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## Introduction

suggestions for reading, meditation, and prayer



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for the means and ends of our scripture readings and ponder questions.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by what I call "questionary," questions for meditation with brief comments. The questions are often such that they contain a sort of commentary as they lead the reader toward specific insights. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following general questions to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site found on the site's home page

- ? What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- ? How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- ? What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- ? How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- ? Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- ? How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- ? How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- ? What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- ? How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder and meditate on every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful meditation and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader

to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and meditation experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and meditated the day's passage. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and meditation into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

### dc 3.<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught. <sup>2</sup>For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round. <sup>3</sup>Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men; <sup>4</sup>for although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him.

### **m**editation

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It is more than useful, it is necessary for us to apply scripture to ourselves. In doing so, we must, at the same time, read scripture within its original historical, cultural, and literary context. The third section of the Doctrine and Covenants contains as good an example of the importance of dual reading as any.

The specific historical context for this section is well known. Joseph had been translating the Book of Mormon for a little over two months. In that period, he had, with Martin Harris' assistance as scribe, translated 116 manuscript pages. Both were excited by the work in which they were engaged. Both were excited to have their work known. In his desire to justify the time and effort he was spending with Joseph, Martin wanted to show the manuscript around to his detractors. He asked Joseph permission to do so on several occasions. The Lord, however, forbade it. Finally, with a stern warning to Harris and strict limitations concerning to whom the manuscript was to be shown, the Lord yielded to Harris' request.

Under circumstances that are to this day obscure, the manuscript was lost. Section 3 was given in response to this loss. While we can liken the section to ourselves, it is important to observe that every word uttered was aimed directly at Joseph Smith. When God speaks of the individual who "may have many revelations" and has "power to do many mighty works," he is speaking specifically of Joseph. When he speaks of the individual who "boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires," he is talking about Joseph. When God warns that such an individual "must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him," he is aiming the warning squarely at Joseph.

The loss of the manuscript was a consequence of personal sin and vice. That sin and vice was as much a part of Joseph as it was of Martin. Indeed, Joseph, with the great light, was guilty of the greater sin. It seems important to acknowledge these truths lest we create a false hagiography of Joseph Smith.

However unfortunate the loss of the manuscript pages, the loss was revelatory. It revealed a boastfulness in Joseph. It revealed an exaggerated ego. It revealed an inclination on Joseph's part to ignore God's directions and do as he darn well pleased. Indeed, we will hear in a moment the divine charge that, not unlike ancient Israel who had vexed God from the day they met, Joseph had "suffered the counsel of [his] director to be trampled upon *from the beginning*" (vs. 15). It revealed that Joseph had willfully allowed "carnal desires" to dictate many of his actions.

One wonders if all this revelation, painful though it must have been to Joseph, was far more beneficial to Joseph than the loss of the manuscript pages was unfortunate for him or anyone else. We seem to be doing just fine without whatever the lost manuscript pages contained. But what would have

become of Joseph without this revelation? Joseph would demonstrate throughout his life that he possessed something more than a big ego. He could boarder on tyrannical. How much more so without this experience.

This is not to excuse Joseph's actions. Had he not repented he would have "fallen," presumably rejected as a gospel minister, and suffered under God's vengeance. He could not serve God with these vices masked and denied. With them unmasked and brought to light, he could be on his guard and strive over a lifetime, with varying degrees of success, to check them. In addition, those who followed him would also be on their guard, understanding that he was subject to personal weakness and thus was not to be "trusted in" as God is "trusted in."

We are little more likely to overcome our vices than Joseph. Many of them will be present and accounted for even as we take our final breath. To be ignorant of them is damnation. To be aware of them, to faithfully confess them to God, to struggle against them and ask God to help us keep them in check, and even, once in a while, entirely eliminate one or two of them, this is salvation, or the hope of salvation. God is greater than our sin and vice. If we will acknowledge and strive against them, God's work, his designs, his purposes for us cannot and will not be frustrated.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 3.<sup>5-11</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Behold, you have been entrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises which were made to you, if you did not transgress them. <sup>6</sup>And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. <sup>7</sup>For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—<sup>8</sup>yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble.

<sup>9</sup>Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. <sup>10</sup>But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; <sup>11</sup>except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift.

## Meditation 1

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These verses continue the record of the Lord's response to Joseph's loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. In the opening verses of this response, the Lord indicated that it was not His plans that were frustrated but Joseph's. Joseph's plan in circulating the manuscript, minimal as the circulation was to be by covenant, was done to some extent to "boast in his own strength" But in the manuscript's loss, Joseph was exposed as weak and thus frustrated in his desire to look strong. In circulating the manuscript, Joseph "set at naught the counsels of God, and follow[ed] after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires."

These were serious charges against Joseph, and we know from his mother's history that these charges and the truth they spoke of his character left him feeling deeply sorrowful and depressed. In today's reading, the Lord goes further. This is not the first or second or even third time Joseph has been guilty of defying God's wishes and plans. "How oft," the Lord laments, "you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God."

Years after the events surrounding the lost manuscript and the revelations relating to it,<sup>1</sup> the "school of the prophets" would be taught that "such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that is liable to sin continually." Joseph Smith's personal life is such as to make this utterance less a detached theological proposition than a personal confession, for it applies all too well to the "latter days" first prophet—and, no doubt, to all those who have followed him.

Joseph's "oft" repeated transgressions were in large measure the result of his having "gone on in the persuasions of men." He yielded to the "persuasions of men" because—and, astonishingly, even after intimate experiences he claimed to have had with Divinity—he "feared man more than God."

Joseph's experience in losing the manuscript, the Lord's response to that loss, and what the loss and response teach us about Joseph's character has much to teach all of us. We are reminded that all of us wish to be well thought of and that sometimes our lust for reputation leads us to think more of how others think of us than how God thinks of us. We are reminded of how oft—practically speaking, "continually"—we transgress the "commandments and laws of God." We are also reminded of Paul's counsel that we are "not to think of men above that which is written"<sup>2</sup>—including prophets who are

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<sup>1</sup> See DC 3 and 10

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 4.<sup>6</sup>

“of reputation,”<sup>3</sup> and “seem to be somewhat.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, in all of this we are reminded yet again,

“He that glorieth, let him a glory in the Lord,”<sup>5</sup> for “His name alone is excellent.”<sup>6</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **m**editation 2

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The first eight verses of section 3 are brutal. Joseph is accused of being boastful, lustful, dismissive of God’s directives, dismissive of God’s opinion of him and more interested in what mere mortals think of him. Such character flaws did not simply arise out of a desire to be known for the work of translation in which he was engaged. They had been and were continuous. As a result, God has already taken the plates and the Urim and Thummim from him. If he is not more careful, he will “fall” and “become as other men, and have no more gift” to perpetuity.

Understandably, all this left Joseph anxious, sorrowful, and depressed. Indeed, more was lost, he feared, than a few scraps of paper. ““Oh, my God! All is lost! All is lost!” What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God,” his mother reports him to have lamented. “Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!”<sup>7</sup>

One can imagine, then, the relief and joy Joseph felt upon hearing

“Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord... Repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work.”

But all of this is possible because of who God is, not who Joseph is—however skilled the latter may be at repenting. After all, it is God, not Joseph, who brought the very possibility of repentance into existence. All of this is possible because God throws Joseph the same lifeline that He has thrown so often to so many others.

“But remember, God is merciful.”

Perhaps you do not need to imagine Joseph’s joy at this promise. Perhaps you have felt the same joy when the Lord threw you the same lifeline. Lord knows, scripture has born testimony to God’s merciful nature a thousand times over. The pages of this site are replete with these scripture testimonies. But His mercy, His unshakable fidelity to us, is so expansive—as expansive, by the Psalmist’s lights, as the universe<sup>8</sup>—that we are as inclined to diminish or dismiss it as we are inclined to transgress against him.

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 2.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 2.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 148.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 126-129

<sup>8</sup> see Psalm 103.<sup>10</sup>



“Who could have supposed that God would have been so merciful.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, this inclination to diminish or outright deny God’s expansive mercy in our lives, causes God as much pain as our inclination to transgress.

“Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies.”<sup>10</sup>

To understand God’s mercies can be a labor. For some, it is as great a labor as others find in exercising faith to pay tithing or stop smoking, or any other of the multitudes of commandments we have been given or we have, ourselves, invented. But Joseph seems to have had a near childlike faith in God’s mercy and His willingness to forgive. It’s a good thing, really, for he, like all of us, needed it often. Joseph seems to have understood His mercies. He seems to have understood that this was central to the Divine character. We end with this testimony of God found in the Lectures on Faith, which, if not composed by him, approved of him.

“Unless he was merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, long suffering, and full of goodness, such is the weakness of human nature, and so great the frailties and imperfections of men, that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, the faith necessary to salvation could not exist; for doubt would take the place of faith, and those who know their weakness and liability to sin, would be in constant doubt of salvation, if it were not for the idea which they have of the excellency of the character of God, that he is slow to anger, and long suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression and sin. An idea of these facts does away doubt, and makes faith exceedingly strong.”<sup>11</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

### **m**editation 3

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We often call them “commandments.” God, Himself, using language we understand, so calls them. But we can almost come to think of them as a kind of manufactured test “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”<sup>12</sup> But to think of them and call them “commandments,” “decrees,” “orders,” “laws” is too legalistic. To think of them as tests, examinations is too trivial. We would do well to abandon the language of command and decree and adopt the language of instruction and tutorial—not tutorial for the purpose of testing our willingness to comply, but to prepare us for an enduring and progressive future existence.

Perhaps I should explain what I am getting at and what it has to do with today’s reading.

Some 11 years after Joseph received section 3—the first of two officially recorded Divine responses to Joseph’s loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon (10 being the other)—Joseph found himself a prisoner in a Liberty, Missouri jail, where he penned another section, section 121, of

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<sup>9</sup> Alma 26.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Alma 33.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Lecture Third

<sup>12</sup> Abraham 3.<sup>25</sup>

the Doctrine and Covenants. It is a hodgepodge of anguished petition, comfort, threats, and instruction. Among the instructions, we find this nugget concerning offering “reproof.”

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of a death.”<sup>13</sup>

The application of this instruction to section 3 and Joseph’s experiences surrounding “the lost manuscript” is probably obvious to the reader. Nevertheless, we ask for the reader’s indulgence.

Up to this point in section 3, The Lord has been unsparing in His reproof of Joseph. He has leveled some serious accusations against the young man. The Lord has accused the young man of boasting “in his own strength—most likely relating to the rather heady work of translation in which the semi-literate man was involved. He has accused him of setting “at naught the counsels of God” and following “after the dictates of his own will”—this, specifically in relation to the sharing of the 116 pages. He has accused him of following “carnal desires” as the young man, contrary to all instruction, has continued to think there might be some financial and/or reputational benefit to be found in the gold plates and/or their translation.

But Joseph’s willfulness, the Lord charges, has not been limited to the recent past or matters relating only to the manuscript. Adopting language Joseph understands, the Lord laments the fact that he, Joseph, has “oft... transgressed the commandments and the laws of God.” Indeed, as God will make known momentarily, Joseph has “suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon *from the beginning!*”<sup>14</sup>—if ever a sentence deserved an exclamation mark, this one does.

Finally, though, as we discussed in our previous meditation on these verses, God turns from afflicting the young man to comforting him. All is not lost. God begins His rapprochement by calling Joseph by name, “Thou art Joseph.” Obviously, Joseph knows who he is, though he may be questioning his character. But this naming is a way for God to assure Joseph that He knows him better than he knows himself. That God has called him in spite of his flaws and is prepared to forgive and continue His working relationship with him. Joseph will need to straighten up and fly right—or, at least, better—but the fundamental reason for God’s rapprochement and willingness to engage Joseph in the work once more is God’s own goodness.

“Remember, God is merciful.”

We see, then, God, Himself, “reproving betimes with sharpness... and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love,” just as He will direct His disciples to do eleven years later. God practices what he preaches. Indeed, this is precisely the point of this and every other “commandment.” Every “commandment” contains something in it that is instructive to the character of God. In giving “commandments,” God is revealing the kind of character that is required if individuals are to endure. In this example, only individuals who can reprove and then comfort through love can, themselves, endure, form enduring relationships with others, and, finally abide in an enduring society.

So, we come back to where we started. “Commandments” are about more than testing our compliance or our ability to follow instructions. True “commandments” are instructive. They are revelatory. They teach us of the character of God and how He, Himself, conducts Himself in His relationships with others. They always represent but one of the many means he uses to reveal the sort of character we

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<sup>13</sup> Vs. 43-44

<sup>14</sup> Verse 15

must possess if we are to endure as individuals and as part of an enduring society that is greater than ourselves.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

### dc 3.<sup>12-15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>And when thou deliveredst up that which God had given thee sight and power to translate, thou deliveredst up that which was sacred into the hands of a wicked man, <sup>13</sup>who has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises which were made before God, and has depended upon his own judgment and boasted in his own wisdom. <sup>14</sup>And this is the reason that thou hast lost thy privileges for a season—<sup>15</sup>for thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon from the beginning.

### Meditation

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According to its heading, Joseph Smith penned Section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants in July 1828, shortly after the loss of 116 Book of Mormon manuscript pages. Joseph was 22 years old at the time. It found its way into the *Book of Commandments* published in 1833, when Joseph was 27, and the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, when Joseph was 29. It remained in the 1844 edition of the DC, the last edition approved in Joseph's lifetime. He was 38 years old. It is, of course, still to be found in the current edition of the DC.

Given the extreme criticism that is leveled against Joseph Smith in this section, it might be viewed as something of a miracle that it is still found in the DC today. In Joseph's more mature years—such as they were, for he had not reached middle-age when he died—he became more than a little autocratic and increasingly resistant to criticism. He was surrounded by loyalist that would hear no criticism of their beloved prophet. The generations of Church leaders that have followed have, to put it mildly, been impatient with any accounts of Joseph and his ministry that were anything short of hagiographical—they have been, perhaps, even less patient with any criticism of themselves and their leadership. So, Joseph, his contemporaries, and the leaders who have followed them are to be commended, I suppose, for leaving a section in the DC that paints Joseph in something less than the best of light.

And the section is, as we have seen in previous meditations, anything but complimentary toward Joseph. According to the Lord's critique, Joseph "boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires."<sup>15</sup> All of this in spite of the fact that he has received "many revelations" and had "power to do many mighty works."<sup>16</sup> Further, the Lord laments "*how oft* you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men."<sup>17</sup> In today's passage, we learn that Joseph's transgressing has not only been "oft," but that "thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon *from the beginning*," Joseph doing his fair share of the trampling.

In all of this, we might say that Joseph showed himself to have more than a little bit of "Israelite" in him. As we read of Joseph's "oft" repeated transgressions that started right from the get-go, we can't help but think of the ancient Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, and his characterization of Israel as God knew it.

"Yet my people have forgotten me  
days without number."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Verse 4

<sup>16</sup> Verse 4

<sup>17</sup> Verse 6

<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 2.<sup>32</sup>

“This hath been thy manner from thy youth,  
that thou obeyedst not my voice.”<sup>19</sup>

“We have sinned against the LORD our God,  
we and our fathers,  
from our youth even unto this day,  
and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”<sup>20</sup>

“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day... they  
hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck...”<sup>21</sup>

Like the handful of LDS generations that have allowed DC 3 to speak its truth, the hundreds of generations of editors and translators who have followed Jeremiah are to be congratulated for having left intact such brutally honest commentary concerning a people they love and think of as God’s chosen people. We, who live in a day when criticism of our chosen religious and secular leaders along with criticism of our religious and national history are viewed as signs of disloyalty and pronounced anathema, would do well to take note of this historical boldness and respect for truth—what really was and is—and follow suit.

