has had so much mystery surrounding his identity than the “One Mighty and Strong” spoken of in Section 85 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Indeed a statement issued on behalf of the First Presidency stated that:

“Perhaps no other passage in the revelations of the Lord, in this dispensation, has given rise to so much speculation as this one.”¹

Because of this we may all too easily ignore the importance of this section and fail to see its relevance. Yet, because of the controversy which surrounds it, it is all the more important for us to gain a correct understanding of this person and events it is referring to.

In Section 85 we find what may be one of the most important prophecies ever made by Joseph. It is up to us to study it carefully and we must watch to be ready for the events that await us, for if we are unprepared we will not be able to meet the challenges that are coming.

We don't need to delve too deeply, or search for obscure quotes to find additional information that clarifies what is being said, the scriptures and Church history available to most of us provide us with a sufficient answer. Let us begin by quoting the most disputed portion of it:

6 Yea, thus saith the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake while it maketh manifest, saying:

7 And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the sceptre of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God;

The most obvious question we would begin by asking is, “who is the One Mighty and Strong?” There

¹ Deseret News, November 13th, 1905. “The words in verses 7 and 8 have, over the years, created a veritable storm of discussion; and wide differences of opinion still exist as to their interpretation.” D&C Compendium, Dr. Sidney Sperry, p. 410, see Messages of the First. Pres. 4:107, 1969.

have been many different interpretations on this matter, and no shortage of people claiming that title for themselves.

He is no mortal man however, for the character spoken of is said to be “clothed with light for a covering,” which would suggest him being in a state of transfiguration, translation, or that he is resurrected or exalted. Moroni was similarly described as being “clothed with glory ... as in the blaze of day,” and the appearance of great light or fire always seems to attend a messenger from the heavens or deity itself. So we are not looking to someone still in mortality to fulfill this role, nor a spirit.

The verse also tells us he will be “holding the scepter of power in his hand.” This would suggest he is a ruler or leader of some kind,¹ that the power he holds is from God, and is probably exercised through the Priesthood. It does not seem too wild a speculation to suggest that the ‘scepter’ spoken of represents the ‘keys’ which he holds, being entrusted with them to carry out the Lord’s purposes and fulfill his role.

His “mouth shall utter eternal words.” Whose words meet that criteria? None other than Gods own! And what is the role, office, or calling where people are entrusted with bringing forth His words to the world? Only the office of Prophet is entrusted with this. So we may be narrowing the possibility down to a prophet who held the keys of the Priesthood, and who will be resurrected (if he has not been already) to accomplish this mission.

What then is the reason for the arrival of this angelic being? We are informed it is “to set in order the house of God.” How can something be set in order unless it is out of order? This suggests there will be at least something incomplete or incorrect, sufficiently important to our exaltation to warrant a being from beyond the veil visiting us to restore it back to the state it should be in.

The modern LDS First Presidency message on this subject states that this section was wholly concerned with the events of the past, and that if it possibly had any future implication it was meant for a Bishop who would help allot the stewardships of the Saints. This seems to be an inadequate explanation, and contrary to earlier authorities’ teachings surrounding this subject.

The statement above mentioned signed by Brothers Smith,² Winder and Lund was not in fact authored by them, but rather by B.H. Roberts, a fact which N.B. Lundwall (his secretary) attested to.³ Its purpose

1 See Genesis 49:10 & Esther 8:4.

2 Joseph W. Musser (son of Assistant Church Historian A. Milton Musser) says that Joseph F. Smith was reluctant to sign it - Items on Priesthood, p. 5.

3 At a regular weekly meeting of the First Council of Seventy held in the Salt Lake Temple, at which the compiler of this book was Secretary, the above article by President Smith and counsellors was briefly discussed. In the course of the discussion, Elder B.H. Roberts stated, “I wrote the article and President Smith and his

seems to be to make the Saints wary of those men who would aspire to such honors and seek to lead them astray.

However, the term “One Mighty and Strong” is of greater antiquity than Joseph’s letter to William Phelps, and appears in the writings of Isaiah, prophesying a similar scenario to the one predicted by the Prophet:

“Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to earth with the hand the crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under foot” It goes on further to speak of that period: “The priest and prophet have erred...they err in vision, they stumble in judgement.”⁴

It is interesting that Nephi prophesies a messenger with a similar title: “And there shall rise up one mighty among them who shall do much good, both in word and deed.”⁵ The current editions’ footnote identifies this person as Joseph Smith, but as explained earlier this could not have been referring to his sojourn upon this earth, but some later period. More than coincidentally during the forty years prior to James E. Talmage’s 1921 revision of the scriptures, Orson Pratt in his footnotes to the Doctrine and Covenants referred to our controversial character in question as “a future messenger promised.”⁶

Another character mentioned in the revelation is also the subject of controversy and speculation:

8 While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning.

The First Presidency announcement mentioned earlier claimed to quote Orson Pratt stating that Bishop Partridge was the one who “attempted to steady the ark.” Yet no quote from him to that effect has ever been found, and Elder Pratt explained publicly that Joseph’s 1832 prophecy referred to a time and events yet future:

“You may perhaps ask when this time will come for the Saints to receive bona fide inheritances?...This you will find recorded in the [Doctrine and Covenants]; and in the same book it is predicted that there is to be ‘one mighty and strong,’ as well as to be an immortal personage - one that is clothed upon with light, as with a

counsellors signed it.” (Statement of N.B. Lundwall, Secretary to B.H. Roberts.)

