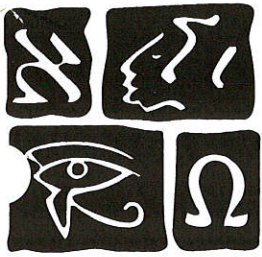




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Transcript

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M. Catherine Thomas

Alma the Younger

(Parts 1 & 2)

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Summary:

Catherine Thomas places Alma and his teachings within the context of the premortal existence to show his concern for the plan of redemption. She notes that some spirits were notably more responsive in their faith than others and that Israel was there organized. Alma's discourses are set against his dramatic conversion, from a condition of abject wickedness to that of a highly motivated saint. His transformation serves as a model of encouragement for the lost soul seeking a higher state.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Teachings

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Alma the Younger

Covenants with the Fathers (Part 1)*

M. Catherine Thomas

Alma's story, like yours and mine, begins in the premortal world; I am going to begin our discussion of the younger Alma in Alma 13 where he speaks of premortal events. Using chapter 13 as a base, and adding other scriptures and prophets to expand on Alma's teachings, I would like to explore some issues that Alma raises that pertain to the premortal life. Understanding Alma's teachings enlarges our understanding of how we can use this earthly probation to greater profit.

In Alma 13:3, Alma uses the phrases "from the foundation of the world" and "in the first place" to refer to premortal events. He speaks in particular of certain people receiving a calling into the holy order.¹ To understand more about the holy order, we have to understand the house of Israel and its organization in the premortal world.

Out of all of Heavenly Father's spirit children, a smaller group distinguished itself by its exceeding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ during the conflicts that occurred incident to the war in heaven. Those who were valiant in these conflicts, and in other ways also, demonstrated both their abilities and their desires to become actively involved in the cosmic work of redemption through the great atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The thing that characterizes the Gods and those who aspire to godhood is the love of the work of redemption; that is, nurturing spirit children through the first estate of premortality, then leading them through a mortal probation, and finally raising them to the level of their parent Gods. If we could look into the heavens with the vision of the Holy Spirit, as Moses and Abraham and

¹ Robert L. Millet gave a helpful presentation, entitled "The Holy Order of God," on this subject. See also President Ezra Taft Benson, "What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple," *ENSIGN* (August 1985): 6-10, where he says, "To enter into the order of the Son of God is the equivalent today of entering into the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which is only received in the house of the Lord. Because Adam and Eve had complied with these requirements, God said to them, 'Thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity' (Moses 6:67)" (p. 8).

* The presenter used this script in making her presentation. It has been provided in lieu of a transcript.

many others have, we would be stunned at the magnitude of the great work of redemption going on on numberless worlds throughout the cosmos. One of the points I want to emphasize is that the great work of the Gods is the work of redemption, and that work seems to be the major reason that worlds are created and inhabited (see 1 Nephi 17:36). More specifically, the great work of the Gods is family work—the raising and nurturing of children and the redemption of families to be sealed together for all eternity. We cannot comprehend the cosmic proportions of the love and the infinite investment of labor and grace that go into this magnificent work. You and I, as members of the literal house of Israel and of the Church of Jesus Christ, were called in the premortal world to participate in that work, everything else being trivial in comparison. Redemption is not just one of the things going on in the universe; it is *the* thing. That work of redemption is *the* work to which the premortal covenant people, the house of Israel, were called, and it was to take precedence over all other work and to subordinate all other work to itself.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Israel is an eternal people. She came into being as a chosen and separate congregation before the foundations of the earth were laid; she was a distinct and a peculiar people in the preexistence, even as she is in this sphere. Her numbers were known before their mortal birth.²

All of those who entered into the premortal house of Israel to participate in the work of redemption were, as the apostle Paul teaches, foreordained to be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Romans 8:29); that is, those in the premortal world who elected to become Gods elected also to come to earth and learn the work of redemption in apprenticeship to the Lord Jesus Christ, a work that would qualify them to live with the Gods in the eternal worlds.

It seems that the holy order was a group within the house of Israel that advanced to a god-like status while yet in the premortal world, much as our Jesus had. They emerged as the leaders within the house of Israel and were prepared and ordained to the holy order, which was the order of the Son of

² *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 510–11.

God, to show the manner of "Christ-ness" to the people, they being types of Christ (Alma 13:16). In this manner the people would understand what they themselves had been foreordained to become and could ultimately also enter this holy order. These high priests of the holy order undoubtedly labored among the spirits in the premortal world and were ordained and prepared to descend to earth and be leaders in the Lord's redeeming work here. It would appear that all the house of Israel could ultimately be part of this holy order, or the order of Gods.

Of course, as people do in this world, the maturing spirits in the premortal world advanced at different rates and to different levels of spirituality, though Alma says that they were initially on the same standing with each other (Alma 13:5); that is, they had equal opportunity to advance, but some rejected the Spirit of God "on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds" (Alma 13:4) and did not make the progress that would have given them the privilege of entering the holy order.

Let's read Alma's words from Alma 13:1-3, 6, observing some of what we have just discussed:

I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place [premortar world] being left to choose good or evil [conflict in heaven]; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest.

This holy order that Alma describes, with other members of the house of Israel foreordained to obtain that order, are likely the ones referred to in the book of Abraham as "the noble and great ones" (Abraham 3:22), whom the

Gods would prove "to see if they [would] do all things whatsoever the Lord their God [should] command them" (3:25). They had kept their first premortal estate; if they kept their second estate, their earthly probation, they would "have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever" (Abraham 3:26). These are the ones for whom the earth was created (Abraham 3:24) and for whom the scriptures were written (D&C 35:20). These are they of whom Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; . . . And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:37, 39). These are they who could be characterized in the premortal existence by these words of Abraham as he expressed his primeval passion to progress to godliness:

I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to *administer the same*; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and *to be a father of many nations*, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, *holding the right belonging to the fathers*.

It was conferred upon me from the fathers; *it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth*, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me. (Abraham 1:2-3; emphasis added)

Abraham seems to make reference to fathers on both sides of the veil, a point we will enlarge on further on.