Even more importantly, we should be faithful enough to acknowledge and confess that almost certainly the same things could be said of us today and will be written of us tomorrow. It is no exaggeration to say that we transgress “oft,” have done since day one, do today, and likely will continue to do until the day we die, however aged we may be on that day.

But, still, God refuses to let this be the final word. If we will face up to the reality of our failures and boldly confess these truths, we will hear, indeed, may hear every single day, these comforting words spoken to that flawed young man of 22,

“But remember, God is merciful.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah 22.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 3.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 7.<sup>25-26</sup>

## dc 3.<sup>16-20</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

## Meditation 1

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It has always struck me so. It is like someone flipped a switch. Turned the page. Entered a new universe. Up to this point, DC 3 has focused unrelentingly on the loss of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript. Or, rather, on Joseph's transgressions that caused the loss—Section 10 will focus more truly on the actual loss and the plans for dealing with that loss. But with verse 16, the subject seems to change—abruptly, it feels—from Joseph and the lost manuscript directly to the Book that Joseph is producing. We could characterize the shift from one of admonition to one of doctrine.

And yet, one might hear admonition in verse sixteen's, "Nevertheless, my work shall go forth"—a warning that notwithstanding Joseph's errors in judgment and behavior, the Book that he has been working on will be brought to light, one way or another, with or without Joseph. He can be part of a marvelous work or not. And even in the doctrine concerning the purposes of the Book, one seems to sense that, perhaps, Joseph has not fully appreciated the importance of the Book. So, the Lord tries to help Joseph understand how vitally important the Book is. Maybe this doctrine will convince Joseph to think more solemnly and act more carefully?

And what of the Book? "Forget about the loss of the manuscript. Forget, Joseph, about all that you have done amiss. Think on the Book. Think of its purposes. Think on the wonders that it is to accomplish!"

As I count them, the Book is to accomplish eight things according to this passage. You might count them differently. That's fine. We are not engaged in science or mathematics. Probably, these eight things I identify are but the tip of the iceberg. But it's early. The Book doesn't even exist at the time of this section's writing. One has to start somewhere, though, and these eight purposes are as good a place to start as any.

In this and the remaining meditations focused on DC 3.<sup>16-20</sup>, we will explore the purposes the Lord had and undoubtedly has in store for the Book of Mormon. As usual, the Lord is not thinking small. He has high hopes for the Book. Joseph will grow in his appreciation of the Book, later calling it "the most correct of any book on earth,"<sup>22</sup> whatever that means. Who knows, perhaps Joseph's growing

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<sup>22</sup> *Book of Mormon*, Introduction

appreciation of the Book began right here, with the instruction concerning the purposes of the Book of Mormon.

There is much to learn here about the Book of Mormon and its purposes. Perhaps it can lead all of us to appreciate the Book a little more and understand the uses to which we might put it in our and other's lives. I have been moved by the voices and testimonies heard in this Book. The Book is not, of course, God any more than the Bible. We do not worship it. But we value it as one of His messengers, standing right there with the Bible. But it is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of whom the Book bears witness that we praise, honor, glorify, and seek to follow.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **m**editation 2

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Joseph lost the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon because, as he had done “from the beginning” and “oft,” he “boasted in his own strength,” “set at naught” and “trampled upon” “the counsels of God,” and “followed after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires.”<sup>23</sup> After a long and stiff rebuke of the young man in verses 1-15, God sets aside His rebuke and turns to the teaching of doctrine in verses 16-20. This doctrine establishes the importance and purposes of the Book of Mormon. In this meditation, we begin looking at the specific purposes of the Book.

Before reviewing these purposes, however, we should note that the Book also has a target audience. The Book is meant, in the first instance, for the descendants of those who wrote the Book in the first place. Simply called, “Lamanites,” elsewhere and often, these descendants are, here, a diverse group composed of “Nephites,” “Jacobites,” “Josephites,” “Lamanites,” “Lemuelites,” and “Ishmaelites.” Every “they” and every “their” in these purpose statements points to the descendants of the Book’s authors and editors.

“that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;  
and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of *their* fathers,  
and that *they* might know the promises of the Lord,  
and that *they* may believe the gospel  
and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,  
and be glorified through faith in his name,  
and that through *their* repentance *they* might be saved. Amen.”

There are eight purposes of the Book of Mormon. But, though it is not presented with the grammar or syntax of purpose as the above are, there is one other purpose. It is the overriding purpose of the Book of Mormon. It is implied in the other seven. But here it is explicitly.

“Inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people...” The “knowledge of the Savior” that comes to the descendants of the Book’s author’s and editors will come through the secondary witness: the Book of Mormon, the Bible being the first.

This purpose statement is consistent with that found on the original title page of the Book. There, in addition to showing “what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers,” and making known “the

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<sup>23</sup> See verses 4, 6, and 15.

covenants of the Lord,” we are informed that the Book is “also to the convincing... that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

The “fathers,” numerous and omnipresent in the text, are not the subject of the Book. Their wonderings, their wars, their highs and lows, their apostasies, their faithfulness... none of these are THE subject of the Book. If there are “great things” done in the Book, they are Christ’s doing. If there are covenants—read promises—made in the Book, they are of Christ’s making. For those who lived and wrote the Book, that most correct of books, Jesus is more than “Christ.” He is not “God the Son.” He is not “*an* Eternal God.” He is “*the* Eternal God.” Jesus Christ is the only God with whom the “fathers” found in the Book had to do.

This then, is the Book’s first purpose. It is to present “knowledge of a Savior,” a Deliverer, an Emancipator, a Redeemer. A God. *The* God. *The Eternal God*. The Eternal God who makes Himself known through His labors with and for and among humankind. The Eternal God who makes and keeps promises.

I am not a descendant of those who wrote the Book of Mormon. I am a white man of European stock. The Book’s authors and editors would call me a “gentile.” The Book did not and does not have me as its primary target. The impact it has had on me seems, almost, an afterthought, an accident of history. Nevertheless, I’ll not complain or feel slighted. The Book has influenced me more than I can say, probably even more than I know. My spiritual hunger is such that I would be grateful even for a few crumbs from the master’s table. But, through that Book, God has given me far, far more than a few crumbs. He has given me the very best the universe has to offer. He has presented Himself. His beautiful, holy, and loving Self. And I, “I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.”<sup>24</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

### **m**editation 3

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*“that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;  
and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,  
and that they might know the promises of the Lord...”*

In verses 1-15 of this third Section of the DC, the Lord addressed Joseph’s deep complicity and guilt in the loss of the 116 manuscript pages. With the sixteenth verse, the Lord turns from admonition to instruction and doctrine. That instruction and doctrine focuses on the purposes of the Book of Mormon. The first purpose, discussed in our second meditation on verses 16-20, is to expand upon the “knowledge of a Savior” by serving as another witness of Jesus Christ, “the Eternal God.”

In this meditation, we will focus on the second, third, and fourth purposes of the Book of Mormon. These purposes are introduced, logically enough, with the grammatical marker, “that.”

*“that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;  
and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of *their* fathers,  
and that *they* might know the promises of the Lord...”*

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<sup>24</sup> Alma 26.<sup>16</sup>



God makes and keeps promises. God has never made or kept any promise greater than that in which He promised and delivered “mercy.” Luke reports that two of the principal actors found in the introduction to his Gospel, Zacharias and Mary, gloried in and testified of the fulfilled promise of mercy. This fulfillment would be most powerful found in the person of Jesus.

“[God] hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham.”<sup>25</sup>

“He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.”<sup>26</sup>

Given the principal purpose of the Book of Mormon, there can be no doubt that this promise of mercy through Jesus is the promise most prized by the Book’s authors and editors. No doubt, they appreciated many other promises made and kept. But there is another promise that held a special place in their hearts and that seems especially relevant to the promised appearance of the Book of Mormon found in today’s reading. Several of the Book of Mormon authors and editors were anxious to know that the record they worked so hard to write and preserve would endure through time. God promised them that they would endure.

“Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation... Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God.”<sup>27</sup>

“Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records, I cried unto him continually... And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, we read in today’s text, “And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people.”

So, there is our second purpose. The Book of Mormon serves as evidence that God keeps His promises. While this is particularly meaningful to those who wrote and received the Book of Mormon, the witness that God keeps His promises is important and meaningful for all of us. God is trustworthy. God is faithful. We can count on Him.

While “the knowledge of the Savior” found in the Book of Mormon is the most precious, the Book purposes to provide another kind of knowledge.

“That the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of *their* fathers,

This, of course, is of more than antiquarian interest. This allows one to place themselves in time and space. It roots them to others. It reminds them that they are part of a great human web of relationships and dependencies. It allows them to learn from others’ mistakes and to build upon others’ successes. In this case, it has one other very important benefit.

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<sup>25</sup> Luke 1.<sup>69-73</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Luke 1.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>27</sup> 2 Nephi 25.<sup>21-22</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Enos 1.<sup>15-16</sup>

“That they might know the promises of the Lord...”

Here, obviously, we return to the idea of “promises.” Attached, as they are to those who passed before them, descendants of the fathers can legitimately embrace as their own the promises that the Lord made to their fathers. Reading of God’s faithfulness, trustworthiness, and promise-keeping character, the descendants can pray and ask and entreat “the Eternal God” just as their fathers did.

Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon is a Book of and with promise. God promised to preserve it. He kept His promise. By keeping His promise, the children come in possession of the precious record of their fathers. By seeing that God kept the promises He made with their fathers, the children can exercise greater faith in God’s promise-keeping nature. By believing in God’s promise-keeping nature, they can experience even greater promises than those of their fathers. Each generation, building on those that proceeded, can, if they will accept the witness, grow ever nearer to God until, happily, they enter His presence and behold his beauty.<sup>29</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **m**editation 4

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*“And that they may believe the gospel...”*

Having finished His stern rebuke of Joseph over the loss of the 116 manuscript pages (vs. 1-15), the Lord directs Joseph’s attention away from his transgressions and toward the record that he has been translating and the purposes the Lord has planned for it (16-20). We have already looked at the Book’s primary purpose: to yield additional “knowledge of a Savior.” We have discovered, additionally, that the book’s emergence is intended as fulfillment of ancient promises, especially the promise concerning God’s commitment to preserve the record.” Coming to know the promises the Lord has made and seeing their fulfillment would serve to increase faith in God’s promises and, more, in God, Himself, and His faithfulness toward all.

In this meditation, we examine the next purpose of the Book of Mormon as this section identifies them.

“And that they may believe the gospel...”

There are many ways to think of “the gospel.” At its most basic, the gospel is “the good story” or “the good news.” We often use, “the gospel,” in an expansive way that takes in all divine truths writ large. In this way, “the gospel” comes to mean the system of all accumulated principles and doctrines. Certainly, there is “good news” to be found in every revealed truth and in their conglomerate. However, we do not understand “the gospel” to have this expanded meaning in this section. Rather, we think of it in the more traditional and restricted sense of “the good story/news about Jesus.”

Our understanding of “the gospel” in this way is, admittedly, subjective. But given the historical likelihood that Joseph possessed a traditional view at this early stage and given the Lord’s habit of communicating with humans according to their language and understanding, this more traditional understanding seems reasonable. The Book’s unrelenting focus on and witness of Christ adds weight to our understanding. No less telling is the follow up to “that they may believe the gospel:”

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<sup>29</sup> Psalm 27.<sup>4</sup>

“And rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

Here, we see the focus on Christ. Of course, the reality of Jesus’ “merits” is “good news” that makes all other “good news” possible. So, while we speak of a more “restricted” sense of “good news” being focused on Christ, this understanding of “the gospel” is infinitely expansive; for Jesus’ universal impact is beyond reckoning. While Jesus’ impact is ultimate, however, it is also intimate. Jesus is a real Being. As a real Being he is relational. He is personable. He is interested and anxious to be part of each of our lives in ways that heal and encourage us when necessary, and in ways that strengthen and advance us—as is always necessary.

When it comes to principles and doctrines, the Book of Mormon seeks to clarify and simplify, but adds little to what the Bible teaches. But except for the New Testament’s four Gospels, it remains every bit as dedicated as the Bible to a focus on the person of Jesus and the impact he has on the lives of everyone, but especially on those who consciously trust him. It contains a message about the best news ever heard by human beings and rewards those who read it thoughtfully and searchingly with a desire to know him more intimately. There can be no more noble purpose than that.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **m**editation 5

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*“And rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ...”*

In this meditation, we continue to explore the purposes of the Book of Mormon as they are outlined in DC 3. The Lord’s main objective in bringing forth the Book of Mormon is to provide another testimony of the good news concerning Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches that it is not enough to believe the good news. We must “rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ.” And so, the Book of Mormon seeks to help us go beyond believing to relying on Jesus and relying particularly on his “merits.”

It will come as no surprise, then, that in considering what it means to “rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,” our first order of business will be to understand what is meant by “merits.”

The word comes from Latin, *meritum*, meaning, “a merit, service, kindness, benefit, favor; worth, value, importance, achievement; what one deserves.” So, we might read, “rely upon the service of Jesus Christ,” “rely upon the kindness of Jesus Christ,” “rely upon the worthiness of Jesus Christ,” “rely upon the achievements of Jesus Christ.” In addition to an appeal to etymology and lexical helps, one can sometimes gain insight into a word’s meaning through consideration of its antonyms. In this case, the most instructive antonym of “merit” is “*demerit*.” We might all be familiar with the concept of demerits from our school days when to receive a demerit was acknowledgement of failing to advance in some way. There, to receive a “merit” was acknowledgement of achievement or advancement. Demerit is indicative of failure, merit of success and achievement.

With this in mind, we might think of the Book of Mormon as serving to convince us to “rely upon the successes/ achievements of Jesus Christ.” The Book does this indirectly through the stories it tells and the examples it gives of individuals and groups that benefited by relying on Christ’s value, achievements, and abilities. The Book also does this by directly addressing the matter of Christ’s merits. For example, in teaching his son, Jacob, Lehi declares,

“Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the

earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be *through the merits*, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah...”<sup>30</sup>

In addressing how one receives the Holy Spirit and receives a remission of sins, Jacob’s older brother, Nephi, affirms that no one arrives at such a blessed place “save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, *relying wholly upon the merits* of him who is mighty to save.”<sup>31</sup> The great Book of Mormon evangelist, Aaron, goes further, declaring that “since man had fallen *he could not merit anything of himself*; but the suffering and death of Christ atone for their sins,”<sup>32</sup> making Jesus’ “sufferings and death” two of his merits. One, a king, who heard and accepted Aaron’s witness, confessed,

“And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, *through the merits of his Son*.”<sup>33</sup>

This confirms Nephi’s teaching concerning the remission of sins that he delivered nearly a half millennium earlier. This blessing comes by “relying *wholly* upon the merits” of Christ. Moroni, the last writer in the Book of Mormon, provides additional insight into this reliance on Jesus’ merits by, perhaps, clarifying the earlier “wholly.” He describes how those who had newly accepted Christ were “remembered and nourished by the god word of God.” Moroni clearly states the objective of such remembering and nourishing”

“to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, *relying alone upon the merits of Christ*, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.”<sup>34</sup>

So, this is one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon. It seeks to persuade the reader to rely wholly and alone upon the merits of Christ; to rely wholly and alone upon the successes, the benefits, the achievements, the abilities of Christ. In doing so, of course, it would have us understand that there is no one else’s merits, successes, benefits, achievements, and abilities upon which he should or can rely if we wish to be forgiven or enjoy the Spirit’s presence, or find wholly trustworthy guidance in today’s life that leads to enduring life in days to come.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **m**editation 6

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*“and be glorified through faith in his name,  
and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.”*

We have suggested that one can identify eight purposes of the Book of Mormon in this passage. After having looked at the first six, we now turn our attention to the final two. The Lord hopes that through the Book He might glorify and save those who accept its message of Christ and seek to apply in their own lives the principles by which he lived.