4 Isaiah 28:2,3,7.

5 2 Nephi 3:24.

6 1879 edition, footnote for verse 7.

garment; - one whose bowels are a fountain of truth. His mission will be to divide, by lot, to the Saints their inheritances, according to their faithfulness in their stewardships.”¹

This concurs with a letter written by Oliver Cowdery to John Whitmer which revealed, “Brother Joseph says that the item in his letter that says the man that [was] called off God, etc. And puts forth his hand to steady the ark of God does not mean that anyone had at that time.”² So it has to apply to some modern leader ‘called of God’, who like Uzzah of old will seek to take authority upon himself which the Lord has not given him. While his actions may come from good intentions this will not be sufficient and God will remove him from his position.

Could Joseph be the One Mighty and Strong?

Should it be such a surprise to us that Joseph to whom it was promised, “the keys of the kingdom shall never be taken from you” may be the very being who finishes the work he started and ushers in the coming of Christ? It is his “business and mission in all [his] *lives* to preside in council, and set in order all the affairs of this Church and Kingdom.”³

Joseph will be like the man to whom the Lord of the vineyard spoke⁴ in section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants,⁵ which is the parable of a Lord who finds some of his servants have let his vineyard fall into ruin, and appoints a faithful servant to redeem his land, along with the promise that if he does so he will become “a ruler in my kingdom.”

Apostle Orson Pratt mentions that after the martyrdom, “we still were in hopes that he would be the man who, like Moses, would lead this people from bondage.”⁶ I do not know but he will yet. God's arm is not shortened that he cannot raise him up even from the tomb. We are living in the dispensation of the fullness of times, the dispensation of the resurrection, and there may be some who will wake from their tombs for certain purposes and to bring to pass certain transactions on the earth decreed by the Great Jehovah; and if the Lord sees proper to bring forth that man just before the winding up scene to lead forth the army of Israel he will do so.”⁷

Coincidentally, within a few days of the martyrdom of Joseph, Parley P. Pratt received a revelation which said: “Lift up your head and rejoice; for behold! it

is well with my servants Joseph and Hyrum. My servant Joseph still holds the keys of my kingdom in this dispensation, and he shall stand in due time upon the earth, in the flesh, and fulfill that to which he is appointed.”⁸

The last verse of section eighty-five shows the sort of conditions that will exist when the “One Mighty and Strong” will return, it mentions a passage in Ezra which describes a situation in which priesthood authority is deemed invalid and not recognized because those who held it have mixed their lineage with those not entitled to the same blessings.

12 Therefore, it shall be done unto them as unto the children of the priest, as will be found recorded in the second chapter and sixty-first and second verses of Ezra.

In the last verse of Zechariah it speaks of there being no more Canaanites in the House of the Lord, which raises the question “how will this be achieved when the Church leaders see nothing wrong with this scenario?”⁹ The abomination of desolation in Daniels day also applied to the defiling of the temple, couldn't also the Savior's prophesy of an equivalent latter-day abomination include the Church's modern temples? That would certainly suggest the setting in order of the house of God may include a literal cleansing of the temple in our day too.

11 And they who are of the High Priesthood, whose names are not found written in the book of the law, or that are found to have apostatized, or to have been cut off from the church, as well as the lesser priesthood, or the members, in that day shall not find an inheritance among the saints of the Most High;

Men such as James Strang, Samuel Eastman, John Tanner Clark, Benjamin LeBaron, John Bryant, Art Bulla and Frank Miller have all taken upon themselves the responsibility of setting the Church in order, but that is not our work – we are to oversee to our own ‘stewardships’ and make sure we ourselves are sufficiently in line with God's commandments that we will have nothing to fear when “judgement begins upon his house.”¹⁰ If we are wise we will seek to set ourselves in order by living all of God's commandments so that when our day of reckoning comes we will be found worthy of the inheritance that the “One Mighty and Strong” will return to give us.

1 Journal of Discourses 21:150-51.

2 1st January 1834.

3 Doctrine & Covenants 90:16.

4 Doctrine & Covenants 103:21.

5 Doctrine & Covenants 101:41-62.

6 see History of the Church 2:380 & D&C 110:11.