If these premortal Israelites were faithful to their premortal covenants during their mortal probations, they would have power and influence with God. When Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was visited by the Lord, the Lord said to him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). Abraham's wife was renamed Sarah by the Lord, which means "princess," suggesting that all these holy men had holy female counterparts; out of deference to their holiness, most of these women are not named.

What difference does it make to us to know about the premortal world? Why did Alma teach this material to the rebellious, hard-hearted inhabitants

of Ammonihah? Because they too, as Nephites and members of the house of Israel, had been foreordained in the premortal world, and they had fallen very far from what they were foreordained to be and were in great spiritual danger. Elder David B. Haight explains the reason the Lord has revealed the doctrine of the premortal world:

Most of us have wondered about what occurred in the premortal world and how it relates to our existence here. We should be acquainted with the truth that knowledge of the premortal life was restored that we might fulfill our responsibilities as children of God. . . .

John A. Widtsoe provides insight to an earth-life responsibility made in that premortal world which is of great importance. He highlights a contractual agreement we made concerning the eternal welfare of all of the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father:

"... Since the plan is intended for all men, we [the covenant people] became parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves but . . . saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. . . . The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation."³

Let's review additional quotes from the Brethren on premortal preparations and assignments to the house of Israel:

1. "During the ages in which we dwelt in the pre-mortal state we not only developed our various characteristics and showed our worthiness and ability, or the lack of it, but we were also where such progress could be observed. It is reasonable to believe that there was a Church organization there. The heavenly beings were living in a perfectly arranged society. Every person knew his place. Priesthood . . . had been conferred and the leaders were chosen to officiate. Ordinances pertaining to that pre-existence were required and the love of God prevailed."⁴

2. "Many there held important positions of leadership. From the tests of that existence they emerged triumphant. Because of their faithfulness they were accounted worthy to bear in life great responsibilities, and were

³ David B. Haight, "Temples and Work Therein," *ENSIGN* (November 1990): 59; emphasis added).

reserved in training there until a day came in earth's history when the very staunchest and bravest would be needed, as '*tried souls, 'mid untried spirits found, that captained these may be.*' With the dawning of this last Gospel dispensation came their call to journey earthward, and perform the special mission for which they were qualified by character and experience."⁵

3. "Remember, in the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to. You are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of you just as are those we sustain as prophets and apostles!"⁶

Joseph Smith wrote, "At the first *organization* in heaven we were all present, and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it."⁷ What was this first organization? Brigham Young quoted Joseph Smith: "Be sure to tell the people to keep the spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion."⁸ Brigham continued: "Joseph then showed me the pattern, how they were in the beginning. This I cannot describe, but I saw it, and saw where the Priesthood had been taken from the earth and how it must be joined together, so that there would be a perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity."⁹

Since much of what we experience here on earth was spiritually created in the premortal world, we might see that, in the premortal world, those who would be earthly children and parents entered into covenants with other

⁴ Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, 12th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 50–51.

⁵ Wilford Woodruff, *Our Lineage* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, n.d.), 4; emphasis in original.

⁶ Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *ENSIGN* (November 1979): 102.

⁷ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 181.

⁸ *Journal History* (23 February 1847).

⁹ *Ibid.*; see also Moses 5:10.

spirits in order to be saved and also to have a saving relationship with them. Joseph Smith said, "God is Good & all his acts are for the benefit of inferior intelligences."¹⁰ If the desire to bless other intelligences was true of God, it was also true of many in the house of Israel—the greater lights would bless the lesser lights so that all might be together in eternity (Abraham 3:18; D&C 88:44). It is likely that many of the premortal house of Israel, that is, that many of us, entered into covenants with those who would be our ancestors as well as with those who would be our posterity. We did this for the express purpose of having a saving influence in both directions—on our ancestors through work for the dead and on our posterity through nurturing work for the living, all under the continuing direction of the great Redeemer.

Likely our own labors with many spirits commenced in the spirit world, our hearts being bound together in love from our associations through eons. There we received specific missions to perform a saving work for those with whom we covenanted in the premortal world. Genealogical chains of parents and children were formed, specifically arranged to promote a variety of the Lord's saving purposes. The plan seemed to be that each of the premortal house of Israel would, as part of their progress toward godhood, experience being redeemed by mortal and immortal beings and also learn the role of redeemer; each would be labored with until he or she could labor with others. The redeemed would become the redeemers. To each of us covenant people it would be said, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

We would, by our premortal covenants with loved ones and with the Lord, become extensions of God's power during our mortal probations and actually be able to exert a saving influence on an increasing number of people. Jesus himself is our model when he says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself" (John 17:19). This is a powerful principle and is one of the foundational principles of our admission to the house of Israel. The Lord teaches the house of Israel in this dispensation: "When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are

¹⁰ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 68.

accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men." (D&C 101:39) "For they were set to be a light unto the world, and to be the saviors of men; And inasmuch as they are not the saviors of men, they are as salt that has lost its savor, and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men" (D&C 103:9–10).

To continue with this idea of dependency of souls upon one another, Joseph F. Smith taught:

Jesus had not finished his work when his body was slain, neither did he finish it after his resurrection from the dead; although he had accomplished the purpose for which he then came to the earth, he had not fulfilled all his work. And when will he? Not until he has redeemed and saved every son and daughter of our father Adam that have been or ever will be born upon this earth to the end of time, except the sons of perdition. That is his mission. We will not finish *our* work until we have saved ourselves, and then not until we shall have saved all depending upon us; for we are to become saviors upon Mount Zion, as well as Christ. We are called to this mission.¹¹

This phrase, "saving all souls depending upon us that we might become saviors," is truly arresting.