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Nephi 2.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>31</sup> 2 Nephi 31.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Alma 22.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Alma 24.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Moroni 6.<sup>4</sup>

Like most traditional Christians, we LDS people probably speak more often of being “saved” than of being “glorified” even though the idea of glorification is far stronger in LDS theology than in traditional Christianity. At least it seems so to me.

Now, “saved,” can mean different things to different people. Indeed, it can mean different things in scripture, depending upon the writer. Most often, however, it seems that “saved” could accurately be replaced with “rescue” or “deliver.” Thus, the word “saved” often implies the existence of a danger or harm from which one needs rescued. Spiritually, the most common danger from which individuals are rescued is sin and its consequences—its consequences being a sense of relational separation from God and physical death. So, “salvation” is the rescue from sin through God’s forgiveness, or removal of sin in such a way as to allow to feel a reestablishment with God. In addition, it is the rescue from death. We could say, then, that to be “saved” is often backwards looking, considering past harms from which we are rescued. This isn’t 100% applicable because, as we have said, the word “saved” means different things even within scripture. But when one reads of being “saved” it is reasonable to begin with this backward-looking nature of the word.

Now, we can all be and should be grateful for rescue. We can not say enough about God’s capacity to handle every danger we face, including death and hell, and his willingness to exert Himself in our deliverance. But we might legitimately ask, what then? I am rescued from a burning house and set safely outside the inferno—past sins no longer threaten me. But what will my life look like thereafter? Where will I live? Will I live in the future in any better a house? Will I go back to the same life that I lived before the fire?

God’s answer to such questions is “glorification.” He acknowledges our human view of time and that we look backward and forward—even though, as the physicist increasingly conjecture—time might not exist in such linear fashion (for example, it is likely that God sees us as we were, as we are, and as we will be, all at once). In laboring in our behalf, God does not only labor against the past and present harms we face. He also labors for our future. He rescues and then glorifies. Like “saved,” “glory” can have different meanings in scripture. But, we limit ourselves in this meditation to the idea of adding upon. Glorification often containing the idea of improvement and advancement.

In his earthly ministry and in the Book of Mormon’s teachings, Jesus serves to bring about both our salvation and glorification. He relates to others in ways that show his generosity of spirit, his accepting disposition, and his earnest willingness to forgive. He turns none away who come to him to be embraced and healed of past wounds and sickness—spiritual and temporal. At the same time, his own exemplary life of dedication to the welfare of others, his finding worth in others, and his teachings concerning the kind of treatment we should extend to others all show us the way to personal improvement and, more importantly, to improved relationship with others—for, whatever else “heaven” is, it is about community and belonging rather than individualism and isolation. We become better people. We improve and advance, looking more like him and growing more confident to dwell with him.

No doubt, God has other purposes for the Book of Mormon and, in fact, of all scripture than those outlined in this passage. Nevertheless, we could do worse than to allow the Book’s purposes as outlined in this passage to guide us in our reading. Looking for these purposes and how they impact the way we live life daily can go along way toward our salvation and our glorification.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 10.<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Now, behold, I say unto you, that because you delivered up those writings which you had power given unto you to translate by the means of the Urim and Thummim, into the hands of a wicked man, you have lost them. <sup>2</sup>And you also lost your gift at the same time, and your mind became darkened. <sup>3</sup>Nevertheless, it is now restored unto you again; therefore see that you are faithful and continue on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work of translation as you have begun. <sup>4</sup>Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate; but be diligent unto the end.

## meditation

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It was mid-June, 1828, when Joseph allowed Martin Harris to take the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. At the same time, Moroni took the Urim and Thummim from Joseph. Weeks later, after learning of the manuscript's loss, Moroni returned the Urim and Thummim to Joseph so that he could receive the revelation that is today Section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In this section, Joseph is severely rebuked for his reckless disobedience, but promised that if he repented, he would be allowed to continue the work. After receiving this revelation, the Urim and Thummim were once more taken from him.

Several more weeks passed before Moroni returned the Urim and Thummim so that Joseph could receive the revelation found in today's Section 10. After receiving this revelation, Moroni once more took the Urim and Thummim. The Urim and Thummim would not be returned to Joseph along with the plates until September 22, when he was able to begin the work of translation once more.

Joseph, of course, felt horrible about the loss of the manuscript. His mother reports Joseph's reaction to the loss.

“‘Oh, my God!’ said Joseph, clinching his hands. ‘All is lost! All is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God. I should have been satisfied with the first answer which I received from the Lord; for he told me that it was not safe to let the writing go out of my possession.’ He wept and groaned, and walked the floor continually...

“‘Then must I,’ said Joseph, ‘return with such a tale as this? I dare not do it. And how shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?’”<sup>35</sup>

Even though Joseph was promised that he was still called to the work, one can imagine the turbulent feelings that swirled in Joseph heart and mind. Because of him, the translation of the Book of Mormon was delayed for some three months. Time was a wastin'. One can imagine the desire to get back at it. One can imagine Joseph's desire to dive in headfirst and translate as fast and furious as possible to make up for lost time and to demonstrate to the Lord that he had learned his lesson, had repented of his impetuosity, and that the Lord could depend on him.

However, this very ferocity in repentance can be, in itself, a sign of impetuosity. This, it seems to me, is the message of this warning delivered to Joseph at the beginning of Section 10.

“Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate; but be diligent unto the end.”

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<sup>35</sup> *History of Joseph Smith*, Lucy Mack Smith, pp. 133-134

“Take it easy Joseph. I am not bound by time limits or wasted minutes, days, months. I live in eternity. Just get back to it in a reasonable and wise manner. Be steady. You have much to do. Don’t wear yourself running as if you are involved in a forty-yard dash, because you are running an ultra-marathon.”

Many times, I have watched others become overzealous and unwise as they recognized error in themselves or acquired new and seminal information and truth. In their desire to repent, turn from past error and misinformation, and prove their steadfastness to new recognitions, I have observed many of them grow impatient and censorious with themselves and others as they found themselves and others progressing more slowly than hoped. They became zealots, often possessing more zeal than commonsense. I often felt and said that it was just best to avoid those who were in this obnoxious stage of their repentance and wait for them to come back down to earth.

God, Himself, is fully aware of this human tendency. He is unimpressed with wild swings in spiritual development. Certainly, he does not want to see spiritual lows. But neither is he enamored with spiritual highs. What he seeks is steadiness, even if it is plodding development. Neither, really, do we have anything to prove to him. He knows the end from the beginning. Our overzealousness is often little more than a vanity trip.

Yes, the Lord’s warning that one “not run faster or labor more than [they] have strength and means provided... but be diligent unto the end” is one that we should all heed. Steadiness, not speed, wins the prize. At least, that’s what I believe.

Even so come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 10.<sup>5-9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Pray always, that you may come off conqueror; yea, that you may conquer Satan, and that you may escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work. <sup>6</sup>Behold, they have sought to destroy you; yea, even the man in whom you have trusted has sought to destroy you. <sup>7</sup>And for this cause I said that he is a wicked man, for he has sought to take away the things wherewith you have been entrusted; and he has also sought to destroy your gift. <sup>8</sup>And because you have delivered the writings into his hands, behold, wicked men have taken them from you. <sup>9</sup>Therefore, you have delivered them up, yea, that which was sacred, unto wickedness.

### Meditation

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Like Section 3, Section 10 addressed the loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. While Section 3 focused primarily on the role Joseph and his personal flaws played in the manuscript's loss, Section 10 focused on the intentions and sins of those who took possession of the manuscript, the source of their "inspiration," and the Lord's solution to the loss of the manuscript.

If we were going to entitle the first third of DC 10, we might entitle it, "Destruction." In today's reading alone, we encounter the word "destroy" three times. We encounter the word again in verses 12, 19, 23, 25 (twice), and 27. In addition, we encounter the word "destruction" in verse 22. These observations are not mathematical but literary in nature. Repetition is a frequently used literary device to assist the reader in determining principal themes.

Destruction has its perpetrators and its targets. When it comes to targets, we find Joseph Smith himself as a target in verses 3 and 19. We find Joseph's gift targeted for destruction in verse 7. We find "this work," meaning the translation of the Book of Mormon, targeted for destruction in verse 12. We find "the work of God" targeted for destruction in verse 23. Finally, we find "the souls of men" targeted for destruction in verses 22 and 27. The perpetrators of destruction are "the servants of Satan (vss. 5-6), Martin Harris (vs. 6), the devil (vs. 12), those who possessed the manuscript (vss.19, 25), and Satan (vss. 22, 23, 27).

It seems that we would be justified in concluding that the primary perpetrator of destruction is Satan and that "the souls of men" are his primary target. Others are but tools Satan uses to assist his work of destruction. The destruction of Joseph, or his gift, or the Book of Mormon are means to an end. If he can undermine Joseph, or his gift, or the book of Mormon, he will have undermined access to scripture. This undermining of scripture can then serve toward the destruction of "the souls of men."

Scripture informs us that God's "work" and "glory" is to "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1.<sup>39</sup>). Section 10 permits us to see what Satan works toward and what he glories in: destruction. There is in the cosmos a contest of wills. It is a battleground. God hopes that we do more than survive the onslaught of evil. He wishes us to "conquer" and "come off conqueror." He wants us to "escape" the destruction planned for us by evil forces. In this contest of wills, in this war, against this threat of destruction prayer is one of our principal weapons.

We can, as Paul admonishes, take up "the whole armour of God."<sup>36</sup> We can wield sword and shield. But, really, our only hope of avoiding destruction, escaping Satan's attacks, and not only escaping but conquering is to have the universe's greatest warrior fight at our side—indeed, fight our battles. Prayer is a key to inviting him into the battle.

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<sup>36</sup> See Ephesians 6.<sup>13-18</sup>



“I will sing unto the Lord,  
for he hath triumphed gloriously:  
the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.  
The Lord is my strength and song,  
and he is become my salvation:  
he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation;  
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.  
The Lord is a man of war:  
the Lord is his name.”<sup>37</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>37</sup> Exodus 15.<sup>1-3</sup>

## **dc** 19.<sup>18-19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—<sup>19</sup>nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.

### **m**editation

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I have never been a big fan of calling Jesus my “elder brother”—and, no, “Elder Brother” does not strike me as better. In this passage Jesus refers to himself as “God.” And, for good measure, “the greatest of all.” There are no caveats here. No hedging. No “God, the Son.” No “the God second in command.” He is “God, the greatest of all.” Period. We would do well to think more often and more seriously on this truth.

And, while we’re at it, we might think on this. What sort and amount of suffering could cause “God, the greatest of all” to shrink from the pain of that suffering? We simply cannot fathom the suffering any more than we can fathom him. But we should know, and do know, that no one else could have or can experience such suffering and survive. This is the angel’s witness to King Benjamin. He described Jesus’ suffering as “even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mos. 3.7). And I don’t think we are talking about physical death only. No one else can endure what Jesus suffered and remain a viable living entity, physical or spiritual. Jesus’ ordeal would result in the complete and total physical and spiritual annihilation of anyone else. Moses... obliterated from existence. Joseph Smith... annihilated. Russell M. Nelson... exterminated. You and me, vanished.

So, no, Jesus isn’t just a little older, a little taller, a little stronger, and a little more experienced version of us. He is “God, the greatest of all.” If I had my way, we would put an end to this “elder brother” stuff once and for all. If I had my way, we would even change this “God, the greatest of all.” In my version it would read, “God, the Greatest of All.”

The season of Lent and Easter is a good time to consider the greatness of Jesus, and to grow in our appreciation for the breadth, the depths, and lengths to which he will go to prove his commitment to the human race; to me and to you.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 22, 2024)*

## dc 20.<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeable to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April—<sup>2</sup>which commandments were given to Joseph Smith, Jun., who was called of God, and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church; <sup>3</sup>and to Oliver Cowdery, who was also called of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the second elder of this church, and ordained under his hand; <sup>4</sup>and this according to the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory, both now and forever. Amen.

## meditation

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When considering individuals called as apostles, we often focus on the individual, the preparatory experiences they have had leading up to the call, and their personal worthiness or goodness. We might then say something like, “they were called according to their talents and faithful record of service.” However, in announcing his and Oliver’s calling as apostles, there is no such focus on the two men. The two men were not called because of their goodness, but because of Jesus’ goodness, or, in the language of Joseph, “according to the grace [read, “generosity” or “accepting nature”] of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

In fact, in the next verse, we will be reminded that Joseph had, as every other mortal man and mortal woman ever has or ever will, required “a remission of his sins” and that even after such a blessed event, he, like all the rest of us, was “entangled again in the vanities of the world.”

It is little wonder that in seeing Jesus and then his 12 disciples— aka, apostles—Lehi saw that Jesus’ “luster” was brighter than that “of the sun at noon-day” while that of his combined 12 was likened to “the stars in the firmament. (1 Ne. 1.<sup>9-10</sup>). It is obvious why Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, Nephi, and many others have warned of the foolishness and disappointment in putting one’s trust in the arm of flesh. We appreciate, too, Joseph Smith’s humble candor and quiet reminder found here in this reading. It not only serves as a reminder that God is faithful and dependable far, far above man, but also serves as encouragement for us to rely upon God far, far more than any man or woman, however exalted he or she may seem.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 20.<sup>5-7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; <sup>6</sup>but after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness; <sup>7</sup>and gave unto him commandments which inspired him...

## meditation

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In this section's opening verses, Joseph identified himself as having been called as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." This call came "according to," or "because of" or "consistent with" "the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In these verses, we are reminded why the call was an act of grace and undeserved generosity on the part of God.

After having "received a remission of his sins, Joseph was entangled again in the vanities of the world." The "remission of sins" mentioned here is a reference to Joseph's experience during his "First Vision" when he, according to his 1832 account, heard the voice of God speak the comforting and remitting words, "Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee." That he "was entangled again in the vanities of the world" is confirmed in the long, painful, and honest confession he made on the night when "God ministered unto him by an holy angel," Moroni. In that confession, Joseph speaks of his "foolish errors," "weakness," "foibles," "temptations offensive in the sight of God," "guilt," "imperfections," "sins," and "follies" for all of which he "felt condemned" and for which he sought forgiveness (See JSH 1.<sup>28-29</sup>).

As we follow Joseph in his career, we have every reason to justifiably think of Joseph, as all of us are, as a serial sinner from beginning to end. Whether we think of the willfulness Joseph demonstrated in losing the 115 manuscript pages, or the lying and abuse associated with his attempt to conceal his polygamous activities, or the deeply autocratic, near tyrannical style of leadership that he exhibited in Nauvoo toward the end of his life, we must agree that his calling—whether it be given the name "first elder," "apostle," "president," or "prophet"—was indeed an act of grace, indicative of the Lord's accepting and forgiving nature. And we can all take comfort and find reason for hope in Joseph Smith's own wild ride on the roller coaster of sin and weakness.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 20.<sup>8-12</sup>

<sup>8</sup>And gave him power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon; <sup>9</sup>which contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also; <sup>10</sup>which was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared unto the world by them—<sup>11</sup>proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old; <sup>12</sup>thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. Amen.