7 Journal of Discourses 15:363.

8 Revelation to Parley P. Pratt, July 1844.

9 Which similarly occurred in Nehemiah 13:27-30.

10 1 Peter 4:17.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY

The Church would be out of order

Many members of the Church resist the possibility that any of the Church's policies could ever be wrong in any respect. They are assured by leaders that "all is well" (*Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, May 1982*) even though 2 Nephi 28:25 says, "Woe be unto him that crieth: 'All is well.'" The scriptures testify that even the Church can become wayward:

"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."

Doctrine and Covenants 84:54-56.

"And upon my house shall [vengeance] begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord; First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord."

Doctrine and Covenants 112:25-26 (see 1 Peter

4:17).

Joseph had a mission yet to fulfill

Joseph wrote a letter to Orson Hyde and John E. Page in which he told them, "Do not be discouraged on account of the greatness of the work; only be humble and faithful and then you can say, 'What art thou, O great mountain! before Zerubbabel shalt thou be brought down.'" Who is the Zerubbabel he speaks of?

The scriptures prophecy that; just as "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it." (*Zechariah 14:9*) The Zerubbabel of the Bible however did not complete the work which he began, therefore this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. It is a type and shadow of things that were to happen at some time in the future.

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This article was written during the Winter of 1994/95, it is based on correspondence between its author and the head of the Church's Institute program at an American University.

The Spirit

Someone dear to me had been praying about something very important to both of us, and which had been the subject of my prayers too. It made me reflect upon the role of the Spirit in our lives, and led to this poem –

The Spirit sometimes comes in a whisper
Sometimes it comes as a feeling of peace
at other times it comes like crashing thunder
Sometimes it comes like a wave of relief

We feel it through the burning of our heart
through the promptings for us to do right
It enters into our bodies – into every part
and it brightens our own internal light

Sometimes it tells us to cast our mind back
to the answer we already had before
It is there to help keep us on the right track
to open our minds, to reveal to us more

Sometimes it works within us silently
even when we are busy or in slumber rest
Its calm influence working on us slowly
bringing about in us all that is for our best

However it comes, in whatever form
whether by peace or joy, dreams or visions
Whether we seek it for emotional comfort
or to help us make difficult decisions ...

It is a divine gift from a loving God
It is our companion and our close friend
It is there to help us hold to the rod
and it will be there beside us to the very end

The Tree of Life & The Plan of Salvation

Karleen Allsop

The Setting for Lehi's Vision

Lehi's dream of the Tree of Life is one of the most memorable visions in all of Mormonism. Beginning in chapter eight of the first book of Nephi, the vision sets the stage for everything that follows in the Book of Mormon. It is a testament to us that God's plan for His children is for us to withstand the test of mortality, to be able to once again return to His presence; this is the Plan of Salvation.

The literal interpretation of the vision is that if we hold to the rod we will be given the opportunity to partake of the love of God. Through Nephi's prophetic interpretation of the vision, we are able to gain an in-depth understanding of its meaning, as well as a glimpse at the grace of God. However, the vision and its meaning are so significant that if we dig a little deeper, we can find greater meaning and clues that shed light on some of the steps we must take in order to be worthy of the promises God has made to us.

Lehi's dream isn't just about the Nephites or any other particular group of people. It is about each and every one of us.

Relating Scripture to Ourselves

John records that the Savior said; "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."¹

This raises the question: Who (or what) is the "world" this verse is referring to? Clearly, God does not love the wickedness of the world. But God loves His children whom He sent into the World – through His Son – and wishes for as many of them as possible to qualify for an everlasting life with Him.

The test of mortality began when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and became mortal, which is commonly called "the Fall." In Moses' story, Adam and Eve transgressed and were cast out of the garden and the presence of God. Similarly, we are born into mortality as a perfect being in an imperfect world. Because of the Fall, mankind are incapable of remaining perfect before God and therefore unworthy to be in the presence of God. We have the free agency to choose to follow God, or to defy Him. We may often find ourselves in a world that seems to be like "the lone and dreary world" in Lehi's vision. There are many dangerous temptations we encounter and things that lead

us unknowingly off the path of truth and righteousness. We must call upon the Lord to escape the temptations of the world. We have been provided with all the resources we need through scripture, revelations from the Lord, keys of the Priesthood, and guidance by the Holy Ghost that will lead us back to Him if we will believe and obey Him.

God loves those who listen to His words and obey Him; His elect people. By sending His only begotten Son to atone for our sins, He gave each of us the chance to be forgiven of them and to become a part of his elect people.

Nephi admonishes us to "Go ye forth out of Babylon,"² calling us to repentance. But is forsaking our sins enough to enter into the Celestial Kingdom? No. We must follow all of God's commandments if we desire to be in His presence again. Only the Atonement can make us worthy to make the covenants and meet the conditions He has required of us. The presence of God, symbolized as the Tree of Life in Lehi's vision, is only attainable through receiving all of God's ordinances of the gospel, including the endowment.

