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The Fall as Taught in the Book of Mormon

Summary:

The anticipation of redemption is meaningless without an understanding of the seriousness of the fall. In this transcript, Robert Millet discusses what the Book of Mormon and the book of Moses teach about the doctrine of the fall, emphasizing its consequences for, and effects on, humanity. While refuting the notion of original sin, Millet notes the reality of our fallen nature and our vulnerability while living in a fallen environment. He takes due account of the tendencies of the natural man and witnesses that worldly impulses may be countered by a conscious yielding to God.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Teachings

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The Fall as Taught in the Book of Mormon

Robert Millet

Our topic today is the fall, the fall of Adam and Eve, the fall of mankind. There is an interesting pattern for teaching the gospel that is found in the Book of Mormon among the great missionaries. Think for a moment about how Ammon, Aaron, etc., taught the gospel. Notice the similarity, for example, between how Ammon presents the message to Lamoni and how Aaron presents the message of the gospel to Lamoni's son. And notice the pattern of going back and asking significant questions like, do you believe there is a God? What do you know about that God? And then taking the scriptures and unfolding the same, piece by piece, the plan of salvation.

Let me show you what I mean. Let's go to Alma chapter 22 and notice the order of things that Aaron presents in Alma 22; picking up with about verse 7. Let me just read this one:

"And Aaron answered him and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God? And the king said: I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together to worship him. And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe."

That is an interesting phenomenon in itself: once the spirit of the Lord begins to come upon the listener (the investigator), and change begins to take place, one of the things you notice is that they begin to believe; they believe! And then of course Aaron bears his testimony.

"And now when Aaron heard this, his heart began to rejoice, and he said: Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king, there is a God."

The king asks a few questions. Is this the great spirit? And Aaron goes on and explains some things. Now look at verse 12.

"And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king—how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen." (Now notice.)

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

"And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins," and so on.

The one thing I would ask you to notice is how frequently this concept of fall is taught in this order. In fact, I would challenge you to try to find many places in the Book of Mormon where the doctrine of atonement is taught, that the doctrine of fall is not taught, either directly or by implication. Now, that is sending a message to us that I would like to comment on for a minute.

It seems to me that if we do not appreciate, fully, the doctrine of fall, we can never really appreciate the doctrine of atonement. If you don't know you are sick, you probably are not going to appreciate taking the medicine. You may not even want the medicine!

We have, as Latter-day Saints, a most unusual theological position in regard to, for example, the scenes in the garden of Eden. I think we could say, without question, that our view of Eden and the events with Adam and Eve therein are as optimistic and as positive as you will ever find. They are uncharacteristic for the Christian world.

To say that another way, we believe that Adam and Eve went into the garden to fall. The fall was as much a part of the foreordained plan of our Father as was the very atonement. In fact, had there been no fall, there would be no need for an atonement. But, taking that farther, ours is an optimistic view. Adam and Eve did what they were expected to do. We do not believe, therefore, that as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, that type of original sin entails upon the posterity of Adam and Eve. We do not believe, with Catholic or Protestant thinkers, that men and women are depraved by nature, or that they do not even have the capacity to choose good.

So in that sense, again, I think we would see our position as very positive. We do not believe, therefore, that little children require baptism, because they are not under the "taint" of original sin.

We also know that Joseph Smith delivered some very significant sermons, before his death, regarding men's and women's possibilities. On the seventh of April, 1844, the prophet delivered perhaps his most famous sermon, the King Follett sermon, in which he set forth the concept that our God was once a man, that God became God through obedience, and so on. He set forth the idea that men and women can become as God very clearly, very forthrightly in that sermon. And so we know that.

We know, therefore, that what went on in Eden was not a travesty or tragedy, but was part of the plan as Eve would later say to Adam—how grateful she was that they had done what they had done, because this would

help to bring about the joy of their redemption, and happiness, and so on. We know that Joseph Smith said that man and woman can become as God.

Now, with all that optimism, it is easy, I think, sometimes to suppose that we don't need to worry much about the fall, because it is all taken care of. I'd like to suggest that there is something very significantly taught in the Book of Mormon about the fall, that if we are not careful we will miss. To say this another way, I worry that sometimes in our stress upon the fact that men and women are Gods in embryo, or in our eagerness to slap one another on the back, and congratulate each other on our innate goodness, that we forget that there is a nature within men and women that comes, because of the fall, that must be changed. And this is what we will talk about today.