## meditation

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Both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants catalogue what seem to them to be the principal contents of the Book of Mormon and the purposes for the Books existence today. Among the many that could be named, this reading identifies two of the Book's important content elements. It contains "a record of a fallen people" and "the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ." As to purposes of the Book of Mormon, this reading identifies three among the many that could be named: proof that "the holy scriptures are true," proof that "God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age," and evidence that God "is the same God yesterday, today, and forever."

In my lifetime, a new title page has been added to the Book of Mormon: "Another Testament of Christ." It has become fashionable to read the Book almost exclusively for this testimony. I don't know how many times I have been encouraged to read the Book with the goal, for example, of finding Christ's titles or even to identify every passage in which he or the purposes of his life are identified. This is all well and good. One could do worse. But to read only for such content is myopic and unwise. No book, not one written by mere mortals and certainly not one inspired by God, has just one purpose or goal.

Today's text reminds us that the Book of Mormon is "a record of a fallen people." This reminder captures our attention. It is an important part of the Books reason for being. Now, it is common for us to say that the Book of Mormon contains "a record of the Nephites," or "a record of the former inhabitants." But here we are reminded that it is more than that: it is "a record of a *fallen* people."

The Book of Mormon is a record of a people, of a nation that existed for many hundreds of years. Hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of people were born into the nation, lived their whole lives in it, and died in it. It seemed to most that things would go on, and on, and on. The universe revolved around the nation. All things existed for it. But, they were wrong. The time came when the nation died. Disappeared from existence. Became nothing more than a distant memory.

Here, then, is another reason for the Book's existence and another important thing to read for. How and why did the people whose society it follows fall? What were the weaknesses that brought their society to extinction? And, what about us today? What kind of "people" are we? Do we see the same seeds of decay in our society that the Book identifies in theirs? If so, what do we do about it?

Yes, the Book not only contains a message that, if heeded and applied, brings about the personal redemption of individuals through faith in Christ. It also contains a message that, if heeded and applied, can strengthen society and help it avoid the evils that will lead to its fall. We would do well to pay careful attention to both these messages, among many others. Such "multitasking"

honors the Book more than any singular focus, however honorable, ever can.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 20.<sup>25-28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>That as many as would believe and be baptized in his holy name, and endure in faith to the end, should be saved—<sup>26</sup>not only those who believed after he came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came, who believed in the words of the holy prophets, who spake as they were inspired by the gift of the Holy Ghost, who truly testified of him in all things, should have eternal life, <sup>27</sup>as well as those who should come after, who should believe in the gifts and callings of God by the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of the Father and of the Son; <sup>28</sup>which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God, infinite and eternal, without end. Amen.

## meditation

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We are sometimes better readers than we think. We know how to find the main ideas of the sentences and paragraphs we read. Without knowing their grammatical names, we know to look for subjects, verbs, and direct objects in order to identify principal actors, what they do, and to whom they do it. We know that parenthetical phrases are... well... parenthetical; something “put in beside,” “an aside.” We can sometimes, then, lightly pass over parenthetical statements, deeming them to contain less important information.

Oh, how very wrong we would be to pass lightly over the parenthetical statement found in verses 26-28 of today’s reading—identified by a dash, —, rather than parenthetical markings ()!

We humans are so often so crimped in our views of and exclusionary in our conduct toward those who are different than us. Israelites could not imagine God having anything to do with “gentiles.” “Gentiles” have harbored and nourished antisemitic feelings almost as long. Early Christians found a God who willingly embraced gentiles perplexing. It took a long time and many debates before they accepted such an expansive and inclusive God.

Elsewhere, those with darker skin who lived in warmer southern climes, recognized light skinned, blue eyed, blond people as “other,” often targeting them for persecution and murder, often in the name of the gods. Citing obscure Bible passages, light skinned Europeans who came to America excluded dark skinned Africans from the promises of America, enslaving them and building a nation on blood-soaked, no-cost labor. Round, wide-eyed westerners feared brown skinned people with slanted eyes, while those same brown skinned people with slanted eyes feared the light skinned people with wide rounded eyes. We fear the other. We exclude “the other” from the joys we so ardently seek for ourselves.

Unfortunately, all too often religion becomes little more than justification for wicked exclusion. We think of the Zoramites of Book of Mormon fame. What could be a better example of exclusionary hate-speech than the arrogant and abhorrent prayer that they offered at Rameumptum in celebration of their own exceptionalism and their exclusive election? Their wickedness and hate is seen in their treatment of the poor among them whom they self-righteously excluded from worshipping God, and thus excluded *from* God.

What, the reader may ask, does all of this have to do with today’s reading? In this reading, we find for the first time in centuries, perhaps millennia, the first hint of the expansiveness and inclusiveness of God toward a group that was the target of the grand-daddy of all pinched and exclusive perspectives: the dead. Here we hear of the salvation “not only those who believed after he came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came.”

How many had dared think such thoughts? How many dared think those who died without knowing

Christ to be within the embrace of God? How many dared think of such an expansive and inclusive God? How many dare today to imagine that the limits of his expansive and inclusive acceptance has not yet been reached; that God has more territory and more needy to win?

If we have not yet learned from the centuries of pain inflicted on the excluded, let us at least learn from this revealed God, whose saving power has reached over and over again beyond boundaries thought possible. Non-Levites holding the priesthood. Non-Israelites, saved. Lepers cleansed. The possessed set free. The dead redeemed. Black men and women being endowed.

God is not done yet, I suspect, expanding the borders of His kingdom. There are more surprises to come; plenty more room yet for those who, even now, are excluded by selfish, insecure, pinched, and wicked exclusion. Yes, more and plenty! That's what I learned from a parenthetical phrase.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



## dc 20.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup>*And again, by way of commandment to the church concerning the manner of baptism—*

All those who  
humble themselves before God,  
and desire to be baptized,  
and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits,  
and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins,  
and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ,  
having a determination to serve him to the end,  
and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission  
of their sins,  
shall be received by baptism into his church.

## meditation

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Not long after Joseph Smith had written DC 20.37, Oliver Cowdery wrote him, as Joseph reported, “to inform me that he had discovered an error in one of the commandments—Book of Doctrine and Covenants: ‘And truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto a remission of their sins.’ The above quotation, he said, was erroneous, and added: ‘I command you in the name of God to erase those words, that no priestcraft be amongst us!’” (*HC*, Vol. 1, p. 105).

The objection to the passage seems to have been both theological and operational. Oliver envisioned baptism as bringing about or making possible the remission of sins. In his view, baptism was a prerequisite of forgiveness. However, this passage seems to envision baptism as a sign that one has already received a remission of sins. In this view, being forgiven is a prerequisite of baptism.

In one view, baptism points to the future, in the other, to the past.

Whatever one thinks about Oliver’s “presumption” in correcting a prophet, the view he had of baptism seems to reflect the Church’s current understanding—if not explicitly stated in doctrinal terms, certainly evidenced through policy and procedure. Potential converts are not required to demonstrate either through word or action that they *have* received a remission of sins. They are, however, promised that they *might* be so blessed as the result of baptism.

Practically speaking, one can find advantages and disadvantages in both views. For example, “convert retention” has always been a matter of concern. Entrance and exit to and from Church activity is a bit of a revolving door. It stands to reason that converts who were expected to demonstrate in word and deed before their baptism that they had already experienced the peace and empowerment of forgiveness through the atonement of Jesus Christ and a personal encounter with him would make for a stronger and more enduring member. Retention would increase among such converts.

This advantage, however, comes with a disadvantage. Many who were baptized in the past would certainly have not been baptized had this standard been in place—my own faithful mother, being one of them. Many more would be excluded at present and in the future. This means fewer converts. But, this disadvantage isn’t numerical, it is ministerial. The higher standard reduces the number of opportunities to influence a greater number of people.

“Relaxing” this standard brings more converts. But, again, the advantage is less about numbers than about the capacity to minister. Though these converts may be weaker than if the standard were higher,

they are at least in the Church's sphere of influence, potentially for an extended period of time. As they sit in services and meetings week after week hearing the word of God, and as they develop relationships and trust with those who can bear a personal, living witness of Jesus and his willingness and ability to forgive, the possibility of their having their own encounter with Jesus unto the remission of sins increases.

It is, then, a trade off. With relaxed baptismal requirements, the Church has the potential for more, though weaker converts, and more influence in their lives over potentially extended periods of time. With more stringent baptismal requirements, the Church has fewer, though stronger converts, and less influence over a more pinched time frame in the lives of fewer individuals.

In the end, though, it comes down to one's view of "Church." Is "Church," as some have put it, a museum for Saints, or a hospital for sinners? If it is the former, then the doors remain closed to all but those who can pass the most robust entrance exam to the most exclusive of clubs. If "Church" is designed as a place where the "saint" finds safety, comfort, and refuge from a wicked world, then a more robust form of initiation is required.

If "Church" is the latter, then the doors remain wide open to all sinners who wish to partake of Jesus' healing balm, however long it takes and however many detours there may be along the way. If "church" is a place where all sinners gather and labor together, sometimes uncomfortably, for healing and improvement, then we loosen the initiation requirements so that there are as many chances to influence as often as possible with as many people as possible.

Whichever definition one adopts, there will be times when some threaten the enterprise and must be removed from it. For there must be an element of refuge in the Church—a place of refuge *from* sin, or a place of refuge *in* sin. Such threats, however, rare as they are, are as likely to come from those who are "too righteous" as from those who are "too sinful."

So, what is it... this thing we call "Church"? Museum or hospital? Is it an exclusive place reserved for the redeemed, or is it an inclusive place open to all sinners who seek redemption? Can it be both? Can the redeemed abide the sinner? Can the sinner endure the redeemed? What think ye? And how do your attitudes and behaviors square with your thought?

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 37

<sup>1</sup>Behold, I say unto you that it is not expedient in me that ye should translate any more until ye shall go to the Ohio, and this because of the enemy and for your sakes.

<sup>2</sup>And again, I say unto you that ye shall not go until ye have preached my gospel in those parts, and have strengthened up the church whithersoever it is found, and more especially in Colesville; for, behold, they pray unto me in much faith.

<sup>3</sup>And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio, against the time that my servant Oliver Cowdery shall return unto them. <sup>4</sup>Behold, here is wisdom, and let every man choose for himself until I come. Even so. Amen.

### meditation 1 — dc 37.<sup>1-4</sup>

For nearly a century and a half the church did not know what to think of or do with Joseph Smith's "translation" of the Bible—"translation" being in quotes because it was nothing like a traditional translation where one goes from one language to another. For years I took heat as a carried an old black hardcover copy of the "translation" printed by Herald Press—the press for the, then, RLDS. As a result of several factors, the church accepted limited use of the "Joseph Smith Translation" (JST) in the late 1970's by including some of the alterations Joseph made to the King James Bible in its new LDS Bible version.

The insightfulness and utility of changes found in the JST is uneven. Some changes seem silly and petty. Some evince a decidedly doctrinaire, dogmatic and polemical spirit. Some are just plain mistaken or unnecessary, indicating, it seems, Joseph's own misunderstanding of archaic King James era English. Then, there are those that are not only insightful and utilitarian, but downright world shaping.

"Now what," one may ask, "does all this have to do Doctrine and Covenants 37? Let me explain.

Joseph began his work of "translation"—I'll stop putting quotes around this word from here on out—sometime in late spring, early summer of 1830. As he worked on Genesis during December of that year, Joseph received what he called, "Extracts from the Prophecy of Enoch," which today comprise portions of Moses 6 and all of Moses 7. According to the *History of the Church*, "Soon after the words of Enoch were given, the Lord gave the following [Section 37] commandment" (Vol. 1, p. 139). This notice is important for understanding not only the significance of DC 37, but of much of what follows in the Doctrine and Covenants.

In my view, Doctrine and Covenants 37 is inseparably linked to Joseph's work of translation and especially to the insights he gleaned into the man Enoch and his success in transforming his society. These insights procured through his translation work in early Genesis shaped, I believe, Joseph's perception of himself and expanded his vision of the purpose to which God had called him. Joseph was called to do far more than establish a new, even restored religion. He was to transform society just as Enoch had.

The "Extracts from the Prophecy of Enoch," had described society as Enoch had transformed it.

"And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7.<sup>18</sup>).

We have briefly examined this passage in its own meditation. For now, we will only say that, as we

understand it, being of “one heart and one mind” is about more than some form of emotional and intellectual conformity. Dwelling in “righteousness” is about more than observing some long and complicated list of legalistic performances. And having a society in which “there [are] no poor” is accomplished by something other than everyone “putting their shoulder to the wheel.” Unity, righteous, and the absence of poverty are all the same thing. No society can pronounce itself unified or righteous if there are poor living in it.

There were no poor in Zion because everyone looked at others as beings bound and connected to them. If someone struggled to provide for themselves and/or their family due, for example, to physical or emotional sickness or handicap, poor life management skills, accidents, age, being orphaned or being the child of someone with the previous challenges, society felt the need, nay, the desire to necessarily jump in and help. Everyone treated others as they would want to be treated in the same situation. Acting in this way and after this form of unity and human connectedness is what it means to be righteous. To be unified and righteous is to assure that there are no poor.

Anyway, it was immediately upon reading of Enoch’s transformed society—its unity, righteousness, and absence of poverty—that Joseph was commanded to “go to the Ohio.” No doubt, the recent conversion of many in Kirtland played a role in the selection of Ohio as a gathering place. However, just as important in its selection was the fact that it was on the borders of civilization. Here, outside of nation, the people would have space—both temporal and intellectual—to reshape society, especially its economy, in ways that conformed to those of Enoch’s Zion.

To this point, one could count the number of times Zion had been mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants with the fingers of two hands. But always as an abstraction and without detail as to what it meant and how it was procured. From here on out, the nitty-gritty details of Zion and upon what principles it was to be established multiply exponentially.

I believe that because of his translation work, and especially the insights he gleaned into the man Enoch and his successes in transforming his society, Joseph Smith perceived himself and his call differently than before. His vision was expanded. He was, he felt, to duplicate Enoch’s work. He was to reintroduce Zion and its principles to a society that had willfully departed far, far from them—best evidenced by the proliferation of the poor. This new perception of himself consumed much of the rest of his life, while this expanded vision dominated the approximate center third of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Joseph might have learned of a different kind of society and discovered the expansiveness of God’s plans for him in some other way. But God chose to educate Joseph through scripture study and the insights that the scriptures can infuse into a willing and open mind. In addition to the mind-expanding ideal of Zion, there is, then, another message to be found in Joseph’s ongoing education. There is deep import and tremendous potential in serious, concentrated, consistent, and anticipatory scripture study. It is likely that if we are to assist in society’s transformation and create one after the principles of Zion, we will need to engage in our own version of scripture translation—translating it from paper or screen to heart.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: november 8, 2023)*

## dc 38

### meditation 1—dc 38.<sup>1-6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made; <sup>2</sup>the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes; <sup>3</sup>I am the same which spake, and the world was made, and all things came by me. <sup>4</sup>I am the same which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom; and verily, I say, even as many as have believed in my name, for I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them.

<sup>5</sup>But behold, the residue of the wicked have I kept in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day, which shall come at the end of the earth; <sup>6</sup>and even so will I cause the wicked to be kept, that will not hear my voice but harden their hearts, and wo, wo, wo, is their doom.