Through the grace of God we can do good works, and for those works we will be rewarded. Some will waste the days of their probation, or will begin with enthusiasm, but fall away in discouragement. A few will take full advantage of the opportunities God gives them; they will live a life worthy of obtaining the fruit of eternal life. Whether our deeds were wicked or righteous we will all have to face judgment, as Nephi foresaw:

"... the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation.

Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works; and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also.

Wherefore the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest gift of all the gifts of God. ..."³

Our Life as Seen Through Lehi's Vision

While traveling in the wilderness with his family, Lehi announces that he has had a vision that has given him reason to believe that Nephi, Sam "and also many others will be saved," but caused him to fear greatly for the

salvation of Laman and Lemuel.⁴

The vision begins with Lehi traveling through a “dark and dreary wilderness.”⁵ This dark and dreary wilderness is analogous to mortality and the temptations therein. Nephi states that the dark and dreary wilderness represents the many temptations of the world.

Mortality has been defined as a probationary and preparatory state⁶ whereby man might become like God. There are four central ideas in the the plan of salvation: the creation, the fall, the redemption of mankind through the Atonement and ordinances of the gospel, and the ultimate judgment and reward for our deeds. It was God's design that we come to earth to prove ourselves worthy to become like Him. If men want to become like God, they must not only endure mortality, but make necessary advancements and progressions through sacred ordinances while living in a mortal state. They must prove their worthiness and be able to withstand the temptations of the devil. The Atonement allows men, in their fallen state, to be worthy of receiving such ordinances and making covenants with God, and those who remain faithful to receive a glorious reward.

After the Fall, men became carnal, sensual, and devilish.⁷ We must take our bodies from corruption to “incorruption”, making ourselves worthy to be resurrected and ascend from mortality to immortality. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.”⁸ However, the journey is not easy and the temptations are great. Many fall away in sin and unbelief.

Satan is “the father of all lies,” and his goal is to “deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will.”⁹ Ignorance of truth is one of his best weapons. Satan is sly, devious and subtle. Without humbling ourselves and seeking the words of the Lord, we cannot endure the many temptations of the world. In the Doctrine and Covenants we learn that “darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face.”¹⁰ We are promised that we will be able to open the door to the kingdom of heaven, inasmuch as we humble ourselves and abide by His word, and heed the promptings of the Spirit.

Our Guide

Because Lehi is mortal, he must seek the word of the Lord to guide him through this vast wilderness. Out of the darkness a man dressed in white stands before Lehi and speaks to him, bidding Lehi to follow him through the dark wilderness. (Nephi sees this figure as a man, but knows it is the Spirit of the Lord.) The Spirit acts as Lehi's divine guide. We might conclude that the Spirit is representative of the Holy Ghost in our own lives. It is also noteworthy that the Spirit acts like a tutor to Nephi,

helping him to correctly understand what he is seeing. As Paul tells us, “the things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God.”¹¹

The Holy Ghost, one of God's many gifts to us, is our own personal spirit guide through mortality. He can shield us and protect us from evil. We are told in John that “the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”¹² By being baptized and thereafter receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost we are given an unparalleled advantage that will allow us to be inspired in all things if we will have a broken heart and a contrite spirit, making it possible to endure to the end. The Holy Ghost is a gift given to any who will receive it; a gift that we should not take for granted:

“And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.”¹³

We know that mankind must pray and gain knowledge for themselves of the plan of salvation from the Holy Ghost. Nephi tells us that “Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark. For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.”¹⁴

The Fruit & The Gulf

After traveling for many hours, Lehi begins to pray unto the Lord to have mercy on him “according to the multitude of his tender mercies.”¹⁵ Only after calling upon the Lord, and with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, can Lehi begin to see through the darkness. He is shown a large and spacious field containing a tree “whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.”¹⁶

Lehi goes forth and partakes of the fruit which fills his “soul with exceeding great joy.”¹⁷ He finds that the fruit is so desirable that he wishes for his family to partake of it with him. The joy he feels after eating the fruit is representative of the joy one can experience after “tasting”

the gospel – a joy that is not complete without one's family.

According to Nephi, the tree represents the Love, or the presence, of God. The love of God is manifest unto us because we know that God sent His only begotten Son to the world. Christ condescended and died for our sins and thereby saved mankind from the effects of the Fall. Alma realized that the gift of mercy God granted to his penitent children, could have only come through so great a sacrifice:

“Mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence ...”¹⁸

While Lehi is searching for his family so that they may also partake of the fruit with him, he sees a river. “It was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God ... a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.”¹⁹

When Nephi speaks about a gulf he is inferring that the river is impassable – perhaps because of its wideness, the rapid course of the water, or because it is at the bottom of a ravine. He doesn't tell us where the river's course leads, but undoubtedly it leads away from the tree of life, either because it pulls people into a whirlpool, or brings them downstream to some hellish destination. But it is not the innocent who are sucked into these depths, but those who have incurred God's justice, which none can escape from, for: “The justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end.”²⁰