Lorenzo Snow taught similarly about our continuing labors with our loved ones after this life:

God has fulfilled His promises to us, and our prospects are grand and glorious. Yes, in the next life we will have our wives, and our sons and daughters. If we do not get them all at once, we will have them some time, for every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is the Christ. You that are mourning about your children straying away will have your sons and your daughters. If you succeed in passing through these trials and afflictions and receive a resurrection, you will, by the power of the Priesthood, work and labor, as the Son of God has, until you get all your sons and daughters in the path of exaltation and glory. . . . Therefore, mourn not because all your sons and daughters do not follow in the path that you have marked out to them, or give heed to your counsels. Inasmuch as we succeed in securing eternal glory, and stand as saviors, and as kings and priests to our God, we will save our posterity.¹²

¹¹ Boyd K. Packer, "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *ENSIGN* (November 1995): 20–21, quoting Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 442; emphasis added)

¹² Brian H. Stuy, comp. and ed., *Collected Discourses* (Burbank, Calif.: B. H. S. Publishing, 1989), 3:364; emphasis added.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "When a seal is put upon the father and mother, it secures their posterity, so that they cannot be lost, but will be saved by virtue of the covenant of their father and mother."¹³ Elder Boyd K. Packer quoted the Prophet Joseph and expanded on this principle: "We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the standards of worthiness required of them. When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them."¹⁴ Packer also quoted Orson F. Whitney concerning loved ones who stray:

Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.¹⁵

Our ancestor and patriarch Joseph who was sold into Egypt was the model for us as he sanctified himself to have a sanctifying influence on his very troubled family and, like his Savior, exercised a saving power on his brethren.

President Harold B. Lee taught: "You have been blessed to have a physical body because of your obedience to certain commandments in that premortal state. You are now born into a family to which you have come, into the nations through which you have come, as a reward for the kind of lives you lived before you came here and at a time in the world's history, as the Apostle Paul taught the men of Athens [Acts 17:26] and as the Lord revealed to Moses, determined by the faithfulness of each of those who lived before this world was created."¹⁶

¹³ *Teachings of the Prophet*, 321; *Words of Joseph Smith*, 242.

¹⁴ *Conference Report* (April 1992): 94–95.

¹⁵ Boyd K. Packer, "Our Moral Environment," *Ensign* (May 1992): 68, quoting Whitney, *Conference Report* (April 1929): 110; see also Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:215.

¹⁶ Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report* (5 October 1973): 7.

We want to take care with such a quote as this not to think that if a person didn't come to a good family, it was because he or she was not good in the premortal world. That would be a mistaken conclusion. Carlfred Broderick teaches that the Lord may assign a valiant spirit to a troubled family in order to bring salvation to that family:

Children need not merely replicate the sins of their fathers, but that each generation is held accountable for its own choices [Ezekiel 18:2-4].

Indeed, my experience in various church callings and in my profession as a family therapist has convinced me that God actively intervenes in some destructive lineages, assigning a valiant spirit to break the chain of destructiveness in such families. Although these children may suffer innocently as victims of violence, neglect, and exploitation, through the grace of God some find the strength to "metabolize" the poison within themselves, refusing to pass it on to future generations. Before them were generations of destructive pain; after them the line flows clear and pure. Their children and children's children will call them blessed.

In suffering innocently that others might not suffer, such persons, in some degree, become as "saviors on Mount Zion" by helping to bring salvation to a lineage. . . .

Others of us may be, ourselves, the suffering messengers of light. Let us be true to our divine commission, forgoing bitterness and following in our Savior's footsteps.¹⁷

We see another variation as well, namely, that God may place spiritually challenging children in homes of spiritual and conscientious parents for their mutual benefit. President Spencer W. Kimball quoted these lines:

It is said that the very hairs of your head are all numbered; is it not to teach us that nothing, not the smallest things imaginable, happen to us by chance? But if the smallest things we can conceive of are declared to be under the divine direction, need we, or can we, be more plainly taught that the greatest things of life, such as the manner of our coming into the world, our parents, the time, and other circumstances of our birth and condition, are all according to the eternal purposes, direction, and appointment of divine Providence?¹⁸

It seems appropriate at this point, with respect to a discussion of fathers and children, to quote Moroni's version of Malachi and ask who the fathers

¹⁷ Carlfred Broderick, "I Have a Question," *ENSIGN* (August 1986): 38-9.

¹⁸ "Small Acts of Service," *ENSIGN* (December 1974): 5, quoting William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Sovereign Grace, 1971).

might be in the statements on fathers and children: "Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet. . . . And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming" (Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39). Why would it be wasted? Because the great premortal arrangements for the eternal sealing of loved ones to each other and to the Gods would not be realized if our hearts did not turn us to fulfill the premortal promises made among the fathers and children leading to the eternal sealing of these people. It was for this purpose that the earth was created, and without those sealings, the earth's purpose would be for nothing. Doctrine and Covenants 84:99 exclaims: "The Lord hath brought again Zion; The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel / According to the election of grace / Which was brought to pass by the faith / And covenant of their fathers."

Joseph Smith, quoting the apostle Paul, after quoting Malachi, said: "The earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children. . . . It is baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect" (D&C 128:18).

Elder McConkie said, with respect to the fathers:

He shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers." That immediately raises the questions: Who are the *children*, who are the *fathers*, and what are the *promises*? If we can catch a vision from the doctrinal standpoint that answers those questions—who the fathers are, who the children are, and what the promises were—we can have our understanding of the gospel and our comprehension of the plan of salvation expanded infinitely. We shall then catch a vision of what the whole system of salvation is all about. Until we do that, really, we never catch that vision.¹⁹

Elder McConkie identifies 'the fathers' as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of the house of Israel on the earth. The promises have to do with the Abrahamic Covenant, which is the premortal covenant of godhood, named

after Abraham because he would be one of the fathers of that great lineage. But perhaps the term *fathers* also refers to those fathers who reach far back into the premortal past where they were prepared to come forth, saying in effect to their Heavenly Father, "I will go down and keep thy commandments and bring these others with me into thy rest."

D&C 138 describes further the great scope of this salvation work. After naming some of the noble and great ones of this dispensation—Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and other choice spirits reserved for the latter-day work—President Smith's vision continues with these words:

I observed that they were also among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God.

Even before they were born, they, with many others, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men.