In our meditation on DC 37, we suggested that the Enoch material found in what is today Moses 6 and 7 powerfully affected Joseph Smith, changed and expanded his vision and understanding of his call, and set him on a new course that would consume much of the rest of his short life. Having read of Enoch's successful labors in transforming his society from this world's natural and typical dog-eat-dog zero-sum economic system to an cooperative economic system called "Zion," where there were no poor, but everyone was "alike" and "receive[d] alike" (See DC 51.<sup>9</sup>), Joseph set out to imitate and duplicate Enoch's labors and successes. He felt called to establish a latter-day Zion based on the same principles as Enoch's.

Thinking concretely, Joseph first needed to identify a location. In being commanded to "go to the Ohio," the Lord identified the first of several locations that would serve as base for this experiment in societal and economic transformation. In DC 38, the Lord sets out the initial purposes of Zion and the principles upon which Zion is to be built. To a large extent, the Enoch materials of Moses 6 and 7 serve as inspiration for what is found there. In this series of meditations on DC 38, we will note similarities in perspectives on Zion between this section and the Enoch material found in Moses.

But before launching into this, we wish to note language and ideals that are found in DC 38 that align with language and ideals found in the Enoch material of Moses 6 and 7. We do this for more than simple literary reasons. We suggest that the similarity in language, while mundane, can be seen as a small indication of the degree to which Joseph was affected by Enoch, and prepare us to see the more profound affects that Enoch had on Joseph's life mission of establishing Zion.

We begin with the Lord, Jesus Christ's self-introduction. In this introduction, he refers to himself with a number of titles and descriptions.

"The Lord your God"

"Jesus Christ"

"The Great I Am"

"Alpha and Omega"

"Beginning and End"

The One "which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven"

The One "which knoweth all things"

The One before whom “all things are present”

The One who “spake and the world was made, and all things came by me.”

The One “which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom”

The One who “by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them”

You may list or summarize them differently, but most of the titles/descriptions are fairly standard fare. “Jesus Christ,” of course is perhaps most common among the titles on the list. We are not surprised to see the “Lord” or “God.” We remember “I Am” as his self-introduction to Moses at the burning bush. “Alpha and Omega” and “Beginning and End” are familiar from his self-introduction to John the Revelation. We have been introduced to him many times as omniscient and omnipresent. His role as creator is well known and oft repeated. I would hazard a guess that if we played the game, “Which one does not belong with the others,” we might very well choose one of the last two. We would be hard pressed, for example, to find the penultimate description anywhere else in scripture... except in the Enoch material of Moses: “which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom.”

The description, with its focus on Enoch, is unique enough and indicative of the fact that Enoch is on the prophet’s radar. However, in this self-description, we are presented with vocabulary and ideals that seem to echo those found in Moses 7.

“Enoch was high and lifted up, even in the bosom of the Father, and of the Son of Man” (7.<sup>24</sup>)

“Thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom” (7.<sup>31</sup>)

“Through faith I am in the bosom of the Father, and behold, Zion is with me” (7.<sup>47</sup>)

“Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom” (7.<sup>69</sup>)

Jesus is elsewhere, and is many times in the DC, referred to as one who abides in the bosom of God. This language attempts to portray the unique and unparalleled intimacy that exists between Jesus and his Father. It represents an expression of their oneness, their unity. In like manner, this reference to the God’s “bosom” in relation to Enoch/Zion is a powerful image of the intimacy and unity of purpose found between God and Enoch/Zion.

It does not seem like a stretch to understand the language from DC 38 about Zion being in God’s bosom as a reflection of Joseph’s recent encounter with that same language in Moses. Nor does it seem a stretch to suggest that the use of this language in DC 38 is indicative of the powerful impression the language had on Joseph. But even more, the use of this language in DC 38 is indicative of the powerful impression that the Zion concept had on the prophet’s mind and heart.

Next, we highlight another description Jesus uses to introduce himself. It possesses imagery that, though unrelated to the concept of Zion, is shared by DC 38 and the Enoch material. In DC 38.<sup>4</sup>, we hear, “I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them.” Similarly, in Moses 7.<sup>39</sup>, God informs Enoch, “that which I have chosen [Jesus Christ] hath pled before my face.” Again, the idea that Jesus is our advocate is common. We hear it most famously, perhaps, in the beloved intercessory prayer that Jesus offered on the night of his arrest. Human pleading to God is a common past time. But God/Jesus “pleading” to God for humans is rarer. Again, it does not seem a stretch of the imagination to see the Enoch material influencing Joseph Smith’s language in DC 38.

The next example of what looks like conscious or unconscious imitation of language on the part of Joseph Smith is rather innocuous. It is reflected in a single word that is found five times in the Enoch material. The reader will have no difficulty identifying the word.

“...Enos and the residue of the people of God...” (6.<sup>17</sup>)

“...but the residue of the people...” (7.<sup>20</sup>)

“...the residue of the people...” (7.<sup>22</sup>)

“...the residue of the people (7.<sup>28</sup>)

“...the residue of the wicked...” (7.<sup>43</sup>)

The word, “residue,” never used in the Doctrine and Covenants until 38.<sup>5</sup>, is found often afterward. In verse 5, it is used exactly as it was used in Moses 7.<sup>43</sup>: “*the residue of the wicked* have I kept in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day...” Yes, the Hebrew prophets commonly use this word, “residue,” as the King James translates it. But it seems noteworthy that it pops up in the DC weeks after Joseph finds it repeated in the Enoch material.

More significant than the use of a rather insignificant word, is the common eschatology that exists between 38.<sup>5</sup> and the Enoch material. DC 38.<sup>5</sup> teaches that “the residue of the wicked have I kept *in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day...*” Of this same “residue,” Enoch learns that “the remainder were reserved *in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day.*” It almost seems that in expressing himself in DC 38, Joseph Smith opened his copy of the revelation of the Enoch material and pasted Moses 7.<sup>57</sup> into DC 38.

Here is another phrase that DC 38 and Moses 7 share: “veil of darkness.” The phrase is used in both places for world conditions leading up to the Lord’s coming in the latter days. In DC 38, a “veil of darkness” keeps the saints from seeing God and knowing that He is (vs. 8). In Moses 7.<sup>60-61</sup>, a “veil of darkness” covers the earth. This state is remedied with the Lord’s second coming. Both passages, then use the term “veil of darkness” for ignorance about God. When the “veil of darkness” is removed, God is seen and known. Before moving on, we should note that it was “a great chain” that Satan held in his hand that “veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness” (Moses 7.<sup>26</sup>).

This brings us to another parallel in language and sentiment between DC 38 and the Enoch material. Seeing the destructiveness of his “great chain,” Satan “looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced (Moses 7.<sup>26</sup>). But what was the Lord’s reaction to the corruption that flooded the earth? Enoch movingly and repeatedly reported both the Lord’s startlingly pained reaction, along with that of heaven and its various hosts.

“The God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people and he wept” (Moses 7.<sup>28</sup>). Witnessing this divine sorrow, Enoch could not wrap his brain around a perfect Being, surrounded by “naught but peace, justice, and truth... and mercy” feeling the negative emotion of sorrow such as to make Him weep (see, Moses 7.<sup>28-31</sup>). But God, on the other hand, wondered at Enoch’s rather dimwitted confusion.

“The whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands; wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer.... Wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep, yea, and all the workmanship of mine hands” (see, Moses 7.<sup>37-40</sup>).

Enoch finally got it and joined in the lamentation.

“Wherefore Enoch knew, and looked upon their wickedness, and their misery, and wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook (Moses 7.<sup>41</sup>).

Indeed, Enoch “had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: ‘I will refuse to be comforted’” (Moses 7.<sup>44</sup>). Enoch did eventually find comfort in his vision of the Lord’s

crucifixion. Still, as the earth continued to suffer under human corruption, Enoch wept again and ask, “When shall the earth rest?” (Moses 7.<sup>58</sup>).

All this talk of God, heaven, angels, and Enoch painfully weeping at the corruption of the earth, is reflected in DC 38.

“All flesh is corrupted before me; and the powers of darkness prevail upon the earth, among the children of men, in the presence of all the hosts of heaven—which causeth silence to reign, and all eternity is pained... (vss. 11-12).

There are many points of contact between the vocabulary and ideas found in DC 38 and Moses 7. As we continue to examine DC 38 in the following meditations, we will find more vocabulary and additional ideals that they share. We will note especially many points of contact between the Zion that Enoch established and the Zion that the Lord describes to Joseph. It seems clear that the Lord used the revelation of the Enoch materials to make Joseph aware of a higher calling. Joseph was to do as Enoch did. Joseph was to be a sort of latter-day Enoch. Those who accepted Joseph’s prophetic call were to be latter-day “Zionists” in imitation of those who followed Enoch.

The importance of DC 38, then, can hardly be overstated. It is the opening salvo in the Lord’s attempt to restructure society and especially a decadent economic system that the world in its delusion has always found to be normal and inevitable. Joseph’s followers were not up to the task. They failed repeatedly to live Zion’s economic law. This great social experiment has been on hold for several generations. There seems no appetite to renew the attempt, even as the traditional worldly economic systems exhibit their predatory nature. Here’s to hoping it won’t require a complete collapse of the current predatory economic system to convince even the saints to try the Lord’s more enlightened economic system called, “Zion.” But one suspects there will be no leaving of the old for the new until the death of the old.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: november 15, 2023*)

## meditation 2—dc 38.<sup>1-6</sup>

*“I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them.”*

Crucial to any understanding of Jesus’ atonement is his ascension into heaven and his enthronement at the right hand of God. His ascension and enthronement should always be included in descriptions of his atonement, right alongside of and equal in importance to his suffering in Gethsemane, his crucifixion at Golgotha, and his resurrection from the tomb. Without his ascension and enthronement at God’s right hand, his atonement would be incomplete.

From the right hand of God, a place of both intimacy and power, Jesus serves, as he always did during his earthly ministry, as advocate for those laid low by sin and the personal humiliation and societal disenfranchisement that so often accompany it. During his earthly ministry, we witness him advocate for, pray for, and pray over lepers, the blind, the deaf, the palsied, and many others whose afflictions were viewed as a sign of sin and divine disapproval and abandonment. We see him advocate for those possessed by overwhelming influences (often identified as evil spirits or demons). We watch through the



inspired words of the Gospel witnesses as he advocates for a women with an issue of blood, a woman whose sins were many, and a widow who could offer but a pittance to the Lord.

In Jesus' great Intercessory Prayer recorded in John 17, we hear the very words he spoke as he prayed for, with, and over his closest disciples. The fact of its inclusion in the Gospel probably speaks to the powerful impact it had on the disciples, even though the record is silent as to the disciples' feelings as Jesus prayed to the Father for them. We are fortunate indeed that upon hearing Jesus pray for them, another gathering did record their feelings.

“And when he [Jesus] had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him. And after this manner do they bear record: ‘The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father’” (3 Ne. 17.<sup>15-17</sup>).

I feel confident in saying that anyone so privileged as to witness Jesus praying for, with, and over them would respond with much the same testimony. And the fact is, Jesus does advocate for us, he does pray for, with, and over us today. And he does so from God's right hand. He does so, by his own testimony as found in DC 38.<sup>4</sup>, “by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt.” With his spilt blood, Jesus says, “have I pleaded before the Father for them.”

As we indicated in the previous meditation on DC 38.<sup>1-6</sup>, we see this language and concept, along with much of the language and many of the concepts we find throughout the section, as influenced by the Enoch material found, especially, in Moses 7. It seems to us that the impact and influence that the Enoch material had on Joseph Smith cannot be overstated. It was immense and transformed the prophet's understanding of his call and purpose, and altered the course of his ministry.

Anyway, in language reminiscent of that found in DC 38.<sup>4</sup>, God informs Enoch of Jesus' role as pleading advocate for a humanity lost in sin: “And [he] which I have chosen hath pled before my face. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins...” (vs. 39). We might see the continued influence of this insight many years later during the Kirtland temple's dedication. In his dedicatory prayer, Joseph reflects upon God's mercy toward those who repent.

“But inasmuch as they will repent, thou art gracious and merciful, and wilt turn away thy wrath when thou lookest upon the face of thine Anointed” (DC 109.<sup>53</sup>).

Even closer to home, a mere three months after having received the Enoch material, Joseph received the privilege of a lifetime. The Lord, Jesus Christ, gives Joseph entrance into his divine prayer life. Joseph hears Jesus offer a modern day intercessory prayer. The introduction to the prayer has language that harkens back to both DC 38.<sup>4</sup> and Moses 7.<sup>39</sup>: “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—saying...” Then, the prayer. The advocacy.

“Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin,  
in whom thou wast well pleased;  
behold the blood of thy Son which was shed,  
the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;  
wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name,  
that they may come unto me and have everlasting life” (DC 45.<sup>3-5</sup>).

One can imagine this good news bringing unspeakable joy to still-young Joseph and those with whom he shared it.

On the other hand, perhaps we can do more than imagine it. Perhaps we too can hear Jesus pray for us. Truly our everyday prayers are but a very, very short step from such privilege, for when we pray, we are to pray “in the name of Jesus Christ.” If one stops to think about it, and understand that this is something far, far more than “prayer formula,” this is truly a most remarkable thing. In praying “in the name of Jesus Christ,” we present a prayer to God as if it were Jesus’ own prayer. We invite Jesus to kneel next to us and pray with us. Join as partner in our prayer. Prayer, if it is offered “in the name of Jesus Christ,” is a serious and solemn privilege. If done rightly, when we kneel in prayer “in the name of Jesus Christ, and plead for forgiveness, for example, it is as though our prayer is his. And we know that the Father always hears Jesus’ prayers.

We are truly and greatly comforted to know that in Jesus we have a friend and advocate, rather than enemy and prosecutor. He has always been our friend. He is now our advocate. The blood he spilt will always serve to draw us to him. We will never forget what his devotion to us cost him. Neither will “all the seraphic hosts of heaven” who abide with God in “the wide expanse of eternity.” Maybe, someday, we will join them there and add our voice to theirs in singing the great heavenly Sanctus: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4.<sup>8</sup>), our devoted friend and powerful advocate.

And we... we will follow him. We will strive to emulate him. We will become devoted friends and powerful advocates for all those who suffer under the pain and humiliation of sin. Who knows the power that such imperfect and inferior advocacy might have in the lives of others. It is, anyway, good practice for what might be our occupation in eternity.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: november 17, 2023)*

### meditation 3—dc 38.<sup>7-9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>But behold, verily, verily, I say unto you that mine eyes are upon you. I am in your midst and ye cannot see me; <sup>8</sup>but the day soon cometh that ye shall see me, and know that I am; for the veil of darkness shall soon be rent, and he that is not purified shall not abide the day. <sup>9</sup>Wherefore, gird up your loins and be prepared. Behold, the kingdom is yours, and the enemy shall not overcome.

God wants to be known. He wants to be understood. He wants to be seen for who He is. It has been many millennia since God extended His invitation to the Psalmist:

“Seek ye my face.”

The Psalmist not only heard the invitation, but he also cherished and responded to it.

“My heart said unto thee, “Thy face, LORD, will I seek” (See Psalm 27.<sup>8</sup>).

Indeed, in response to this invitation, the Psalmist confesses that,

“I had fainted,  
unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living” (27.<sup>13</sup>).

As today’s passage indicates, God remains committed to being known and seen. Indeed, He reminds us of this commitment and extends invitations over and over again in the Doctrine and Covenants.