Lehi finally sees that his wife, Sariah, and his sons, Sam and Nephi, are at the head of the river and do not know where to go. Lehi calls to them and tells them to come to the tree to partake of the fruit with him. With the Plan of Salvation, we are promised that families may remain together if they abide by the laws of God. The Prophet Joseph stated that an eternal family unit, such as the one Lehi envisioned, can only be obtained through the sealing ordinances. He told the Saints, “The first thing you do, go and seal on earth your sons and daughters unto yourself, and yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory.”²¹ The Lord tells us that such family sealings are not binding unless they are part of everlasting marriage covenants. For, says He: “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into

the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.”²²

We are promised that if we meet these qualifications, and the conditions surrounding them, we can then be raised on the morning of the first resurrection with our loved ones and spend eternity with them (if they have also been faithful), ultimately extending our family throughout time and space:

“Having fought the good fight we then shall be prepared to lay our bodies down to rest to await the morning of the resurrection when they will come forth and be reunited with the spirits, the faithful, as it is said, receiving crowns, glory, immortality and eternal lives, even a fulness with the Father ... Then will they become Gods, even the sons of God; then will they become eternal fathers, eternal mothers, eternal sons and eternal daughters; being eternal in their organization they go from glory to glory, from power to power; they will never cease to increase and to multiply, worlds without end. When they receive their crowns, their dominions, they then will be prepared to frame earths like unto ours and to people them in the same manner as we have been brought forth by our parents, by our Father and God.”²³

Noticing their absence, Lehi searches for Laman and Lemuel that they may also partake of the fruit. “And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.”²⁴ By choosing not to partake of the fruit, Laman and Lemuel forfeit their rights to have an eternal life with their family.

The Rod

Laman and Lemuel need not have strayed from the path that would have led them to their father, as Lehi went on to see, God had provided a rod of iron running along the bank of the river that leads to the tree. Nephi explains that the iron rod is “the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.”²⁵

The word of God is given to us in many forms: the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, revelations given to our Prophets, Seers and Revelators, and even through personal revelation. When we are baptized we make the decision to hold firmly to the rod. The words of God can keep us from being led into temptation because they teach us the differences between good and evil, and give us instructions for living the

fullness of the gospel.

It is not enough, however, to recognize and believe in God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ—we must *live* by His words. Christ tells us that even more importantly than physical nourishment, we require all the words of God to live. After being tempted in the wilderness by Satan to turn stones into bread, Jesus answered him, “It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”²⁶

The Path

Those who are not seeking to follow God's words will eventually stray from the path of truth and righteousness. In the vision Lehi sees a pathway that leads to the tree beside the iron rod. “And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even unto the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain [river] unto a large and spacious field as if it had been a world.”²⁷ It is easy for one to seemingly walk down the path, but only by adhering to the rod beside it can we ensure that we will not wander away from it.

We often think of the pathway as being “straight,” without curves. It shouldn't be missed that the word “strait” is used instead of “straight.” Strait can sometimes be interpreted as “strict” or “rigorous.” By using “strait” to describe the path, we might be able to conclude that the path is strict, having set requirements, and consists of strict gospel principles. Nephi gives us greater insight to finding and adhering to the pathway:

“For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

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

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay: for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope and a love of God and of all men.

Wherefore, if ye shall press forward feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.”²⁸

Those following the strait and narrow pathway in Lehi's vision are participating in correct principles and ordinances. They are active in the gospel and are obeying all of the laws of God. Yet, even those who are on the pathway are not safe from being led astray or succumbing to temptations. In fact, Satan's main priority is to lead Christ's elect people astray in any way that he can. It is his goal to confuse and manipulate us.

The Mists & The Building

A “mist of darkness” arises “insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.”²⁹ Nephi explains that the mists of darkness are “the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men and leadeth them away into broad roads that they perish and are lost.” The mists make it difficult to distinguish between the ways of God and of the world. Every faculty can be deceived except for the Spirit. Lehi sees that some do, in fact, make their way to the tree, but after reaching it and partaking of the fruit they fall away because of persecution. History has proven that persecution is inevitable when one chooses to follow God.

Lehi then sees a “great and spacious building” filled with all manner of people who mock and point fingers at those who are holding to the rod and those who partake of the fruit. The building appears to stand in the air, high above the ground. Those in the building look down upon the righteous because they feel they, themselves, are higher, ascended, and untouchable, like those on the tower of Babel. Nephi tells us that the building is the vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men.

It is easy for us to assume that those in the great and spacious building are only the wicked and the damned of the earth. However, we cannot even assume that we ourselves are not members of the great and spacious building at various times in our lives. Anytime we mock, criticize, or belittle those who are choosing righteousness, we allow ourselves to wander from the path into the great and spacious building. It is our duty to humble ourselves

and refrain from pointing fingers and assuming the right to judge others. We must refrain from making judgments, especially judgments that mock the gospel, or mock those who have been called into leadership positions.