I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead. (D&C 138:55–57)

An earlier passage teaches that after the righteous are resurrected and enter into the Father's kingdom, they "continue thenceforth their labor as had been promised by the Lord, and [are] partakers of all blessings which were held in reserve for them that love him" (D&C 138:52). It appears that our work will continue for the salvation of men after our resurrection and, with our own spirit posterity, will grow infinitely greater.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this about great priesthood holders who have gone on into the spirit world and, in connection with these fathers, gives an interesting interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed:

These men are in heaven, but their children are on the earth. Their bowels yearn over us. God sends down men for this reason. 'And the Son of Man shall send forth His angels. . . .' All

¹⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, "Promises Made to the Fathers," in *Genesis to 2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *Studies in Scripture*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 3:51–52.

these authoritative characters will come down and join hand in hand in bringing about this work.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. The mustard seed is small, but brings forth a large tree, and the fowls lodge in the branches. The fowls are the angels. Thus angels come down, combine together to gather their children, and gather them. We cannot be made perfect without them, nor they without us.²⁰

In another place, the Prophet Joseph taught, "The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith."²¹

President Joseph F. Smith, himself a man of deep family feeling, also taught on the feelings of the departed spirits and their nearness to us:

Sometimes the Lord expands our vision from this point of view and this side of the veil, that we feel and seem to realize that we can look beyond the thin veil which separates us from that other sphere. If we can see, by the enlightening influence of the Spirit of God and through the words that have been spoken by the holy prophets of God, beyond the veil that separates us from the spirit world, surely those who have passed beyond, can see more clearly through the veil back here to us than it is possible for us to see them from our sphere of action. I believe we move and have our being in the presence of heavenly messengers and of heavenly beings. We are not separated from them. We begin to realize more and more fully, as we become acquainted with the principles of the gospel, as they have been revealed anew in this dispensation, that we are closely related to our kindred, to our ancestors, to our friends and associates and co-laborers who have preceded us into the spirit world. We cannot forget them; we do not cease to love them; we always hold them in our hearts, in memory, and thus we are associated and united to them by ties we cannot break. . . . [They] can see us better than we can see them— . . . they know us better than we know them. They have advanced; we are advancing; we are growing as they have grown; we are reaching the goal that they have attained unto; and therefore, I claim that we live in their presence, they see us, they are solicitous for our welfare, they love us now more than ever.²²

²⁰ *Teachings of the Prophet*, 159.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 326.

²² *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 430–31.

Who were others of the fathers prepared in the premortal world to this holy order who have descended to earth, performed their labors faithfully here, and returned to the world beyond where they continue to labor in our behalf? The scriptures mention Adam, Enoch, Melchizedek (whom Alma mentions in Alma 13), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nephi (several of them), Jacob, Alma the Elder, and Alma the Younger, and many others whom, if we had all the records, we could name right down to the present day. These men sanctified themselves to have power to lead others to sanctification. Alma describes the nature of sanctification:

Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;

Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:10–12)

But turning attention once again to the younger Alma before his redemption, we see this same principle of the parents' personal sanctification exerting a saving influence on the son. The younger Alma had spent many years in this middle world in spiritual darkness before he knew who he was. The account of his redemption from spiritual death may really begin with an incident in his father's life. The elder Alma received from King Mosiah the responsibility of judging the rising generation of unbelievers, among whom were his own son and the sons of the king. After pouring out his whole soul to God, fearing that he should do wrong in the sight of God, the Lord's voice came to Alma the Elder (Mosiah 26:19–20) revealing this magnificent principle and promise: "Because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed. Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep." With this promise of eternal life,

Alma the Elder's power to draw down appropriate grace from his Heavenly Father became very great. His prayers and those of King Mosiah bring an angel to these rebellious sons, and you know the rest of that story. Later, this redeemed younger Alma will exert this same saving influence over his erring missionary son, Corianton.

We want to bring this, at the last, to a personal level. This principle of the premortal house of Israel being arranged in saving relationships helps us to look at all our relationships and ask, What are my covenants with respect to the redemption of these people, and how can I fulfill them? What do I need to do now? The question asked with an honest heart will bring not only answers, but power, from the great Redeemer himself. Answers will extend not only to family members, but to the Laurels in one's Young Women's class, to those one home teaches, to a business associate, and so on. We know enough to know that no one in our lives is there by accident.

With respect to troubled family members, we can imagine that both King Mosiah and Alma the Elder suffered over the prolonged rebellion of their sons. When we face similar situations, consolation may come when we remember that life does not end with physical death. When our efforts in this life do not yield the redemption of a loved one, often the only labor that a person can engage in on behalf of his or her loved one is to persist in the personal sanctifying process. Sometimes the most miraculous things happen in relationships as that personal sanctification process goes forward.

But it is also important to remember that at times our own worthiness is not the immediate issue. In all these matters of saving souls, we are dependent on the timetable and the will and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, who does all things well. Nevertheless, consider what Mormon counsels his son Moroni in this holy order work: "And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God" (Moroni 9:6).

Some closing words from the younger Alma reveal the true spirit behind this holy order:

I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors;

For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God. (Alma 36:23–26)

The First Presidency's proclamation on the family makes this statement: "The family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."²³ Once we know what we're up to here on earth, we can focus on what is really important. All the activities of men are designed, not as ends in themselves, but as means of getting people together so that they can have a saving influence on each other. When we know that that work is more important than any other, we'll know what it is we are to pay attention to during the minutes and hours of our telestial lives, and at the same time, we'll know what we can patiently hope for.

It is helpful to remember that the earth and the very lives we live upon the earth were created for entirely spiritual purposes. It may be that, among the most enlightened beings, the power to bless is the most coveted power. May we take a long-range view, both with our erring loved ones and with ourselves as we fall so short of all that we wish to be, keeping in our hearts this quote from Elder Orson F. Whitney:

They have strayed in ignorance from the Path of Right, and God is merciful to ignorance. Only the fulness of knowledge brings the fulness of accountability. Our Heavenly Father is far more merciful, infinitely more charitable than even the best of

²³ "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *ENSIGN* (November 1995): 102; emphasis added; see also *Church News* (24 September 1995).

his servants, and the Everlasting Gospel is mightier in power to save than our narrow finite minds can comprehend.²⁴

May we seek to enlarge on and to extend this power in all our associations.