A word or two about the scenes in Eden. Rather than our going to the Pearl of Great Price, for example to the book of Moses, the prophet's inspired translation of the early chapters of Genesis, let's just comment for now about a few things:

I think it is probably not wise on our part to draw too many definite conclusions about things in Eden, because of some problems we have. For that reason I frequently make what I call disclaimers about the creation and the fall. At least three of my disclaimers work something like this:

1. We do not have a full account of what went on in Eden. The account in Genesis, in Moses, in Abraham, is a fragmentary account.

2. We cannot always tell what things are figurative and what things are literal. Was Eve really made from a rib? What is the significance of the two trees? Did one represent mortality, the other immortality? We are not always told directly in scripture, or haven't always been told by prophets, how much is literal and how much is figurative.

3. We really do not know how much Adam and Eve knew, do we? We can surmise, we can guess, we can conjecture, but we really do not know what Adam knew and what Eve knew. And for that reason I think it is wise to take counsel and direction from a revelation that came through Joseph Smith indicating something like this: "In that day [meaning the millennial day] when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things—

"Things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purposes and the end thereof" (Doctrine and Covenants 101:32-33).

In other words, let's be patient, let's learn what we can, let's be true to the revelations we have (ancient and modern), but let's be willing, where necessary, to put some things on a shelf and wait until the Lord makes all

things known to us. I am much less concerned, therefore, in our discussion today with exactly what went on in Eden, than I am with the effects of what went on. And that is why our discussion will center on the nature of the fall, and of men and women as a result of the fall.

Maybe just one point that might prove helpful before we turn our attention to the nature of fallen beings. One of the things I would like you to think about is this. You know that for many years we have wrestled with this question of conflicting commandments. I don't know that I have ever taught a Book of Mormon or Pearl of Great Price class that a student hasn't raised the hand and asked, Why would God give conflicting commandments? Namely, multiply and replenish the earth, but not to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was absolutely necessary to multiply and replenish the earth. And I think we have worked up some pretty interesting answers over the years, but let me suggest to you there may be another way of looking at this. And I will draw upon President Joseph Fielding Smith's ideas.

President Joseph Fielding Smith suggested that "perhaps we ought to read it a little differently, or to read into the scripture the following: When God said 'of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat,' " consider this, President Smith said: "What if what the Lord was saying was, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely (that is without consequence) eat; but, of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not freely (without consequence) eat. For in the day that you do partake you will die." President Smith said, "In other words God was saying to Adam and Eve, if you want to stay in the garden don't eat the fruit, or in other words, I forbid you to stay in the garden if you eat the fruit."

I think that perspective will pull us away a little bit from the idea of the type of conflicting commandment, wherein actually God is stating limitations and bounds upon Adam and Eve that they can and cannot do. If you want to stay in the garden, don't eat the fruit! Any thoughts or questions on that?

Let us begin our discussion of the nature of the fall with a statement from President Ezra Taft Benson that will sort of summarize what I began with. President Benson said this: "I am deeply concerned about what we are doing to teach the saints, at all levels, the gospel of Jesus Christ as completely and authoritatively as do the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. By this I mean teaching the great plan of the eternal God, to use the words of Amulek. Let me ask this question. Are we using the messages and the method of teaching found in the Book of Mormon, and other scriptures of the restoration, to teach this great plan of the eternal God?"

And then he goes on to speak of some examples. We have referred to one

of those in Alma 22. Then he says this, and this is very pertinent to our discussion of the fall. "Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the fall, and its effect upon all mankind. And no other book in the world explains this vital doctrine nearly as well as the Book of Mormon" (*A Witness and A Warning*, pp. 32–33).

Let's take some time then and talk about the doctrine of the fall as it is put forward in the Book of Mormon. I will refer occasionally to, I think, a helpful statement here and there by leaders of the Church and see how they can help us.

Let us go first to 1 Nephi 10. Who wants to read for us first? I think this is the first reference to the fall in the Book of Mormon. Now let's figure out where we are. What is in chapter 10? Up to now the first eight chapters have dealt with, have essentially consisted of, Nephi's abridgement of his father's experiences and record. Nine is an intermediate chapter, a transition. With ten we begin the ministry of Nephi, but he can't completely leave things out that his father taught, and so he begins. Begin reading in about verse 4, 1 Nephi 10:4–6, if you would.

"Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.

"And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

"Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer."

I think that is our first reference to the fall. "All mankind were in a lost and fallen state and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer." This is Lehi's teaching. Lost how? I think we will get into the concept of fallen, but why would he call them lost? What is implied by *lost*?

Student: They don't know where they are going.

They don't know where they are going. They don't know where they are headed. They don't know where they are. One of the values of the doctrine of the fall, once it is understood, is to teach us who we are, what we are, what we may become. A lost and a fallen state! Ever would be except they would rely on this Redeemer.

Let us try another. In this case I am going to have us turn to the book of Moses. We will just read a verse or two from the Pearl of Great Price, Moses chapter 6. I said a little while ago that our doctrine of the scenes of Eden is remarkably optimistic and positive, and it is. Let us go now to Moses chapter 6; we are going to begin, I suppose, with verse 53. Are we there? Who would like to read for us? Let's start with 53, and I will interrupt you every line or two and we will make some sense of this.

"And our father Adam spake unto the Lord, and said: Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water? And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

"Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world."

Let's think for a second now. This is a very early revelation. This is an insight given to us by Enoch concerning Adam; in fact, let's see if we can get this straight. Joseph Smith's vision—of Moses' vision—of Enoch's vision—of Adam. Does that sound right? We are really looking through a tunnel, aren't we? Joseph Smith's vision—of Moses's vision—of Enoch's vision—of Adam. Enoch is telling us about Adam and what he has been taught—that Adam asked a very important question. Why do people have to be baptized? And the answer, interestingly, "I have forgiven thee," the Lord says, "thy transgression in the garden of Eden."

Now, I ask you, what difference would it make if the Christian world just understood that concept? What difference would it make? "I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the garden of Eden."

Student: No concept of original sin. No infant baptism.

So no concept of the doctrine of original sin. No infant baptism. Perhaps not a doctrine, therefore, of moral depravity that is so common to both Catholic and Protestant thought, the depravity of men and women.

You know, I was coming across the country once in a car and ran out of things to do and decided to just flip on the radio, and I found a religious network and listened for awhile. This particular time a minister was taking questions. It was a call-in show and one of the questions was this: "Reverend, why would Adam and Eve take the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden?" And the minister's answer was very interesting. He said, "I don't know. That was the dumbest thing they could have ever done. Why," he said, "if they hadn't done that we would all be in paradise today."

Now you think about it. Bless his heart, that is about the best he could come up with. I remember some years ago a very respected psychoanalyst wrote a book called *Ye Shall Be as Gods*. I read it, and you know what the premise of the whole story was? It was that Adam's action in Eden, to take the fruit and become as God, was man's first effort at acquiring great power. And it has been downhill since then!

Well, again ours is a different view: Adam fell that men might be. In other words, it was positive. I think Elder Orson F. Whitney said, "The fall was downward but forward." And so, "I've forgiven thee thy transgression." Verse 54—the Son of God hath atoned for that original guilt. The sins of the parents won't be answered upon the heads of the children, but, here's where it gets interesting. Verse 55, go ahead.

"And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good."

Verse 55, at first blush, almost sounds contradictory to what we have been saying so far. "Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts." What does it mean to be conceived in sin? Haven't we essentially said here, in the first twenty minutes, that we don't believe people are born in sin? Well then what does it mean to be conceived in sin?

Student: In a sinful world.

To be brought forth into a sinful world. Good, what else?

Student: The effects of the fall are passed on.

All right, good. The concept is we are brought forth, conceived into a sinful world. Secondly, conception becomes the vehicle, the mechanism, by which a fallen nature (we call it mortality) is transmitted to the posterity of Adam and Eve. Well, you say, I thought our view was optimistic. It is. There is no sin associated with what I inherit from Adam. But, that doesn't mean there aren't effects, real effects. We call that the effect of the fall.

So, let's go back to the Book of Mormon now. Let's go to 2 Nephi 2. Who was speaking the first time we read? Lehi. 2 Nephi 2, who would be talking? Lehi, again. Let's go to 2 Nephi 2:21. This is Lehi speaking to his son, Jacob. He has already talked about the opposition in all things as typified by the two trees in the garden of Eden. He has talked about the fall of Lucifer from heaven; he has talked about the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden; let's pick up at verse 20.