Foreseeing that the Gentiles would mock the words of the Lord, the prophet Ether stated:

“Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness; And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”³⁰

By choosing to stay on the pathway and hold firmly to the words of God, we are almost ensuring that we will be mocked by the world at some point. Some cannot withstand the mockery from those in the great and spacious building. After partaking of the fruit they “did cast their eyes about and were ashamed ... they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.”³¹ These are they who had followed the path and had completed everything that was required of them. They had successfully made their way to the tree, but once they had eaten the fruit they suddenly became much more aware of and vulnerable to the temptations and evil of the world.

Persecution & The River

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells us, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”³²

Those who partake of the fruit and fall away are like those in Mark which are “sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately are offended.”³³

But, despite such opposition, and the strong

temptation to give in and join the world to escape it, Jesus also warns us that, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”³⁴

Lehi sees other multitudes; some making their way to the tree and partaking of the fruit, others going toward the great and spacious building. “And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the [river]; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.”³⁵ He tells us that the great and spacious building “was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female;” and that there were “multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.”³⁶ Although Lehi did not foresee the fate of this building in which those who mock the Saints reside, the Lord tells us that “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,”³⁷ and it was revealed to Nephi that this is what would happen to this great and spacious edifice too; “great will be the fall thereof.” Given the example of the tower of Babel, it was only to be expected that such a place, which is built on such a dubious foundation, would come crashing down or be washed away along with all of its occupants.

The Four Groups

There are four distinct groups of people in the vision: 1) those who intentionally seek the great and spacious building and have no desire to partake of the fruit. They mock and ridicule those who partake of the fruit. 2) Those who neglect the divine help of the iron rod and wander away and are lost. 3) Those who follow the path and succumb to pressures of the world. 4) Those who have a firm hold to the iron rod and follow the path of righteousness. These are they who have withstood the temptations and mockery of the world, who have lived the fullness of the gospel and will receive eternal life.

We can find in many places in scripture wherein the multitudes of the earth are divided into four groups. In Matthew 13, Jesus speaks of the multitudes of the earth in the parable of the seeds. One group of seeds fall by the wayside and is devoured by fowls. Another group of seeds fall onto stony ground and cannot grow deep roots, causing the sun to scorch them. Another group falls among thorns and is choked. The final group of seeds fall onto good earth and is able to grow and produce great quantities of fruits.

He tells us that if a person hears the word of God and understands it, but turns to the “wicked one”³⁸, they are the seed that has fallen to the wayside. The seeds that fall to stony ground are those who hear the words and receive them with joy, but fall away when persecution

arises. The seeds that fall among the thorns are those who seek after the riches and evils of the world. “But he that received the seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth the fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”³⁹

These four multitudes in this parable, as well as the four multitudes in Lehi’s dream, will further be divided up into four resurrections, and the different degrees of glory that accompany them.⁴⁰ These same groups of people exist in our world today.

The lowest group is the sons of perdition who, in mortality, gained a perfect knowledge of the divinity of Christ through the Holy Ghost, yet chose Satan and intentionally chose lives of wickedness. These will come forward in the last resurrection, having had no part in the millennium of peace, being raised to be judged, then condemned. Those who continue into this attitude and ultimately deny all that is true and holy, will find themselves in eternal darkness.⁴¹ They will be cast out with the devil and will not be redeemed.

There are those who seek to do wrong, sometimes out of a desire to rebel against or oppose God, or, more commonly, believing it will grant them some advantage, popularity, acceptance, wealth, or success. They look down on others who do not conform, perhaps because of the guilt they feel when the presence of others remind them of the course they should have taken. The Second Resurrection, occurring at the end of the Millennial Reign, will bring forth these people who are like those Joseph Smith saw in his vision of the Celestial kingdom who “received not the Gospel of Christ.”⁴²

All those who attempted to live righteously, but “received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh” and “were blinded by the craftiness of men.”⁴³ will be given the opportunity to receive the fullness of the gospel in the *afternoon* of the first resurrection.

Despite the many ways in which they can be led astray, a few remain upon the path, holding to the rod, looking forward to what they can reach, relying on the Lord for His strength, and not solely upon their own, who disregard the mocking of others, who seek only for the things the Lord wishes to offer them, and who accept His will humbly, even when it results in opposition from others. They are those who will not lose the way because of short-sightedness or distraction, and who accept the Gospel fully, not partially. Their lives will be a progression through the steps of faith, laws, ordinances, and every Godly principle until they reach sanctification and the assurance of eternal life. These will come forward on the morning of the first resurrection; they will spend a thousand years with the ones they love, and an eternity in glory.⁴⁴

The questions we must ask ourselves are “Which

group do we belong to? What stage are we at on our journey, and where are we heading?”