²⁴ Orson F. Whitney, *Conference Report* (April 1929): 110–11.

Alma the Younger

Man's Descent (Part 2)*

M. Catherine Thomas

The account of Alma's life in the Book of Mormon begins with his description as a wicked and idolatrous man who went about trying to destroy the church of God (Mosiah 26, 27). But after the angel's visit, we witness Alma's rapid ascent from spiritual darkness to spiritual power and to the holy order of God. We read his discourses, which span the great doctrines of the kingdom, discourses delivered by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. The account of Alma's life ends in Alma 45 with his being "taken up by the Spirit" even as Moses (Alma 45:19). We understand from this verse that Alma was translated in order that he might extend the work of redemption on the earth.

Perhaps among all the important things that one could learn from Alma, the account of his life gives us hope that there is a mighty power that can take a lost and fallen person and work a miraculous transformation. As one who has been redeemed, Alma can teach about the process of redemption and strengthen our faith that if we learn to work the principles that he did, we too can be born again and experience the joy promised in the scriptures, no matter who or what we have been.

Alma teaches a series of truths that are mysteries to the natural man pertaining to the Fall and to man's relationship to the Holy Spirit and to the evil spirit. I'd like to consider a few of those here.

I. Alma 12:22 *By [Adam's fall] all mankind became a lost and fallen people.*

Because of the Fall, we are deeply fallen and reduced in power and spirit from our premortal life. For the most part, we are blind and deaf people in the midst of forces and conditions we do not perceive. Spiritual influences from the great cosmic ocean wash upon the shores of our souls seeking access to our spirits, but we are like babes, who, lying in their cradles, are immersed in stimuli that they cannot distinguish or make sense of. But in time, motivated by various hungers, infants learn the meaning of these physical sights and sounds and sensations. So we, maturing spiritually, learn to perceive that which lies just beyond our physical senses.

*The presenter used this script in making her presentation. It has been provided in lieu of a transcript.

We learn that we live in a world in which we have access to two dimensions: that physical dimension, which our puny five senses perceive, and that spiritual dimension, which flourishes beyond our physical senses and is perceived only by an internal spiritual faculty, a sense that we only barely understand. In the physical dimension, we can describe something of the vibration of the tympanic membrane in human hearing, but we do not know the physiology of the Spirit. We came to earth to develop this spiritual faculty in order to access knowledge of the unseen.

Earth life is designed to create hungers that motivate us to develop the tools by which the unseen world of spiritual realities and joys are retrieved. The deprivations of the Fall were deliberate and meant to be deeply felt to create the felt need for redemption. One's distress would create the desire to escape the Fall and reach out for the Savior.

Alma teaches about this hunger of the fallen person in Alma 37, drawing an analogy between Lehi's journey through the wilderness and man's spiritual hunger. When Lehi's family were diligent and exercised faith, heed, and diligence, their spiritual compass worked for them, and they not only had direction, but they also had many other miracles wrought by the power of God, even day by day. Nevertheless, because the means of accessing spiritual powers seemed small, they got lazy and forgot to exercise these seemingly small means. Alma wrote, "Then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with *hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions* (Alma 37:41-42). The hunger and thirst are symbolic of the spiritual and emotional hungers and thirst that the Fall has created. There are many ways that people try to satisfy these hungers of fallenness but only one way that these hungers are truly satisfied.

II. The Holy Ghost is the key to the satisfaction of these hungers in the fallen man.

In every department of knowledge, the seeker for truth must choose his tools with reference to the field to be explored. Just as the astronomer must use a telescope or the physicist, the electron microscope, so the Holy Spirit is the communicating agent for the unseen world. An individual must be properly

prepared and tuned if he is to receive and to comprehend spiritual truth.¹ Elder John Widstoe wrote:

When a person does fit and qualify himself, spiritual messages, waiting to be revealed, come to him. Then, and only then, is spiritual knowledge quickened into living comprehension leading to activity. When there is such correspondence between an individual and the spiritual world, the real joy of life appears. Otherwise, something is missing from our daily desire. We live incompletely. . . .

Is it difficult to . . . qualify oneself spiritually? Nothing is easier or more enjoyable. When there is harmony between the instrument and the pounding message [of the Spirit], there is joy in the heart. The world's confusion roots in discord, lack of harmony. To be out of focus or to live in the midst of static is to be in semi-darkness and chaos. . . .

All who yield . . . obedience to God's law undergo a real transformation, by the Holy Ghost, which enables them more and more, to receive and understand spiritual messages. Unless that transformation is accomplished, a person is opaque to spiritual truth, and the "things of God" are beyond his understanding.

Great is the effect of such spiritual communication. . . . It transforms life. It makes the weak strong, the strong mightier. . . . The individual becomes filled with light as the incandescent lamp when the electric current passes through it. . . . All will be aided in their life pursuits if they have contact with the inexhaustible intelligence of the spiritual realm. The wealth of eternity will be theirs. They who do not seek to make themselves receivers of spiritual messages, but thrash about for such truth as their unaided powers may reveal, do not learn the meaning and destiny of life, and fail to win the vision of the glory of the universe in which we live.²

As a person's fallen condition becomes apparent to him through the influence of the Holy Spirit, a person can get stuck in a kind of spiritual twilight between spiritual darkness and that full light available in Christ. For many Latter-day Saints, this spiritual twilight can be an unnecessarily prolonged experience. This twilight zone is a transition state between having recognized one's fallenness but not yet reaching to the solution. It is an attempt to accommodate the world with the gospel. This is a state of hunger and bondage—not total darkness, but hunger for something indefinable. We can recognize it in ourselves when our souls cry out, "Is this all there is to the gospel? Can't I feel a richer inner experience?" We can get stuck in this twilight because we are doing some things right, we are going through some

¹ See John A. Widstoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 85.

² *Ibid.*, 87–8.

motions, we are feeling occasional Spirit, we seem to be on the path; but still, there's that nagging hunger in the heart that doesn't know what it wants. People try lots of things to assuage the hunger. Alma preaches against the pursuit of the vain things of the world (see Alma 4:8): riches, power, gain, mocking one's brother, costly apparel (see Alma 4:6; 5:53), elevating oneself above others—perhaps all in the attempt to fill the hunger inside, but counterproductive where happiness and being born again are concerned.