“And again, verily I say unto you that it is your privilege, and a promise I give unto you that have been ordained unto this ministry, that inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am—not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual” (DC 67.<sup>10</sup>).

“Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God...” (DC 84.<sup>23</sup>).

“Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will. Remember the great and last promise which I have made unto you...” (DC 88.<sup>68-69</sup>).

But there is a veil that keeps us from understanding, knowing, and seeing God. It is a “veil of darkness.” Darkness covers and fills the mind. In order to understand, know, and see God, that veil; that darkness must be “rent.”

“To rend” is an intense word. It is something more than tearing or parting. And it is not accomplished lightly. “To rend” usually involves a “strong force,” even “sudden violence.” This reminds us that the “veil of darkness” that covers and fills our minds is not as thin as we might want to think and is not as easily removed as we might wish. The veil is thick and heavy, extraordinarily opaque. By such a veil, the children of Israel, when extended the invitation to understand, know, and see God’s face, “hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence” (DC 84.<sup>24</sup>).

God’s most powerful and clearest attempt to make Himself known, understood, and seen came in the person of Jesus Christ. God was, in Christ introducing and revealing Himself. It was an aggressive intrusion of the brightest of lights into the deepest of darkness. If you do not believe it was aggressive, just have a look at the extremes to which the darkness went to squelch the light. This darkened world acted aggressively, even going so far as to kill Jesus, eradicate the light.

With Jesus’ death, God did not give up the desire or effort of making Himself known, understood, and seen. He is nothing, if not enduring. What has been called “Mormonism” represents but one more in a long line of attempts to rend the veil of darkness; to infuse light into the human mind, heart, and soul. God has flashed a good bit of light in the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that come before this 38<sup>th</sup> section. But, I submit, with the command to “go to the Ohio” found in DC 37 and the initial directions for the establishment of Zion—the kind and character of place God inhabits—God ups the ante and infuses a more concentrated light than He had previously provided in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The first generation of Mormons fared no better than the ancient Israelites in responding to the invitation to rend the “veil of darkness” and, like their progenitor, Abraham, look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11.<sup>10</sup>). Like the ancient Israelites before them, those

first latter-day Israelites “hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence.” Among the many shortcomings of those latter-day Israelites,

“were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them; therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances” (DC 101.<sup>6</sup>).

Looking nothing remotely like God, those latter-day Israelites could not hope to look upon God.

It would be nice if we could do and be better. But there is little to recommend us as doing or being better than those who preceded us. The veil of darkness still holds a powerful sway over our minds. Here’s to having another look, not only at DC 38, but at all those sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that contain the playbook for establishing Zion, “where God’s full presence shines” (LDS Hymn, “How Great the Wisdom and the Love).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: december 18, 2023)*

## meditation 4—dc 38.<sup>10-15</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Verily I say unto you, ye are clean, but not all; and there is none else with whom I am well pleased; <sup>11</sup>for all flesh is corrupted before me; and the powers of darkness prevail upon the earth, among the children of men, in the presence of all the hosts of heaven—<sup>12</sup>Which causeth silence to reign, and all eternity is pained, and the angels are waiting the great command to reap down the earth, to gather the tares that they may be burned; and, behold, the enemy is combined.

<sup>13</sup>And now I show unto you a mystery, a thing which is had in secret chambers, to bring to pass even your destruction in process of time, and ye knew it not; <sup>14</sup>but now I tell it unto you, and ye are blessed, not because of your iniquity, neither your hearts of unbelief; for verily some of you are guilty before me, but I will be merciful unto your weakness. <sup>15</sup>Therefore, be ye strong from henceforth; fear not, for the kingdom is yours.

In our previous meditation on DC 38.<sup>7-9</sup>, we found that God wants to be known, understood, and seen for who He is. We also found that He is not known, understood, and seen because of a “veil of darkness” that covers the mind and heart. That veil, as we discussed, is no light thing. Today’s passage informs us just how heavy and pervasive the “veil of darkness” is.

“All flesh is corrupted before me; and the powers of darkness prevail upon the earth, among the children of men.”

The “latter days” are not so different from “former days,” indeed, from “all days and every day.” The Psalmist observed that

“YHWH looked down from the heavens  
upon humankind  
to determine, “Are there any in possession of knowledge;  
any who consult ’ēlohîm?”  
The whole lot of them had rebelled;  
as one, they had become morally tainted.  
There were none among them who did good.

None! Not even one!” (Ps. 14.<sup>2-3</sup>, author’s translation)

The apostle Paul would later latch on to this and other passages like it to characterize not only his own day but human history from beginning to end (see Rom. 3.<sup>9-18</sup>). While Paul did not use this one, he could have.

“...The heart of the sons of men  
is full of evil,  
and madness is in their heart  
while they live...” (Ecc. 9.<sup>3</sup>).

Having said all that, we should point out that the language used here in DC 38—“All flesh is corrupted before me; and the powers of darkness prevail upon the earth, among the children of men”—is remarkably and unsettlingly similar to that found in Genesis 6.

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen. 6.<sup>11-12</sup>).

We should not be surprised by the similar language. As we have discussed in previous meditations, DC 38 comes on the heels of Joseph Smith’s “translation” work on Genesis. What he discovered in the process of “translating” is felt throughout DC 38. But more, what Joseph learned there dramatically impacted his thoughts, his intentions, and actions to the very end of his life.<sup>38</sup>

This is especially true of the Enoch material that is today found in the Book of Moses. The cosmic reaction to the latter-day corruption and darkness—“Which causeth silence to reign, and all eternity is pained”—reminds us of the cosmic reaction to the corruption and violence found immediately before the flood as recorded in Moses 7.

“The God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people and he wept” (Moses 7.<sup>28</sup>).

“The whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands; wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer.... Wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep, yea, and all the workmanship of mine hands” (see, Moses 7.<sup>37-40</sup>).

The description of latter-day corruption and darkness seems patterned after that found about the era just before Genesis’ flood. The cosmic response to the latter-day corruption and darkness seems patterned after the cosmic response to the corruption and violence of the pre-flood era. Can there be any doubt that the consequences of unchecked latter-day corruption and darkness might be as dire as the consequences of pre-flood era corruption and violence? Though it be not a flood, the Doctrine and Covenants is chock full of dire warnings of devastating consequences for latter-day corruption and darkness. Here is but a sampling.

“For a desolating scourge shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming” (5.<sup>19</sup>)

“But without faith shall not anything be shown forth except desolations upon Babylon, the same which has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (35.<sup>11</sup>).

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<sup>38</sup> See our meditation on DC 37.<sup>1-4</sup> and meditation 1 on DC 38.<sup>1-6</sup>.

“For I, the Almighty, have laid my hands upon the nations, to scourge them for their wickedness. And plagues shall go forth, and they shall not be taken from the earth until I have completed my work, which shall be cut short in righteousness— (84.<sup>96-97</sup>).

“And verily I say unto you, the rest of my servants, go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit, in your several callings, unto the great and notable cities and villages, reproving the world in righteousness of all their unrighteous and ungodly deeds, setting forth clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days. For, with you saith the Lord Almighty, I will rend their kingdoms; I will not only shake the earth, but the starry heavens shall tremble” (84.<sup>117-118</sup>).

“And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations...” (87.<sup>9</sup>).

“For behold, and lo, vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it? The Lord’s scourge shall pass over by night and by day, and the report thereof shall vex all people; yea, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come; for the indignation of the Lord is kindled against their abominations and all their wicked works” (97.<sup>22-24</sup>).

“Mine indignation is soon to be poured out without measure upon all nations; and this will I do when the cup of their iniquity is full” (101.<sup>11</sup>).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face. Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord” (112.<sup>23-24</sup>).

Noah’s generation, it seems, has nothing on ours. Noah was told to build a boat. Joseph Smith was told to build a city; to establish a new form of governance and a new economic system. The new form of governance and the new economic system are meant to undo the prevailing corruption, darkness, and violence of the old systems of governance and the old economic systems that have flooded the earth in suffering and blood since Cain killed Abel.

Notwithstanding all that has been said in DC 1-37, DC 38 represents a more concentrated and practical response and solution to the corruption, darkness, and violence that floods the earth today as it always has. The solution has gone largely unheeded even by those who utilize the Doctrine and Covenants. How much longer can the scourge be put off when even the house of God is full of those whose minds are veiled with darkness, corruption, and violence?

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: december 18, 2023)*

**dc 38.**<sup>23-27</sup>

<sup>23</sup>But, verily I say unto you, teach one another according to the office wherewith I have appointed you; <sup>24</sup>and let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practise virtue and holiness before me.

<sup>25</sup>And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself. <sup>26</sup>For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: 'Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here;' and to the other: 'Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there'—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just? <sup>27</sup>Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.

**m**editation

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Jesus, according to the writer of Hebrews, was “not ashamed” to call those he served and intended to save, “brethren” (Heb. 2.<sup>11-12</sup>). He was, then, prepared to think of us and treat us with all the intimacy and care family members deserve. Consistent with the Lord’s Zionist intentions as well as his expectation that his disciples develop and act upon the divine character trait of at-one-ment, the Lord invites us to follow Jesus’ example. We are to think of and treat others with all the respect and care that we do beloved family members. Not only so, but, consistent with Jesus’ “Golden Rule,” we are to “esteem” others as we “esteem” ourselves.

There are, of course, many ways in which we can demonstrate our “esteem” of others as family and even as ourselves. But, consistent with the economic principles necessary to the establishment of Zion, in today’s reading the Lord focuses on economic equality. He uses a Father and his sons as an illustration of his expectations. Just as a father cannot call himself “just” if he shows economic partiality toward his sons, so a disciple of Christ cannot call himself “just” if they do not seek to raise the economic status of others to their own level. Indeed, minus such an attitude and the attendant actions, such an individual cannot call themselves a disciple. They cannot be sanctified. And, finally, they forfeit the privilege of having God think of them as “Mine.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **dc** 49.<sup>5-7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Thus saith the Lord; for I am God, and have sent mine Only Begotten Son into the world for the redemption of the world, and have decreed that he that receiveth him shall be saved, and he that receiveth him not shall be damned—<sup>6</sup>and they have done unto the Son of Man even as they listed; and he has taken his power on the right hand of his glory, and now reigneth in the heavens, and will reign till he descends on the earth to put all enemies under his feet, which time is nigh at hand—<sup>7</sup>I, the Lord God, have spoken it; but the hour and the day no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor shall they know until he comes.

## **m**editation

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This reading is sobering, indeed. First, there is the juxtaposition of salvation and damnation with the announcement and promise of damnation upon those who do not “receive” Jesus. If we ask what it means to not receive him, we can hardly be forgiven for thinking of the very next line in which we are reminded that “they have done unto the Son of Man even as they have wanted.” We can also be forgiven for wondering who the “they” is. We wonder if “they” are only those Romans and Jews who, alive at the time of his earthly minister, had opportunity to kill him. We wonder if “they” include those who would kill him if they could; if he showed up some other time somewhere else; if he showed up today as he showed up then.

It seems unlikely that the Romans and Jews of the first century A.D. were all that different from everyone else, wherever or whenever they have lived on earth. So, we really do ask ourselves, “What do I wish to do “unto the Son of Man”? How receptive am I of him and his teachings? How hard do I strive to live my life consistent with his teachings? We certainly hope not to be numbered with those who will not receive him when he comes next time; for next time those who feel enmity with him and his principles will not be able to do whatever they want to him. There will be no crucifixion. Rather, those who do not receive him will be “put...under his feet.”

I am O.K. with being *at* Jesus’ feet, but I don’t want to be under them. It’s always a good idea to review his life and teachings and be sure that I am not at odds with him or them. That when he comes he can do with me what I hope and want him to do with me.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



## dc 49.<sup>20</sup>

It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin.

### meditation 1

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Jesus, whom the Book of Mormon calls “God Himself,”<sup>39</sup> was not impressed with “the world” that he found when he came to dwell among men. This Jesus declared himself “not of this world.”<sup>40</sup> While “the world” couldn’t quite grasp him or always articulate its discomfort with him, it knew that Jesus was different; not quite “of this world.” Thus, while the “world would love its own, “the world... hated [him].”<sup>41</sup> But, while Jesus was “not of this world,” he did possess a world, or, better, a “kingdom” which was “not of this world.”<sup>42</sup> Jesus invited others to join him in this otherworldly kingdom so that they too might be “not of the world.”<sup>43</sup> Here, Jesus would deliver a “peace... not as the world giveth.”<sup>44</sup> He would not ask his Father “that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [of the world].”<sup>45</sup>

We think of all this when we read today’s passage. Jesus has already prepared us to believe that “the world lieth in sin.” Unfortunately, it is often the case that too many of us are not sufficiently free “from the evil of the world” to believe that one of the principal evils, or sins that ensnares “the world is “that one man... possess that which is above another.”

But, God be praised, Jesus unambiguously reveals economic inequality for what it is: “sin;” contrary to the will and character of God.

We say the world is ensnared by this sin. But this isn’t quite the right way to look at it. To be ensnared by something or someone implies a certain unwillingness on the part of the ensnared. In the case of economic inequality, however, too much of “the world” is not an unwilling participant. “The world *lieth* in sin.” It luxuriates in the sin of economic inequality. It prostitutes itself to it. While economic inequality is like a bed of roses upon which the wealthy luxuriate and prostitute themselves to it, it is like a bed of nails for its victims. The propagandists and practitioners of economic inequality would have us believe it is holy. Recipient of divine approbation.

But, God be praised, Jesus unambiguously reveals this for the lie that it is: “It is *not* given that one man should possess that which is above another.”

Economic inequality, like a gleaming golden calf, is one of the world’s “evils,” from which Jesus would deliver us. This evil has many deleterious effects, not least of which is its power to deny us access to the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit upon which we are dependent for avoidance of all evil.

“Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Mosiah 13.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See for example, John 8.<sup>23</sup> and 17.<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> John 15.<sup>18-19</sup>

<sup>42</sup> John 18.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>43</sup> John 17.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>44</sup> John 14.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>45</sup> John 17.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>46</sup> DC 70.<sup>14</sup>

The righteousness of economic equality can only be achieved cooperatively. No single individual can achieve the Lord's goal of economic equality. Individuals can be committed to it, but it takes a village. Individuals must not only be prepared to live differently themselves, they must be prepared to advocate among others for a system that can achieve the goal. How the Lord intends to achieve economic equality is described in depth in approximately the central third of the Doctrine and Covenants. The system for achieving economic equality—a system in which “the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low”<sup>47</sup>—is often called, “The Law of Consecration.”

Many are under the impression that this “law” only applies to members of the LDS faith. This is mistaken. It applies to everyone. It applies to society as a whole. If anything, those of the LDS faith should simply be the most vocal about the evils of economic inequality and the godliness of economic equality. They should be the loudest advocates for society wide principles, practices, and legislation that works to bring about the Divine desire for economic equality through the exaltation of the poor and the humbling of the rich.

Don't believe me when I say it is to be more universal than one single, tiny Christian denomination? Well, consider the Book of Mormon. Within a short period of time after Jesus' appearance, the Book of Mormon peoples “had all things common among them; therefore, there were no rich and poor...”<sup>48</sup> As a result “there were no contentions and disputations among them”<sup>49</sup>—the “love of money” is, after all, “the root of all evil”<sup>50</sup>—a there was a flowering of spiritual capacities and gifts such as had never been heard of before, just as DC 70.<sup>14</sup> leads us to envision. This state of affairs was society wide. All were in when it came to combating the evil of economic inequality. This societal wide state of affairs lasted for two hundred years. But, alas,

“In this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world. And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them. And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ.”<sup>51</sup>

It was all down hill from there. Societal collapse was inevitably built into this religious denial of economic equality and the deification of economic inequality.