"And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth.

"And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent [now notice—all men must repent]; for he showed unto all men that they were lost [there's that word again] because of the transgression of their parents."

Now notice, it doesn't say he showed unto all men that they were depraved because of the transgression of their parents. It doesn't say he said unto all men that there was an original sin because of the transgression of their parents. But this "lostness." We probably won't get to this, and so let me say it here. One of the interesting effects of the fall is a type of an alienation—an alienation from things of righteousness. What do we call that alienation from things of righteousness, that separation from things of righteousness, that separation from things of God? What do we call it? *Spiritual death.*

Part of that spiritual death entailed separation from God. But not only from God, but also from the family of God. What difference does that mean? Well, separation from the family is overcome only in one way—through the atonement. The atonement, therefore, represents the way, not just to get our sins forgiven, but to get us restored to the family of God. And you are restored to the family of God through Christ. Before you do have that restoration or that reconciliation you are familyless and nameless. And so, once you get into the family, what do you have? You have a family, and you have a name. And the name, the new name, is the name of Christ. And so, part of the atonement is not just to get our sins forgiven, as important as that is, but it is to get us back into, reestablished in, the royal family.

And so Lehi teaches this very early on to his son. We will see it reflected in the teachings of his son, Jacob, later on. Let me show you, just to show you how this idea spans the book; go back with me, if you will, to the book of Ether, way in the back—the Jaredite record, Ether, chapter 3, let's go to verse 2. Glance at this and someone remind us, what is the setting? What is the occasion?

Student: The brother of Jared is faced with the problem of providing light for the vessels by which they might cross the waters over here to the Americas, and so the Lord has told him, well you go figure it out.

So one of the problems he has already solved; what was the other one?

That was the air problem, wasn't it. It seems, in a sense, to have been architecturally beyond the brother of Jared, so the Lord told him how to do that. Here's one, he says essentially to him, what would you have me to do? So the brother of Jared does some thinking, does some preparing, and does what? Brings back the stones; the solution is sixteen small stones which he is going to ask the Lord to touch.

But in the midst of that story there is a great doctrine taught in verse two. Who wants to read for us?

"O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires."

Now, who is this person, again, who is doing the praying? This is Mahonri Moriancumer. How would you describe his spiritual status? Yes, about nine feet! He is going to go high in the draft, isn't he! This is a man that is going to do well. This is a pretty spiritual fellow. Notice what he says: "we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually."

It is interesting to me that it is not just a Nephite doctrine, it is a Jaredite doctrine, too. Because of the fall our natures have become evil continually. That fallen nature! But notice what follows after the semicolon. That wonderful word *nevertheless*. "Nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee."

Now that is important. Why? For the same reason as when Nephi is crying out in 2 Nephi 4 about his own condition. Remember what bothered Nephi? He is rejoicing in the Lord, and in the midst of all that rejoicing something troubles him about himself. What is it? He cries out, "O wretched man that I am." Now, why is he wretched? Because he has unkind, maybe even angry, feelings toward his brethren. Most of us would have killed his brethren by now, but he has unkind feelings.

Student: It is interesting that in many of the prayers that are recorded in the scriptures, a lot of the prophets and people indicate their unworthiness before the Lord. They comprehend the fall and realize that without the atonement they're nothing. And so there is a common thread in many of the prayers.

Yes, in fact that is why I said earlier, this is a packaged deal—fall and atonement. People that come to Christ automatically know they've got a

problem that needs straightening out. Think about this. If faith is coming to know the Lord, his attributes, his powers, can you see why repentance follows naturally on the heels of faith? Because what do you sense? The difference between yourself and the Lord. And so repentance will always follow on the heels of faith.

Student: Along those lines is the hope that they always exercise.

That is why that word *nevertheless*. I'm getting back to Nephi; he says, "O Lord, wretched man that I am." There is a great line from Nephi, "Nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted." Do you notice? The fall—the atonement; the fall—the atonement, repeatedly. If all we taught were the fall, and, if people leave our classrooms, or our discussion groups, and they come away feeling like a scummy worm, then we obviously haven't done the job right, because we have only taught one half of the story.