Thus we sometimes find ourselves half in and half out of the will of God. That half-and-half state is precisely the problem and the source of our hunger. The hunger comes from the need for the most powerful nutrient a fallen human can receive: the Spirit of the Lord, the indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the healing word of God, godliness itself. The Fall creates the hunger. Perhaps the most characteristic state of fallen man is the hunger and the feeling of darkness or spiritual twilight. Many people experience only the hunger for their entire lives.

Acknowledging this hunger of aspiring disciples—who get stuck in the spiritual twilight—the Lord said, “Blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst *after righteousness*, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6, italics added), with that power that conveys the inner presence, love, and nourishing will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Alma teaches that the seed of the Spirit must be nourished with diligence and patience and obedience; it is most precious, sweet, white, pure, “and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (Alma 32:42). This fruit can so fill the soul with the joy in Christ that Alma promises: “And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do *if ye will*” (Alma 33:23; italics added).

The purposes of this life pertain to the development of spiritual faculties. Contrary to Korihor's contention that one cannot know what one does not see (Alma 30:15), one can come into possession of a reality that far exceeds in power and splendor the world that is perceived by the physical senses and the finite mind. Alma himself testified:

Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me (Alma 5:45-46).

The greatest mystery to the fallen and natural man (Mosiah 3:19) is that he is spiritually dead. What does 'spiritually dead' mean? It means that a person is asleep to spiritual realities, unable to perceive the cosmic forces in which he or she is immersed. We struggle in spiritual bondage that we don't begin to know the nature of and from which we cannot extricate ourselves; we are in bondage to our spiritual ignorance, because forces of evil play upon us and we are helpless against them.

Alma relates the sleep of spiritual death to bondage (Alma 5:5), speaking to the Nephites of their fathers:

Behold, [God] changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them. . . .

And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved (Alma 5:7, 9).

II Mystery: This spiritual sleep in man's descent is by divine design. Alma himself went through a period of dark descent; he was described as a very wicked man. The apostle Paul, a character similar to Alma in his personal history, sheds some light on the idea of the descent. In Romans, he writes to the Gentiles that they had better not gloat over their becoming the elect and the Jews being cast off, because God is orchestrating the whole business for His purposes and one day will draw the Jews back into the fold of the elect. Paul writes: "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all" (Romans 11:32).

The Jerusalem Bible translation reads more faithfully to the Greek: "God has imprisoned all men in their own disobedience only to show mercy to all mankind." What does this mean that God imprisoned Alma and Paul and you and me in disobedience? Brigham Young said: "I . . . praise God in the highest for his great wisdom and condescension in suffering the children of men to fall into the very sin

into which they had fallen, for he did it that they, like Jesus, might descend below all things and then press forward and rise above all."³

Some observations about this descent of man:

1. God knew we would arrive in a fallen world with no memory, no knowledge, and no power to make our way successfully alone, and that at first we would not perceive our true fallen condition. The Gods designed that upon arrival in mortality, as babies and children, we would begin to make choices before we had much knowledge or judgment or ability to choose right over wrong consistently and would inevitably make mistakes and sin, even though we had the light of Christ to some degree. As we grew in a fallen environment, we would form wrong opinions and make false assumptions, by which we would then govern our lives, and would unwittingly be programmed by many precepts of men. We would make many choices before we had grasped the significance of even the Light that we had. Many would reach an advanced age before they really saw the Light. Some would never see it in this life.

The period of descent was surely seen by the righteous premortal spirits as a great sacrifice. The most righteous did not want to sin. They knew the truth about sin. A veil was necessary so that they would make the descent, as Alma did, into spiritual darkness. And yet the experiences of making mistakes, of being subject to sin, were essential in coming to *know* evil. It would seem that we had to do evil to know evil—for a limited time.⁴ It seems that we also had to experience evil done to us. Descent into disobedience and evil is part of the divine design that man might understand redemption from his own desperate and felt need for it. Apparently we must experience redemption as part of receiving the increasing power to redeem. Last hour we spoke of the premortal organization of the holy order, those who would, in assisting the Savior in the great cause of the redemption of mankind, become of the order of Christ himself. The Lord Jesus Christ, as Alma taught, had to suffer the whole spectrum of possible suffering in order to be able to succor his people in their suffering (Alma 7:11–13). If he did, then so must we.

³ *Journal of Discourses* (11 July 1869),13:145.

⁴ In the Savior's case, he experienced the *consequences* of evil and sin without committing sin.

2. A peripheral idea: As part of the covenant people's descent, occasional withdrawal of the Spirit from an individual is part of the tutorial of earth life. An ebb and flow of the Spirit sometimes seems to have little to do with our current spiritual strivings or worthiness. That means we aspiring disciples may have to expect days, or even longer periods of time, when we feel the emptiness left by the Spirit's withdrawal. We do not feel that vital quickening of the Spirit. These become periods of hanging on. We just have to endure hanging-on days. This ebb and flow is important to know about lest we become too discouraged in our discipleship during these periods of withdrawal of the Spirit. Elder Neal Maxwell wrote: "If everything in one's immediate context were constantly clear, God's plan would not work. Hard choices as well as passing through periodic mists of darkness are needed in order to maintain life's basic reality—that we are to overcome by faith."⁵

Brigham Young was apparently asked, "Why are [we] left alone and often sad?" His response was that man has to learn to "act as an independent being . . . to see what he will do . . . to practice him . . . to be righteous in the dark—to be the friend of God."⁶ . . . On another occasion, President Young called for us to be faithful even if circumstances are 'darker than 10,000 midnights' " (*Journal of Discourses* (17 February 1856), 3:207).⁷

Obviously, God can withdraw grace from a group or an individual and he can give grace. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). He does this to accomplish his divine purposes; we know he does nothing save it be for the benefit of the world (2 Nephi 26:24). But something we can probably never calculate, unless it is given to us by revelation, is how much grace is being given or being withheld from a person, even ourselves. All we can do is the best we can do, lending support and tolerance and compassion to one another. Unless one has inspiration, one cannot tell what the Lord is up to in another person's life. We just have to look at each person compassionately, knowing that the Lord isn't done with him or her yet, nor is He done with us yet.