Our Purpose & Plan

Our purpose in mortality is to obtain a physical body and to strive to perfect ourselves. Mortality is a medium through which we are offered free agency to choose between the good and evils of the world. God has given us everything we need to be able to discern between good and evil, and has promised to guide us safely through mortality if we will seek Him out and live by His words.

God is loving, patient and merciful. Because He wants all of His children to become like Him, He has given us every opportunity to successfully endure mortality. However, man cannot be found worthy of living the laws and ordinances of the gospel, or being in the presence of God once again without the Atonement of our Savior, Jesus Christ – a gift so valuable that, without it, no man could be saved.

Because man fell, we are imperfect and therefore incapable of always making perfect decisions. Through our Savior Jesus Christ’s Atonement, we know that all men can be forgiven of their sins and be able to stand at the judgment bar of God and be found worthy of God’s blessings, if we will repent and receive Him in this lifetime. We are completely dependent upon the Atonement. If we will actively accept the words of God and his plan for us, including all of the laws and ordinances of the gospel, He will be merciful to us. “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”⁴⁵

Lehi’s vision is a testament of God’s plan for His children to once again return to His presence. It is representative of the steps we must take during mortality to achieve this. It acts as a warning to us about the dangers we will encounter along the way, but also informs us of the great happiness we can have.

In the scriptures, we are told that this is the “the plan of salvation”⁴⁶, “the great plan of happiness”⁴⁷, “the plan of mercy”⁴⁸, and “the plan of redemption”⁴⁹. Through this plan and with the Atonement, we are given the chance to once again return to the presence of God and live in eternal, Celestial glory. This is the story of Lehi’s vision, and it is our story too.

Endnotes

- ¹ John 3:16
² 1 Nephi 20:20
³ 1 Nephi 15:32-33,36
⁴ 1 Nephi 8:3
⁵ 1 Nephi 8:4
⁶ Alma 42:13
⁷ Mosiah 16:3, Alma 42:10,
Moses 5:13, 6:49
⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:53
⁹ Moses 4:4
¹⁰ D&C 112:23
¹¹ 1 Corinthians 2:11
¹² John 14:26
¹³ 3 Nephi 9:20
¹⁴ 2 Nephi 32:3-5
¹⁵ 1 Nephi 8:8
¹⁶ 1 Nephi 8:10
¹⁷ 1 Nephi 8:12
¹⁸ Alma 42:23.
¹⁹ 1 Nephi 15:8
²⁰ 1 Nephi 15:30
²¹ History 6:251-53
²² D&C 131
²³ Brigham Young,
Journal of Discourses 18:259
²⁴ 1 Nephi 8:18
²⁵ 1 Nephi 15:24
²⁶ Luke 4:4
²⁷ 1 Nephi 8:21
²⁸ 2 Nephi 31:17-21
²⁹ 1 Nephi 8:23
³⁰ Ether 12:25-27
³¹ 1 Nephi 8:25-28
³² Matthew 5:10-12
³³ Mark 4:16-17
³⁴ Mark 8:38
³⁵ 1 Nephi 8:32
³⁶ 1 Nephi 8:27, 31
³⁷ Proverbs 16:18
³⁸ Matthew 13:19,38
³⁹ Matthew 13:30
⁴⁰ D&C 76 and 88
⁴¹ See D&C 76:31-39
⁴² D&C 76:81-90
⁴³ D&C 76:71-80
⁴⁴ D&C 76:50-70
⁴⁵ 2 Nephi 25:23
⁴⁶ Alma 24:14
⁴⁷ Alma 42:8
⁴⁸ Alma 42:15
⁴⁹ Alma 12:30

Our Rights

(John Taylor)

“Human law, ... is not binding upon any honest man”

All men should be entitled to two kinds of rights: – natural and artificial. Natural rights are embraced in life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness. Artificial rights consist of powers granted by legislative enactment; hence the machinery of government. ...

Men do not enjoy all their rights in any government now existing. They waive the right by appointing men to make laws for the safety and convenience of the whole, allowing the majority to govern. But this is no criterion, or standard to suit the wants and capacities of the people. Every man is above the law, and can act as he pleases if he does not interfere with his neighbor's right.

This is clearly taught in the great foundation of all law, the ten commandments. Human law, the artificial contrivance of the intellect, is not binding upon any honest man; nor should it be any more than the creeds and dogmas of bigots. Laws are for transgressors. ...

Men have a right to petition and protest, and if either is unheeded by those entrusted with powers, they, the people, (oppressed) have what is denominated the reserved right of protecting themselves from insult.