In a sense that is why the plan needs to be presented regularly as a big package. And in a sense, just to take the fall and teach it by itself is to do an injustice to the plan. Or to take any doctrine and teach it in isolation is to also teach it in abstraction. Because the full meaning is to be seen only when we view the whole thing. That is why an Elder Bruce R. McConkie would call the creation, the fall, and the atonement, the *Three Pillars of Eternity*—in the sense that they form one grand package of the plan of salvation. So, there is the brother of Jared.

Now let me summarize just a little bit what we have said so far, and then we will turn to Mosiah chapter 3, and we will go to the great statement by the angel to King Benjamin. I am going to read something here that maybe summarizes what we have said:

"Conception, which clothes us in the flesh, is the mechanism of transmission. The means by which Adam and Eve's fallen nature, both physical and spiritual death, is transferred from generation to generation. The propensity for, and susceptibility to, sin, are implanted in our nature at conception, just as death is." Another way of saying that is this: the seeds of sin and death are present at conception. Now, a child is neither sinful nor dead when it is born, but the seeds are there. Do you see what we are saying?

"Sin comes spontaneously, just as death does. In the case of little children, the results of this fallen nature (sinful actions and dispositions) are held in abeyance by virtue of the atonement, until they reach the age of accountability. When children reach the time of accountability, however, they become subject to spiritual death, and must thereafter repent, and come unto Christ by covenant, and through the ordinances of the gospel."

So, that sort of brings us up to where we are now. Let's go to chapter three,

and we are introduced to this interesting concept that the angel delivered to King Benjamin.

Mosiah chapter 3; we are right in the middle of this wonderful chapter—let's pick up with verse 16. Benjamin is talking about the coming of Christ that he has learned from the angel. He has talked about the condescension of the great Jehovah, the coming of the great God to earth.

Verse 16: "Even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved [what do we sort of have to interpolate here? What do we have to do? Without the atonement, of course. That is the implication—without the atonement they would be damned like everyone else]; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they [what is the antecedent of they—little children] fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins." That is a very interesting thing.

I think if you ask most people, maybe many Latter-day Saints, the question often asked is, "Are little children innocent?" That is the wrong question. The obvious answer is yes. But the real question is why? Many people would say because they are just so sweet, and good, and dear. I don't know what your children are like; mine sometimes are not like that. When you are asked to become as a little child, as we will read about in a minute, what are we talking about? Stingy? Possessive? Grouchy? No. No! You know what you are asked to be like—like a little child, *innocent*. But why are they innocent? There is the question again. We are just told why. Because the blood of Christ does it. Little children are innocent not because they are good by nature—we are just told, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall. But the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.

Student: Would you say the word to be *accountability*? They are not accountable for what they do.

That's right. And so you occasionally will read a scripture like "they cannot sin." I know, when I lived in another part of the country, of a little 7 year old who murdered his brother! I think we'd call that a sin under most conditions, wouldn't we? It doesn't count as a sin against him. Why? Because he has not arrived at that time of accountability. And so, it is covered through Christ. All right, by nature they fall; the blood of Christ atones for their sins. Now going on, Mosiah 3:17.

"And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given [there's that word again—*name*. It is a study in itself to take the Book of Mormon and just search the concept of the holy name. The name that is above all other names. Why does the name matter again? Because the fall brings upon us an alienation from the family of God; the atonement brings upon us family living, and the family name.], nor any other way nor means

whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

"For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy."

So far as I can tell, this is one of the first places that doctrine is taught in the Book of Mormon—that is to say, the salvation of children who die before accountability. It will appear again in the teachings of Mormon. It will occur again earlier in the teachings of Abinadi. It certainly is mentioned a couple of times in the Doctrine and Covenants. But I think this is one of the first places that "the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy" is taught in the Book of Mormon.

"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, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent."

And here is the key verse. "For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man," and so forth. I am going to come back to that process of putting off as we draw this to a conclusion later.

The "natural man is an enemy to God." The scriptures are pretty consistent in the use of that phrase *natural man*. In the New Testament, for example, Paul, in writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2, gives a great statement: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God for they are [remember what he says] foolishness unto him." One of the characteristics, then, of the natural man is that he or she (the natural woman) cannot perceive spiritual reality—or will not perceive spiritual reality.