These are the kinds of bondages we suffer in this fallen world. Probably most references in the Book of Mormon to bondage, of whatever kind, are figures of this

⁵ Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 110–11.

⁶ Neal A. Maxwell, *That They May Believe*, 194–5.

great bondage of the Fall, of the descent of man, from which none could be delivered except by the power in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Part of man's earthly tutorial seems to be that he be brought to see his true condition, develop a deep desire to be delivered from it—seeing sin as the greatest enemy to his happiness—feel keenly his own inability to deliver himself after repeated tries, and finally in abject humility come to taste the grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:20–21). That is, the divine design made sin possible so that grace could abound to man to deliver man from sin. But in Paul's words, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:1–2). Once the Lord comes for us in the midst of our descent, we are accountable for the knowledge that he imparts. We must ascend. As Joseph Smith taught, "When God offers a blessing or knowledge to a man, and he refuses to receive it, he will be damned."⁸

Would it be true to say that it was so important for us to experience personally the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and the process of redemption that the earth experience was constructed in part that we might have something from which he could deliver us? Yes, and in the process we might become as merciful as Christ himself.

Our mortal existence is a school of experience.⁹

We know the design of our Father in Heaven in creating the earth and in peopling it, and bringing forth the myriads of organizations which dwell upon it. We know that all this is for his glory—to swell the eternities that are before him with intelligent beings who are capable of enjoying the height of glory. But, before we can come in possession of this, we need large experience, and its acquisition is a slow process. Our lives here are for the purpose of acquiring this, and the longer we live the greater it should be.¹⁰

How patient we must be with the slow process, yet how diligent.

⁷ Ibid., 194–5.

⁸ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 322.

⁹ *Journal of Discourses* (25 May 1862), 9:292.

¹⁰ *Journal of Discourses* (16 September 1871), 14:229.

III Mystery: The Holy Spirit is the key to happiness. Withdrawal of Spirit produces pain.

Alma expressed the power of happiness in the Spirit of the Lord that he experienced at his rebirth:

But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to *taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost* (Alma 36:23–24; italics added)

Contrast that joy in the Spirit with its withdrawal, as described in Doctrine and Covenants 19:20:

Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.

It appears that enlightened beings exist on a sliding scale of Spirit and that the direction a person is sliding with respect to the Spirit determines the degree of his or her happiness. Alma taught:

He that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until is it given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

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

... If our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned. (Alma 12:10–11, 13)

It is clear that the knowledge to get the Spirit is the most valuable knowledge that can be offered to a person, or that he can implement to affect his total well-being.

Thus man is moving either toward exaltation or toward captivity and eventual destruction by the devil. The absence of Holy Spirit is the key to misery; possession of Holy Spirit is the key to joy in this telestial world and to a fulness of joy hereafter. There is no other principle of joy—yet how many ways do we try to circumvent the

Spirit to find joy, only to find emptiness? "Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light" (D&C 93:31).

The prime characteristics of these two spiritual principles—of the good Spirit and the evil spirit—are that the evil powers wish to subject the spirits of men to themselves in order to have power over them and to drag them down to misery and destruction. The Gods, on the other hand, seek to empower the spirits of men to become like them and to possess a fulness of everlasting happiness. These two underlying principles of existence shape the channels in which life will flow either to its elaboration and enhancement or to its diminishing. Brigham Young said: "Righteousness tends to an eternal duration of organized intelligence, while sin bringeth to pass their dissolution."¹¹

IV Mystery: Satan is the Enemy—and a subtle one. Satan takes away light and truth by seducing a person into disobedience (see D&C 93:39). He is very subtle, because he does not want to be detected as separate from the person he is seducing. If a person could detect Satan, he or she would have greater power to withstand the evil spirit. It seems that we are never alone. There are spiritual influences playing around us continually; therefore, Alma warns those who would enter into the holy order after the Son of God:

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

Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest. (Alma 13:28–29)

It is interesting that Alma mentions humility, patience, and love as the spiritual tools of resistance to Satan.

How important it is for us to know that the spirits who followed Satan in the great rebellion in Heaven got here before even Adam and Eve and are still here. What are they doing? They are influencing you and me. They dwell in the hearts of the children of men (see Mosiah 3:6). We are their victims until we learn to discern

¹¹ *Journal of Discourses* (6 October 1863), 10:251.

what is of God from what is not of God. There are only two options and only two voices, as Alma teaches:

Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; . . . and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, . . . ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold. (Alma 5:38–39)

That is, if we are not deliberately and consciously cultivating the Holy Ghost as our constant shepherd, we may know for a surety that we are unwittingly taking signals from the adversary and reaping the wages of service to him.

G. Q. Cannon gave instruction on reasons to be spiritually vigilant:

We are apt to forget the principles of truth and righteousness, and to give way to influences that are not of God. We are placed in this existence for the express purpose of learning to overcome all these things. One of the great objects . . . which God has in view in sending us here upon the earth, is to give us experience in the influences of the earth that we may contend with them successfully and overcome them, that when we pass beyond the veil we may be in a position to comprehend them to a greater extent than we could had we not come here and felt the influences to which human nature is subject. . . . We . . . do not sufficiently realize the importance of keeping guard upon ourselves, and upon our feelings, and of resisting the influences that surround us. . . .

There are spirits in the atmosphere that are filled with [evil] disposition, and who seek to influence those with whom they are brought in contact, impressing those who are in the tabernacle of flesh to indulge in the same sin.

There are influences in the atmosphere that are invisible to us that, while we are here upon the earth, we ought to resist with all our might, mind, and strength—influences which, if we would be led by them, would lead us to destruction—influences that are opposed to the Spirit of God. . . . If our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, we should feel differently on this subject than we do; we would not be so unguarded and careless, and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not; but we would be continually watchful and prayerful to our heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit and His holy angels to be around about us to strengthen us to overcome every evil influence. . . .