Now, one can complain that this is all just pie-in-the-sky utopianism. So be it. It is certainly true that it is “not of this world.” But neither was Jesus “of this world.” While those who profess to be followers of Christ were not called out of the world, they were called to leave the evils of the world—one of the principal evils being that of economic inequality, especially that which is intentional and systemic. Those who claim to be followers of Jesus not only reject this evil as inevitable and godly. They not only do what they can individually to assist victims of a system that has economic inequality built into it as if it were a hallowed principle. They go further and advocate for social attitudes and policies that work toward the Lord's goal of global economic equality, harbingers of spiritual birth, growth, and maturity.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>47</sup> DC 104.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>48</sup> 4 Nephi 1.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>49</sup> 4 Nephi 1.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>50</sup> 1 Timothy 6.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>51</sup> 4 Nephi 1.<sup>24-26</sup>

## meditation 2

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Now, there's a scripture you don't hear read or referenced every week. Or once a year. Or once a decade. Come to think of it, I don't know the last time I heard it read or referenced. Maybe never—except by me, of course. I'm rude like that. If you made a list of the top ten read or referenced scriptures in Mormondom, Moses 1.<sup>39</sup> and a couple of 3.<sup>7</sup>s, one from 2 Nephi and one from Amos, would surely be on the list. If you made a list of the least ten read or referenced scriptures, this one might be on the list. Right along aside DC 70.<sup>14</sup>.

“Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld.”

Shoot, a passage from Leviticus about having sex with animals might be more often read or referenced than these two latter-day scriptures. They represent too great a danger to the mad status quo of our time.

But the absence of these two and other likeminded scriptures is revelatory. Tells you something about our culture. That something is not complimentary. It is something idolatrous. It's almost like we don't even understand those top ten most read and referenced scriptures we are so fond of.

All of this came to mind recently when an Associated Press headline caught my eye: “CEOs got smaller raises. It would still take a typical worker two lifetimes to make their annual pay.”<sup>52</sup> Among the eye-popping observations made in the piece was this tidbit.

“The median pay for workers at companies included in the AP survey was \$77,178, up 1.3% from \$76,160 the previous year. That means it would take that worker 186 years to make what a CEO making the median pay earned just last year. At the same group of companies in 2021, it would have taken 190 years.”

I am not sure how many things could more obviously NOT be part of “the plan of salvation” than this. While such perversion isn't part of God's economy, but that of a fallen, ungodly world, I'll concede, reluctantly, to the boss making a little more than employees. But what the AP reports is criminal, from any perspective but the perverted. It is criminal and perverted on the part of the CEO. It is criminal and perverted on the part of the companies that pay it. It is criminal and perverted on the part of the legislators that permit it. It is criminal and perverted on the part of the population that countenances it and does not righteously resist it.

It is difficult to find language sufficiently vile to describe such perversion and madness.

And not only does such inequality fly in the face of a just God, it flies in the face of all the propagandistic claims of our culture about merit and meritocracy. It is patently obvious to anyone with a brain and a heart that no one is so good at what they do that they are worth two lifetimes of their fellow human beings' earnings. No one ever worked that much harder than anyone else. It's simply not humanly possible. American businesses and the legislators that lap from their troughs

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<sup>52</sup> By Alexandra Olson, May 31, 2023

can't even be true to their own delusional and idolatrous ideas about merit and meritocracy, for God's sake! They show remarkable skill in further corrupting what is already corrupt to begin with.

One might wonder how the wealthy and powerful so successfully get away with such ungodliness and infidelity to even pretended virtues. Part of the answer to this is the fact that the "liberal media" does not report on such madness—although the "radical leftist/socialist/communistic" media might. More important is the monied class's ability to deflect and distract. Over nearly a half century, the monied interests, their well-funded think tanks, and the legislators that they have bought have spent billions of their ill-gotten gains in stoking culture wars to distract attention from their thievery. Then too, it seems people can be made to feel satisfied being pillaged as long as they can be encouraged to beat up on those weaker than themselves—traditionally, African Americans, gays, transexuals, etc., and more recently school teachers and librarians.

It is all madness, just as the Bible bears witness in passages such as the one that heads all our just society posts.

“...The heart of the sons of men  
is full of evil,  
and madness is in their heart  
while they live...” (Eccl. 9.<sup>3</sup>).

One would think that those religious leaders who claim to believe in and most understand scripture would step up and fulfill their prophetic role to expose and resist the ungodliness of inequality. But, alas, all too many of them have been bought off by these same monied interests and have bought into their delusional and idolatrous doctrines. So effective are the wizards of business that one begins to believe in sorcery.

But God be praised. We have scripture to teach and warn us against their sorcery.

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste!  
yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!  
Through thy precepts I get understanding:  
therefore I hate every false way” (Ps. 119.<sup>103-104</sup>).

“Moreover by thy word is thy servant warned” (Ps. 19.<sup>11</sup>).

Simply being a decent human being should be enough to reveal the evil of the thieving economic inequality that has infected our society. But it is certain that those who read scripture and claim to be disciples of the Lord, Jesus Christ, should be able to discern the sorcery that justifies the thieving economic inequality of our times. Even if such thieving inequality was not so clearly evil on the face of it, the word of God ought to cast aside all doubt. For it is most certainly “not given that one man should possess that which is above another.” Discerning believers should have no difficulty discerning that the economic inequality of our day in which a few individuals possess more than 95% of the world's wealth and in which a few individuals make as much in a single year as all their fellow beings make in two lifetimes is proof that “the world lieth in sin.”

Those instructed and warned by the good word of God have no choice but to root and pray against such ungodly thieves and scoundrels. Indeed, they have responsibility to do so. They are called to do so. They must pray that the sorcerers who establish, maintain, and operate such vile and perverted and idolatrous schemes fail miserably in their perversions. They must so pray, not out of hate for the vile

thief and scoundrel, but out of a desire for the happiness, security, and progress of all God's children. Such prayer fulfills Jesus' teaching that we pray,

“Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done in earth,  
As it is in heaven” (Mt. 6.<sup>10</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 21, 2024)*

## dc 76.<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth,  
and rejoice ye inhabitants thereof,  
for the Lord is God,  
and beside him there is no Savior.

<sup>2</sup>Great is his wisdom,  
marvelous are his ways,  
and the extent of his doings none can find out.

<sup>3</sup>his purposes fail not,  
neither are there any who can stay his hand.

<sup>4</sup>From eternity to eternity he is the same,  
and his years never fail.

## meditation

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It is an interesting and telling beginning to a section that is, ostensibly, about the future happiness and glorification of humankind. But no discussion and no revelation about humankind's future, or happiness, or glorification can begin in any way other than by focusing on God and His magnificence. So it is here. God is "Lord." He is, alone, "Savior." His "wisdom," His "ways," His "doings," His "purposes" are "great" and "marvelous" and incomprehensible and unfailing and unconquerable. He, Himself, is enduring in some way unique to all other enduring beings. The glorification of God in these verses is very psalm-like.

"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
and his greatness is unsearchable.  
One generation shall praise thy works to another,  
and shall declare thy mighty acts.  
I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,  
and of thy wondrous works.  
And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts:  
and I will declare thy greatness.  
They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness,  
and shall sing of thy righteousness."<sup>53</sup>

But, "though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, He has huge plans for His children, as we will see in the six verses that follow this section's opening four verses and then again in the visions that follow. While the focus of those visions is on human glorification and progression, God's ultimate hope for His children is "happiness." His "plan" is a "plan of happiness."<sup>55</sup> "Men are, that they might have joy."<sup>56</sup> One could, I suppose, either think of "happiness" as another way of saying "glorification," or of "glorification" as another way of saying "happiness." Either way, God's plan calls for the happiness of all His children. Indeed, this Section later testifies that God will save and glorify "all the works of his hands," except an infinitesimally small group that is belligerently uninterested in happiness or salvation or glory.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Psalm 145.<sup>3-7</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Psalm 138.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See Alma 42.<sup>8, 16</sup>

<sup>56</sup> 2 Nephi 2.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>57</sup> See DC 76.<sup>43</sup>

Given the nature of mortality, any success is amazing. This success rate is truly astounding, nearly incomprehensible.

Mortality can be ugly. Human failure is omnipresent. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”<sup>58</sup> Sin is universal, abounding from youth to old age and accompanying us into the grave. “For such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that he is liable to sin continually.”<sup>59</sup> God certainly has His work cut out for Him. Thankfully, He is up for the challenge. Failure is not an option. The “works, and designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught.”<sup>60</sup> Human sin is no deterrent to His work. His hands cannot be stayed. They reach down into the nethermost regions and draw us out of the grasp of a voracious death and hell and grave, and lift us up into happiness and glorification just as he planned from before the foundation of the world.

So, yes, the decision to begin a discussion of humankind’s joyous glorification with a reminder of God and his power is more than appropriate. It is the only beginning that makes any sense. For, “his name alone is excellent,”<sup>61</sup> and only “through God shall we do valiantly.”<sup>62</sup> We would do well to never forget this reality.

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus.

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<sup>58</sup> Romans 3.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Lectures on Faith, Lecture Third, questions and answers.

<sup>60</sup> DC 3.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Psalm 148.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Psalm 108.<sup>13</sup>

## dc 76.<sup>5-10</sup>

<sup>5</sup>For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

<sup>6</sup>Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.

<sup>7</sup>And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom.

<sup>8</sup>Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations.

<sup>9</sup>And their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught.

<sup>10</sup>For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will— yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man.

## meditation

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It's a big universe out there. It seems that God's hopes and plans for us are every bit as big. He does not act conservatively as he acts to personally assist us in realizing his hopes and plans for us. Labor in our behalf is his ultimate delight. So, he puts all his resources to work for our benefit. He puts his mercy to work (vs. 5). He puts his generosity to work (vs. 5). He puts his Spirit to work (vs. 10). He puts his power to work (vs. 10). He puts *all* of himself to work.

As part of his labors, he reveals "*all* mysteries," even "*all* the hidden mysteries," and *all* things pertaining to [his] kingdom—past, present, and future. Nothing trivial here. Eternal Glory? It is ours, if we desire it. The "wonders of eternity"? They are ours, if we desire them. "Wisdom"? "Understanding"? "Secrets" beyond our senses? Beyond, even, our imagination? They are all there for us, if we want them.

Through God's foresight, his mercy, his grace, his Spirit, his power, we have extraordinary futures awaiting us. With such a grand future awaiting us, we are wise to not become enamored and distracted by things of little consequence that this world offers. We are wise to keep our eyes, our ears, our hearts, and our minds upon the prize, upon the things of eternity so willingly offered by a loving God and Father.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



## dc 84.<sup>112</sup>

And the bishop, Newel K. Whitney, also should travel round about and among all the churches, searching after the poor to administer to their wants by humbling the rich and the proud.

## meditation

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The Lord encourages the Church to be about administering to the “wants” of the poor. However, even without consideration of innumerable other passages in which the Lord calls for the care of the poor, this short, single 32-word verse contains far more instruction than the simple requirement to administer to the poor’s wants. In addition to caring for the poor, the Lord provides insights into his thoughts about financial insecurity as well as financial security.

First, Church leaders do not wait for the poor to come to them. By the time the poor gather the courage to ask for help, many are already emotionally humiliated and worn out with worry. They may have dug themselves into a deeper financial hole as they have looked for solutions. In order to avoid such depths, Church leaders are to proactively go on the hunt, look under every rock in “search” of the poor. This proactive assistance can help preserve the self-worth of the individual. As a leader approaches an individual with the intent of ministering to their wants, the leader can assure the individual that he or she is not there because there is something wrong with them, but because the leader is a disciple of Jesus and is acting as disciples act.

Second, this passage calls into question the common thought that Church assistance is only intended to meet basic “needs.” Leaders are under divine command to administer to “wants” as well as “needs.” Again, this humanizes the poor and leaves them with a sense of divine worth.

Before moving to our last observation, we will ask the reader to consider whether and how the counsel that is given to Church leaders also applies to individual disciples who lack the designation, “Church leader.”

The two insights above, alone, would be enough to justify the existence and usefulness of this passage. But, in seeking to administer to the wants of the poor, the Lord has another objective. This one is of no less importance than that of meeting the poor’s wants. In administering to the poor’s wants, the Lord fully intends to “humble the rich and the proud.” This certainly means that the resources necessary to assisting the poor are to come from them, the rich. This is a fundamental aspect of the Lord’s economic principles.

You see, the Lord knows that the rich are every bit as much in need of help as the poor. The well-to-do can, often do, become proud. Such pride need not be gross arrogance and hubris. It can simply be a sense of self-sufficiency that would work against their reliance upon God and make them hard-hearted and tight-fisted toward the poor. Such false security would be detrimental to their spiritual health and relationship to God. The Lord’s rich know that it is no burden to financially assist others. In fact, they know that such assistance allows them to retain their remission of sins and maintain a healthy relationship with God. Far from judging, prosecuting, and looking down at the poor—persecuting them according to Book of Mormon language—they should thank them; thank the poor for the role they play in their own salvation history.

Today is as good a time as any to repent of any ill feelings we may have toward the poor. Today is as good a time as any to recognize the valuable role they play in their own salvation. Above all, today is as good a time as any to rejoice in the role we can play in being a blessing to the poor, and act upon the invitation to diligently “search after the poor,” being unsatisfied until we have seen all their “wants”

met.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **dc** 88.<sup>123</sup>

*See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires.*

## **m**editation

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When trying to take the measure of our spiritual health, we are fond of examining such conveniently easy indicators as consistent scripture reading, daily prayer, or the regularity of our FHEs. I have often said, and that for decades, that the measurement most indicative of our spirituality is to be found in our pockets and purses. It is found in our attitude toward our material assets, how we use them, and how we impart them.

We feel, justifiably, that the degree to which we love is also a strong indicator of our spiritual progress. But we forget, or choose to ignore, the tight connection that passages such as today's establish between love, our attitudes toward the material assets of others, and the manner in which we impart our material assets to others. "When [we] look at others with their lands and gold" (Hymn #241), and envy them, become dissatisfied with what we have, and covet their material assets and success that we imagine those assets to represent, we give evidence to a lack of love. For the absence of covetousness and the Christ-like impartation of our material resources is unbreakably bound up with true love of others.

What is the nature of a "Christ-like" or gospel-centered attitude toward personal assets and the impartation of the same? We can mention a few. Christ considered every asset he possessed to be of worth only insofar as it could be used for the benefit of others. Christ imparted his assets to others without consideration as to how they arrived at their need. He imparted his assets without demanding as a prerequisite to know that they would make the maximal use of it. He was always pleased at others' achievements and successes as long as they were acquired through just and holy conduct. Yes, Jesus offered each of us his maximum help at a time when we were least worthy of it and long before it could be ascertained what we would do with it. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5.<sup>8</sup>).

If we would be truly Christ-like, seek to imitate him, and come to be comfortable in his presence—i.e., be sanctified—we must look anew at the assets we have, including the material, and do with them as Jesus did with his.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **dc** 101.<sup>37-38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Therefore, care not for the body, neither the life of the body; but care for the soul, and for the life of the soul. <sup>38</sup>And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life.