Nor is it less legal for an insulted individual or community to resist oppression. For this reason, until the blood of Joseph and Hyrum Smith has been atoned for, by hanging, shooting, or staying in some manner, every person engaged in that cowardly, mean assassination, no Latter-day Saint should give himself up to the law: for the presumption is, that they will murder him in the same manner. The government has not redeemed the broken faith of the State; but upon the contrary, allowed an indicted murderer to sit in the legislative halls, whereby the whole state becomes accessory to the crime! The partaker is as bad as the thief.

Neither should civil process come in to Nauvoo, till the United States, by a rigorous effort, causes the state of Missouri and the state of Illinois to redress every man that has suffered the loss of lands, goods, or any thing else, by expulsion and the robbery from the one state and martyrdom and state plunder in the other. Commissioners can be appointed to regulate, where the clandestine forms of law might require the strange work of God to rebut it.

Let it be proclaimed to the ends of the earth that the lives of the Saints are their own property, and that they are bound to protect them, and that they will in the name of Israel's God.

If any man is bound to maintain the law, it is for the benefit he may derive from it. No man can be

compelled in a free country, to support a law that deprives him of his natural rights, when, enjoying them is no disadvantage to his neighbor. "Thus," says Blackstone, "the statute of King Edward IV, which forbade the fine gentlemen of those times (under the degree of Lord) to wear pikes upon their boots and shoes of more than two inches in length, was a law that savored of oppression."

Well, our charter is repealed; the murderers of the Smiths are running at large, and if the Mormons should wish to imitate their fore-fathers, and fulfil the scriptures making it "hard to kick against the pricks," by wearing cast steel pikes about four or five inches long on their boots and shoes, to kick with, that's the harm!¹

Out of Myself – Joseph F. Smith

No more I trust myself in life's dim maze;
Sufficient to myself in all its ways,
I trust no more, but humbly at Thy throne
Pray, "Lead me, for I cannot go alone."

Out of myself, dear Lord, O lift me up!

I faint, the road winds upward all the way
Each night but ends another weary day.
Give me Thy strength, and may I be so blest
As on "the heights" to find the longed for rest?

Out of my weary self, O lift me up!

Though other hearts with love are running o'er;
Though dear ones fill my lonely home no more;
Though every day I miss the fine caress;
Help me to join in other's happiness.

Out of my lonely self, O lift me up!

Help me to feel that Thou are always near;
E'en though 'tis night and all around seems drear,
Help me to know that, though I cannot see,
It is my Father's hand that leadeth me!

Out of my doubting self, O lift me up!

1 The Nauvoo Neighbor, 23rd April 1845.

Convictions or Preferences

When filling in forms, such as those you are given when staying in an American Hospital, one question, amongst the myriad that ask for such information as your Ethnic origin, preferred title and diet requirements, is that of Religious 'preference.' A friend found herself filling in one of these forms recently, and it caused her to pause and think, "Is my religion just a preference. Do I prefer to be LDS today, maybe Baptist tomorrow? Or do I have Religious convictions?"

The United States Supreme Court classifies all religious beliefs as either preferences or convictions. According to the court, only convictions are given the full protection of the First Amendment.

When is a Belief a Preference?

A belief is a preference when, under certain circumstances, that belief can be changed. A belief may be strong and intense and may still be a preference. The five circumstances noted by the court that most often cause one to change his beliefs are: peer pressure, family pressure, litigation pressure, jail pressure, and death pressure.

Peer Pressure – When the disapproval of others causes one to bend their beliefs, their beliefs are simply preferences.

Family Pressure – It is often pressure from within a family – from a spouse, parent, or child - that will cause one to lessen their beliefs. The court held that if family pressure causes one to change ones beliefs, then those beliefs are merely a preference.

Litigation Pressure – When one faces an intimidating legal battle, he often re-evaluates his beliefs. If a lawsuit changes your beliefs, they are preferences.

Jail Pressure – Would you be willing to suffer a jail sentence for your belief? If not, your belief is just a preference.

Death Pressure – The ultimate test of a belief is whether you would be willing to die for it - like many Christian martyrs have done throughout history. Would you be willing to die for your belief? If not, your belief is not a conviction.

When is a Belief a Conviction?

Convictions are self-determined – The court held that if you need other people to stand with you, your belief is not a conviction. A conviction must be self-determined, not influenced by what others do or by what others ask of you.

Convictions are nonnegotiable – If you are willing

to even discuss the option of dishonouring your belief, your belief is not a conviction but only a preference.

Convictions are victorious – Victory is standing for what you believe is right, regardless of the cost. The court held that if you need earthly victory to remain true to what you believe, you do not have a conviction.

Convictions are lifestyles – The court held that if a man holds true to his beliefs, those beliefs will evidence themselves in a life which is consistent with those beliefs.

Convictions must control a person's life.

If religious liberty is to be passed on to the next generation, it is critical that we study the Gospel so that we can understand what it teaches, live consistent lives according to those teachings, and stand firmly for Gospel principles. Only then will the world recognise God's people to be people of conviction and only then will we find our faith is sufficient to pass the test of conviction versus preference.

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