That word *natural* is used in a very intended way. It is a person that is more acclimated to the nature of things about him or her than to the spiritual nature. Let's say this another way. Each one of us comes into earth life through the process we call natural birth. The natural birth produces the natural man. We can't stay like that. We have to change and so there must come about a spiritual birth which produces the spiritual man or the spiritual woman. And so the natural birth gives life to the natural man which is an enemy to God. Why? Well, he doesn't perceive spiritual reality.

I think we will find consistently taught the idea that the natural man is a person who is on his or her own agenda. They are going to do things their way. We find that the natural man is a person who seeks happiness in other ways than in God's ways.

For example, let's sort of hold our place here and go back to Alma 41. We

are in the middle of Alma's great discussion with his son Corianton. Alma 41:10—maybe one of the most quoted, cited scriptures in the Book of Mormon, but we will go on from there.

"Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness."

Now, this is the chapter that deals with the doctrine of restoration. The concept not just of resurrection, that is a part of it, but also the idea that we just can't believe that if I live a lewd and natural life here, I am going to be restored to a spiritual life hereafter; it is that idea. So, wickedness never was happiness.

And now he gets very specific with his terms. Verse 11:

"And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature." Restate that—they're in a state of nature—how else might you say it? "All men that are in a state of nature." So far what have we done with the word *nature*? It is not positive is it?

Student: The natural are inherently wicked.

There you go. All men that are natural men.

"or I would say, in a carnal state." There—he has given you an equation, hasn't he? The natural man becomes the carnal man. What does carnal imply?

Student: Base.

Base, fleshy.

"are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity: they are without God in the world." What does that mean? We have learned something new now about the natural man. He lives or she lives without God in the world. Meaning?

Student: Not having accepted.

All right, either one, not having accepted the fact that there is a God, or not even accepting God's will if you know there is a God.

"and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness."

Can you see that the natural man, in other words, is working, in a sense, at cross-purposes to the purposes of God? Does that make sense?

Student: When you tie this into the whole concept of having the light of Christ given to each individual, back in Moroni, discerning between good and evil—you notice that these people are natural because of the fall, but they have the opportunity, God has given them the light of Christ, and they are at a crossroads. They can either pursue the natural or pursue the light of Christ. It is conscious decisions all along the way, until it becomes so natural and base that that is the path they are on.

Good observation. In fact, let me just say that another major difference in the Latter-day Saint perspective of the fall and fallen men and women has to do with this. I suppose, if we were reading Martin Luther right now, for example, if we were reading the debate he had with Erasmus, that is called *The Bondage of The Will*, what we would discover is that Luther believed men and women don't even have the capacity to choose good. I'm glad you raised that. Look back in 2 Nephi 2 again, and notice the language in chapter 2. Would somebody, to save us time, be turning to Helaman 14? 2 Nephi 2. Notice the language after he has talked about those important verses we know very well.

2 Nephi 2:24. Lehi says, "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."

And so what are we just taught? We are taught the fall. What do you expect to follow soon thereafter? The atonement.

"And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed [look at one of the things that comes through the redemption—redeemed from the fall] they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon." That concept of redemption—the overall redemption—makes possible men's and women's ability to choose.

The other example is Helaman 14. Why don't you just read for us verse 30—this is from Samuel the Lamanite.

"And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free."

Does that kind of get at what you are saying? In fact, an interesting reaction to what I am talking about, what we are discussing today, that I often

get from students or others who are not real big on the idea of the fallen nature is, "But isn't it true that we have the light of Christ?" The answer is yes; the issue is not whether you have it, the issue is whether you hearken to it. Only those who hearken to the light of Christ bring themselves into conditions of redemption.

All right, back to King Benjamin. The natural man is an enemy to God. We have an idea as to why. Let's take one other glance or two at scriptural passages. Let's go to Mosiah 16. We are now taking in the words of Abinadi. Chapter 16—let's have you read verse 1 and continue until we just stop you.

"And now it came to pass that after Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hand and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just.

"And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth."

Now this is going to get into what we were just talking about as far as the refusal to hearken. A colleague of mine, Larry Dahl, says it this way: Some people aren't hard of hearing, they are just hard of hearkening. The word *hearken* implies something very interesting. It is not just that you hear it—you hear and obey.

"and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not."

Now notice the description that is going to follow of the natural man.

"For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.

"Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

"But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature—"

Notice the language, "persists in his own carnal nature." He didn't say, get into a carnal nature through sin. Do you notice the difference here? It is a nature out of which we need to be extricated. Do you know what I am saying? This is the concept that comes through: you don't move from natural man to spiritual man by just living longer; you have to be changed—removed from the setting—or to use the language of the angel to Benjamin, "put off" the

natural man. See the concept? Excuse me, go ahead.

"But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God."

Those are very insightful verses as to this nature we are talking about. Any questions or ideas you would like to raise?

Student: I think the fall is a very personal thing. Everyone has to fall. We are in a state of "fallness," but you continue to fall until you get out of it by personal change. It is not something that is going to happen *to* you, it is something that *you* have to do. It is a very personal thing.

In fact, another one of my colleagues said it this way. He says, there is the *fall of man*, which Adam is associated with, and then there is the *fall of me*. Man and me. The Lord took care of the first one; I am responsible, through Christ, to see that the second is taken care of. And I think that is what you're dealing with.

Let me suggest something here. The tendency, the temptation for us, (it's a good word isn't it—temptation) the temptation for us is to assume that the natural man or the natural woman is always the slimy, rotten, dirty scoundrel. Well, that person certainly falls into that category. Here is the scary part. The natural man (we'll just use *man*) need not be just the awful, vicious, vile personality.

There is a subtler variety of the natural man and we are talking about a continuum of things. The natural man might be just a very fine man or woman who has not come to know the revelation of Christ through the Holy Ghost, and has thus not begun to enjoy, also, the cleansing powers of his spirit.

What does that really mean about Latter-day Saints? Latter-day Saints who are either too busy (preoccupation or distraction is our great sin, it seems like), or uninterested. It doesn't matter that we have been baptized and received the Holy Ghost by ordinance. If we have not begun to enjoy the Holy Ghost in our lives, we are still sort of spiritually stillborn. Are you with me? And so the natural man need not be the dirty, awful person; it may be the very nice, morally upright person who is not enjoying the spirit in his or her life.

President Brigham Young, for example, says, "There is no doubt if a person lives according to the revelations given to God's people, he may have

the spirit of the Lord to signify to him his will, and to guide, and to direct him in the discharge of his duties in his temporal, as well as his spiritual exercises. [And then this line.] *I am satisfied, however, that in this respect we live far beneath our privileges.*"

It is why President Benson would speak so forcefully about pride, pride being enmity to fellow man—enmity to God. The prideful person refuses to look up; he just wants to look down, and so forth.

Let's begin bringing this to some conclusion. The natural man—maybe we could look at one other scripture that might prove helpful. Alma chapter 42. This sort of says many of the same things; we are back to Alma and Corianton. Let's pick up at about verse 5. Who would like to read for us?

"For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.

"But behold, it was appointed unto man to die—therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth—and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man.

"And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

"Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.

"Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

"Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state."

And so again a summary statement as to the fall and the atonement. Just a concluding thought or two. President Brigham Young on one occasion (I love this statement) said: "It requires all the atonement of Christ, the mercy of the Father, the pity of angels, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with us always. And then to do the very best we can to get rid of this sin within us so that we may escape from this world into the celestial kingdom."

I return to President Benson, where we began essentially. He talks about the fall, and he asks some more hard questions. He asks:

"Are we using the messages and the methods of teaching found in the Book of Mormon? The Book of Mormon Saints knew that the plan of redemption must start with the account of the fall of Adam. In the words of Moroni: 'By Adam came the fall of man, and because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man.' "

President Benson says, "We all need to take a careful inventory of our performance, and also the performance of those over whom we preside, to be sure that we are teaching the great plan of the eternal God to the Saints. Are we accepting and teaching what the revelations tell us about the creation, Adam, and the fall of man, and redemption from that fall through the atonement of Christ?" That is an important question. The great plan. Are we teaching it?

C. S. Lewis once said, "This transformation of men and women from natural, fallen creatures to spiritual creatures is what Christianity is all about." He said, "We are like a great sculptor's shop and we are the statues. And there is a rumor going around the shop, to this effect, that one day some of us are going to come to life."

That is what the atonement is all about. To raise us above the fallen nature, and redeem us from that, and make us into creatures that would feel comfortable being with, and like, God. I so attest in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.