### **m**editation

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That old philosophical question asks, “If a tree falls in the woods and no one hears it, does it make a sound?” I have wondered, “If I do not exist, is there existence?” Perhaps this suggests a certain narcissism on my part. But, I do not think that I am alone in finding it nearly impossible to contemplate non-existence! Nothingness. And so, the promise of an existence that is eternal is, for many of us, not only assuring and pleasing, but carries in it a sort of logic. How could it be otherwise?

That said, we wonder about the nature of an existence that goes on and on. And we wonder if there is anything we can do to improve the nature of eternal existence. In today’s short passage, I hear two suggestions for improving life in the here and now and in the infinite beyond.

First, we prioritize those things which improve the innermost part of us, whatever we call that—here it is “soul.” Even in our short lifespans with finite understanding, we see that some things do not last. Some things rot, crumble, rust, decompose, fall apart, disappear, etc. Such things deserve no more than our most cursory attention.

Second, we seek to find God and, finding him, to discover his nature. Finding and discovering Him, we seek His influence and presence in our lives. Finding Him, discovering Him, and enjoying His presence in our lives, we seek to imitate Him. In imitating Him, however imperfectly, we prepare ourselves for that existence which is eternal; an existence that is in and through God, the great Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## dc 101.<sup>46-51</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Now, the servants of the nobleman went and did as their lord commanded them, and planted the olive-trees, and built a hedge round about, and set watchmen, and began to build a tower. <sup>47</sup>And while they were yet laying the foundation thereof, they began to say among themselves:

‘And what need hath my lord of this tower?’

<sup>48</sup>And consulted for a long time, saying among themselves:

‘What need hath my lord of this tower, seeing this is a time of peace?’

<sup>49</sup>Might not this money be given to the exchangers?’

For there is no need of these things.’

<sup>50</sup>And while they were at variance one with another they became very slothful, and they hearkened not unto the commandments of their lord. <sup>51</sup>And the enemy came by night, and broke down the hedge; and the servants of the nobleman arose and were affrighted, and fled; and the enemy destroyed their works, and broke down the olive-trees.

## meditation

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In 1833, Mormons were violently expelled from their homes in Jackson County Missouri, a location that doctrine had taught a Zion community was to be built. In response to this tragic expulsion, Joseph Smith received a revelation (DC 101). A portion of this revelation (vs. 44-62) is in the form of parable. This parable explains both the reasons for the expulsion and the promise that and means by which Zion would be “redeemed.”

The saints, the Lord reveals, were not innocent victims in their expulsion. They had contributed to it by abandoning divine principles and acting contrary to those principles. In rebelling against these divine imperatives, the parable’s servants had reasoned, “Might not this money be given to the exchangers?”

This justification for ignoring God’s directions is too often overlooked. If observed, it is too often ignored. If not ignored, it is dismissed as “symbolic.” The truth is, it ought to get more press. It should be made into a plaque, sold at Deseret Book Stores, and be placed on the wall of every Mormon’s comfortable living room.

While there is much that is symbolic in this parable—as is customary in all parables—the parable’s servants’ choice to seek profits through exchanges rather than follow the Lord’s directions is consistent with what we know of the historical reality and so should not be read as symbolic of something else. Earlier in this same revelation, the Lord had revealed that the saints themselves had “polluted their inheritance” through “jarrings” and “contentions,” and “envyings,” and “strifes,” and “lustful and covetous desires” (vs. 6). Money, profit, and the things of this world had been dearer to the saint’s hearts than Zion with its strict economic principles of redistribution.

Still today, money, profit, and the things of this world too often take priority over the things of God, including and especially God’s economic principles. The false economic principles we inherit from a fallen world keep us from establishing Zion here and from preparedness for the kingdom of God in the hereafter. We might, as Satan claimed, “have anything in this world for money,” but we cannot abide the kingdom of God with money as a first, second, third, fourth, fifth... priority. It must be sacrificed on the altar of God so that we might avoid eternal expulsion from his kingdom.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **dc** 128.<sup>22-23</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause?

Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren;  
and on, on to the victory!

Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad.

Let the earth break forth into singing.

Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel,  
who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their  
prison;

for the prisoners shall go free.

<sup>23</sup>Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud;  
and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King!

And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness.

Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord;

and ye solid rocks weep for joy!

And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together,  
and let all the sons of God shout for joy!

And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever!

And again I say, how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven,  
proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms,  
principalities, and powers!

## **m**editation

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Some years ago, a visitor to my office complained that we Mormons didn't really understand the grace and mercy of God. I was quick to point out that if this was true—and, I conceded, it might be—it wasn't the fault of our scriptures. For they often present a God who is far more expansive in mercy and grace and saving power than that of traditional Christianity.

When asked how I could say that, I referred my visitor to this section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Here, we are presented with a God so expansive in mercy and grace and power that he reaches beyond the grave and saves the dead—a group that every other “Christian” theology has given up on. Here, we are presented with a God who is simply relentless in his pursuit of individuals to save.

As we contemplate this divine endurance, we might think of the ancient nation called Israel. They vexed him from the day they accepted him as their Lord, and then proceeded to vex him for the next millennia. But he stuck with them, calling them to him—over and over and over again. He finally came in person, looking for lost souls to save.

But, this discovery of divine relentlessness comes not only from the scriptural witness. It is also a result of my own experience. I have found him to be relentless in his pursuit of me as well. This is, indeed, a cause in which to go forward, a cause to inspire courage, a cause in which to rejoice and shout for joy, a cause to break forth into singing, a cause for anthems of eternal praise. This divine relentlessness is the alpha and omega of our ultimate victory, whatever its nature. Above all else, that is what Doctrine and Covenants 128 teaches me.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **d**c 138.<sup>11-12, 15-16, 18-19</sup>

<sup>11</sup>I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great. <sup>12</sup>And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just... <sup>15</sup>I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. <sup>16</sup>They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death... <sup>18</sup>While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful; <sup>19</sup>and there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance.

## **m**editation

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Jesus' amazing power to gladden and encourage and deliver was on constant display during his mortal ministry. His ministry surpassed that of any other in this regard. I don't know how many dead people have the power to gladden and encourage and deliver, but Jesus did. Even in death, his impact on people was electrifying. We see this in his "advent... into the spirit world" and the jubilation his arrival caused. At his appearing, an "unnumerable company," a "vast multitude" was filled with joy and gladness," "rejoicing together."

With this, we come full circle, of sorts. At Christmas we enjoy reading (though it should be more often, but several times a year) about the humble group of shepherds who were, at Jesus' birth, visited by a choir of angels and were privileged to hear its most incredible performance. Among the lyrics that the choir sang were these

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you *good tidings of great joy*, which shall be to all people" (Lk. 2.<sup>10</sup>).

This beginning and ending to Jesus' mortal life serves as a reminder of something that can, at times, seem somewhat trite: that "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2.<sup>25</sup>). A few centuries after Nephi's insight, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, asserted that "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence." Many centuries later, Joseph Smith would say something very much like it: "Happiness is the object and design of our existence." It was not a choir of angels that woke King Benjamin from his slumber one night in hopes of delivering this same message. It was but one solitary, lone angel. But, this lone angel's purpose was no different than that of the heavenly choir of angels who visited the lowly shepherds.

"Awake, and hear the words which I shall tell thee; for behold, I am come to declare unto you the *glad tidings of great joy*. For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee *that thou mayest rejoice*; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, *that they may also be filled with joy*" (Mos. 3.<sup>3-4</sup>).

King Benjamin was true to his charge. He faithfully delivered the angelic message to his people. As a result, the angel's hopes were fulfilled.

"The Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and *they were filled with joy*, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus

Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them” (Mos. 4.<sup>3</sup>)

Truly, it is an understatement of gigantic proportions to say that the glad tidings about Jesus and the willing fellowship he extends to us is joyous. Fellowship with him always results in this sort of peace and joy. Just imagine. Day in and day out for three years Jesus’ disciples had joyous fellowship with Jesus. It must have been addictive. Little wonder, then, that on the last night of his earthly ministry, and just hours before his jubilant advent into the spirit world, Jesus was under necessity of comforting his disciples as the realization that he would not always be with them came crashing down on them, crushing them. Among the comforting promises Jesus made them on that last night was this,

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn. 16.24).

One of that night’s participants and recipients of the promise was John. He must have experienced the fulfilment of the promise, for he was anxious to pass it along to others and have others join him in the joy of fellowship with Jesus.

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 Jn. 1.<sup>3-4</sup>).

No one brings the kind and level of joy and happiness that Jesus brings.

“Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A *voice of gladness!* A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; *glad tidings* for the dead; *a voice of gladness* for the living and the dead; *glad tidings of great joy*. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that bring *glad tidings of good things*, and that say unto Zion: Behold, thy God reigneth! As the dews of Carmel, so shall the knowledge of God descend upon them!” (DC 128.<sup>19</sup>)

This is gospel. I hope it is the gospel you experience. If not, the Lent and Easter Season is the perfect time to ask, “Why not?” It is the perfect time to seek Jesus and the joy he so richly promises. If it *is* the gospel you have experienced and do experience, then the Lent and Easter Season is a good time to share the wealth. It is a good time to do as King Benjamin did, as John did, as angels have done, and above all as Jesus himself always does. Become a bearer of glad tidings so that others “may also be filled with joy” so that, together, our joy may be full.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: march 28, 2024*)



## **Moses 7.**<sup>18</sup>

And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.

## **Meditation**

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While working on his “translation” of the Bible in the late summer, and then fall and early winter of 1830, Joseph Smith received what is today known as the Book of Moses found in the LDS Pearl of Great Price. The Book of Moses is a reworking of Genesis 1.<sup>1</sup>-6.<sup>13</sup>. There is much here that fascinates and inspires. However, Joseph seems to have been most captured by the material concerning Enoch, and, more specifically, his gathering of disciples and the establishment of a community called, Zion. As evidence for this assertion, we would point to a few facts.

We find references to Zion in parts of the Doctrine and Covenants that predate the composition of the Book of Moses. These are often formulaic,<sup>63</sup> with Zion being little more than an abstraction. They provide little or no insight into Joseph’s conception of the title at this stage of his development.<sup>64</sup> However, with DC 28 composed in the fall of 1830, Zion ceases to be an abstraction and becomes very, very concrete.

“And now, behold, I say unto you that it is not revealed, and no man knoweth where the city Zion shall be built, but it shall be given hereafter.”<sup>65</sup>

Hereafter, Zion becomes an actual city that Joseph is to establish and build. By the end of the year, Joseph is moving the center of the church in preparation for the “gathering” associated with Zion’s establishment.

“And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio...”<sup>66</sup>

From here on, whether in the form of a center “stake” or dispersed “stakes,” Zion’s establishment becomes the center focus of Joseph’s thoughts and efforts. Whether the title is used or not, the next fifty or so sections of the DC—often entire sections—are devoted to the city, how it is to be built, and upon what principles it exists and endures. While there are many principles associated with the establishment of Zion, no principle gets more press or is more critical for the establishment and endurance of Zion than the economic principles upon which it is based. It will become abundantly clear that one of the goals and, indeed, one of the principal character traits of the Zion society is that there are “no poor” in its midst. Zion accomplishes this extermination of poverty through the redistribution of wealth, the Lord’s “own way.”

“But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.”<sup>67</sup>

The oneness of “heart” and “mind” found in today’s text is not some abstraction of sentimentalism. It is literal and concrete. Among other areas, the oneness is found in the identification of and the

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, 11.<sup>6</sup>, 12.<sup>6</sup>, and 14.<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Additional references are 21.<sup>7</sup>, 24.<sup>7</sup>, and 25.<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> Verse 9

<sup>66</sup> DC 37.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>67</sup> DC 104.16

temporal assistance toward the poor so that they cease to be poor. Indeed, the existence of poverty is incompatible with righteousness, with oneness, and with Zion. The incompatibility of poverty with Zion is not found only in individual callousness toward the poor but in community policies that do not care for the poor through the distribution of resources.

The economic principle whereby resources are distributed evenly or “equally,” based upon “need” and “want” rather than “merit,” is called the Law of Consecration. It is at times called “the Order of Enoch” after the individual who initiated Joseph into the existence and meaning of Zion.

Oneness in Zion calls for the distribution of resources such that “rich” and “poor” are “equal” until there are no rich or poor. There is no righteousness so long as there are poor citizens. Joseph learned these truths from Enoch. Over the following months and years, the Lord would give Joseph additional details and practical instructions on how to carry out this divine plan for the establishment of Zion.

Unfortunately, the Doctrine and Covenants also details the failure of the “saints” to fulfil the divine plan. It is a sad tale of a missed opportunity. Even now, after nearly two hundred years, the “saints” continue the earlier failures, often kicking against the pricks and belligerently offering up vain justifications for their failure—justifications that partake of the false wisdom and lustful traditions of a fallen world.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## hymn # 72

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!  
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!  
Join the great throng,  
Psaltery, organ and song,  
Sounding in glad adoration!
2. Praise to the Lord! Over all things he gloriously reigneth.  
Borne as on eagle wings, safely his Saints he sustaineth.  
Hast thou not seen  
How all thou needest hath been  
Granted in what he ordaineth?
3. Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy way and defend thee.  
Surely his goodness and mercy shall ever attend thee.  
Ponder anew  
What the Almighty can do,  
Who with his love doth befriend thee.
4. Praise to the Lord! Oh, let all that is in me adore him!  
All that hath breath, join with Abraham's seed to adore him!  
Let the "amen"  
Sum all our praises again,  
Now as we worship before him.

## meditation

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The hymnist, and we with him, prays, "Oh, let all that is in me adore him!" Praise forms in our thoughts, our minds, our hearts, and our souls. Praise is expressed in the words that our tongues utter and the actions that our hands and bodies perform. Praise should indeed occupy every part of us.

"I will praise, O Lord, with my whole heart" (9.<sup>1</sup>), the Psalmist promised. He would praise God "at all times" (34.<sup>1</sup>), from the cradle to when he became "old and grayheaded" (71.<sup>18</sup>), and then as long as "I have my being" (104.<sup>33</sup>). Still not enough, he would praise "yet more and more" (71.<sup>14</sup>): "I will praise thee for ever" (52.<sup>9</sup>). His praise would be loud—as loud as trumpets and cymbals (150.<sup>3-5</sup>)—and "boastful" (34.<sup>2</sup>). His praise would flow from "joyful lips (63.<sup>5</sup>), becoming "a joyful noise unto God" (95.<sup>2</sup>). He would not be timid, certainly not be silenced (30.<sup>12</sup>), and never hide or conceal God's praiseworthiness (40.<sup>10</sup>).

His praise would flow, not only at all times, but in all places and "among much people" (35.<sup>18</sup>). He would "shew forth all thy praise" from the intimacy of "the great congregation" (22.<sup>25</sup>) to the open friendliness of "the gates of the daughter of Zion" (9.<sup>14</sup>) to less familiar, less friendly, possibly hostile locales found "among the nations" (57.<sup>9</sup>) and "among the heathen" (18.<sup>49</sup>). He would not even confine his praise to the present generation, near or far, but proclaim it to a future people, "shewing to the generations to come the praises of the LORD" (78.<sup>4</sup>). He would invite all, near and far, present or future to join him: "Let us exalt his name together" (34.<sup>3</sup>).

It was his hope that such praise, always "comely" (147.<sup>1</sup>) in the eyes of God, would become so common and so pervasive that it could be said of God: Thou "inhabitest the praises of Israel" (22.<sup>3</sup>). Indeed, "every thing that hath breath" (150.<sup>6</sup>) would join the choir in praise of God. We could do

worse than follow the Psalmist's example. We could not do better than measure ourselves against his standard and then pattern our praise after him.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!