The adversary has numerous agencies at his command, and he seeks to control and lead to destruction the inhabitants of the earth who will be subject to them. If we could see with our spiritual senses as we now see with our natural senses, we should be greatly shocked at the sight of the influences that prompt us to disobey the counsels of God or the Spirit of the Lord in our hearts. But we cannot see them, for they are spiritually discerned; and he who discerns the most [evil spirits], is the

most fully impressed by the Spirit of God; he who does not discern, has not profited by the instructions given to him, and yields to those evil influences in an unguarded moment, and is taken captive in his blindness. He who is imbued with the Spirit of God is sensibly aware when the evil power approaches; but he does not welcome it to his bosom; he resists it with all the might and strength God has given unto him, and he obtains power over it, and it no more troubles him; if it does, its influence is more weakened than previously.¹²

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that God gave us bodies to help us protect ourselves against the forces of evil and to triumph over evil and that having learned to discern and resist evil is essential to salvation. He said: "The Principle of Salvation is given to us through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Salvation is nothing more or less than to triumph over all our enemies & put them under our feet & when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world & a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come then we are saved."¹³

"If you wish to go where God is you must be like god or possess the principles which God possesses for if we are not drawing towards God in principle we are going from him & drawing towards the devil. . . . A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge for if he does not get knowledge he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world as evil spirits will have more knowledge & consequently more power than many men who are on the earth."¹⁴

"In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because he has greater Knowledge, and hence he knows how to subject all other beings to him."¹⁵

With respect to the tools of love against the adversary, Brigham Young sharpens our sensitivity as to what actually constitutes evil. He said:

There are thousands of plans which the enemy of all righteousness employs to decoy the hearts of the people away from righteousness. . . .

Some say "Brother Brigham, you slide along and the devil lets you alone." If I have battles with him, I can overcome him single handed quicker than to call in my neighbours to help me. If I am tempted to speak an evil word, I will keep my lips locked together. Says one, "I do not know about that, that would be smothering up bad feelings, I am

¹² George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses* (13 November 1864), 11:29–30.

¹³ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 200; from Wilford Woodruff Journal (14 May 1843).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113–4; from Wilford Woodruff Journal (10 April 1842).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183; from William Clayton Report (8 April 1843).

wonderfully tried about my neighbour, he has done wrong, he has abused me and I feel dreadful bad about it. Had I not better let it out than to keep it rankling within me?" No. I will keep bad feelings under and actually smother them to death, then they are gone. But as sure as I let them out they will live and afflict me. If I smother them in myself, if I actually choke them to death, destroy the life, the power, and vigor thereof, they will pass off and leave me clear of fault, and pure, . . . and no man or woman on earth knows that I have ever been tempted to indulge in wicked feelings. . . .

If you feel evil, keep it to yourselves until you overcome that evil principle. This is what I call resisting the devil, and he flees from me. . . .¹⁶

While we have the privilege of speaking to each other, let us speak words of comfort and consolation. When you are influenced by the Spirit of holiness and purity, let your light shine; but if you are tried and tempted and buffeted by Satan, keep your thoughts to yourselves—keep your mouths closed; for *speaking produces fruit, either of a good or evil character.*

If persons think they have greater sorrow and affliction than any others, when they reveal that sorrow and affliction, it produces fruit. You frequently hear brethren and sisters say that they feel so tried and tempted, and have so many cares, and are so buffeted, that they must give vent to their feelings; and they yield to the temptation, and deal out their unpleasant sensations to their families and neighbours. Make up your minds thoroughly, once for all, that if we have trials, the Lord has suffered them to be brought upon us, and he will give us grace to bear them; and that they do not concern our families, friends, and neighbours, we can bear them off alone. But if we have light or intelligence—that which will do good, we will impart it. . . . Let that be the determination of every individual, for spirit begets spirit—likeness, likeness; *feelings beget their likeness.* . . . If, then, we give vent to all our bad feelings and disagreeable sensations, how quickly we beget the same in others, and load each other down with our troubles, and become sunk in darkness and despair! . . .

In all your social communications . . . let all the dark, discontented, murmuring, unhappy, miserable feelings—all the evil fruit of the mind, fall from the tree in silence and unnoticed; and so let it perish, without taking it up to present to your neighbours. But when you have joy and happiness, light and intelligence, truth and virtue, offer that fruit abundantly to your neighbours, and it will do them good, and so strengthen the hands of your fellow-beings.¹⁷

President Young's advice might seem to fly in the face of current theories about man's emotional well-being, but it may be that voices of the adversary have taken advantage of our spiritual ignorance and have slowly programmed us to think and

¹⁶ *Journal of Discourses* (27 January 1856), 3:194–5.

¹⁷ *Journal of Discourses* (6 October 1859), 7:268–9; emphasis added.

feel in certain ways that create our emptiness and hunger. We need to know that by ourselves we cannot entirely undo that programming, but the power of Christ can. Deep in the dungeon of our earthly descent, we can turn our minds to Christ, as Alma did:

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

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

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

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! (Alma 36:17–21)

By contrast, read Alma 36:26–27:

For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God.

And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.

That which we exercise mentally and spiritually grows, develops, and strengthens. That which receives attention in our minds has great power. That which we neglect will soon lose power and be extinguished inside and will ultimately cease to bother.

I have described various aspects of the fallen condition of man and his descent to earth after the pattern of Alma the Younger. Knowing about the divine design behind man's descent helps me to exercise faith in the Lord's great power to cleanse and redeem me and at the same time, helps me to be merciful to those around me who are in the same dilemma I am in.

In the midst of our earthly descents, we can ask for and receive the sublime, divine, enabling power of Christ to change our hearts and to make it possible for us feast on his love, which is joy. Our earnest pleadings and mighty prayers—with

sincere hearts, real intent, and faith in Christ—will unlock the gates of heaven to us (see Moroni 10:4–5; 32–33). Alma teaches the principle in Alma 33:11, 16:

Thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments [i.e., effects of the Fall] away from me, because of thy Son.

For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.

Glory to God in the highest for these principles of light and truth, which I can testify to you that I know—independent of any other person, by my own experience—are true.