

Introduction to the Doctrines and Teachings of The Holy Scriptures

by
Jared D. Edson

This work is first and foremost an introduction to the scriptures, so it has not been written under the assumption that the reader knows either much or little, but that the subjects discussed in these pages are both worthwhile and of interest to inquiring minds. While the number of subjects may be somewhat limited overall, great care and effort has been made to discuss each one as thoroughly and completely as may be practical without getting buried in detail.

There may be some who find this presentation too shallow or too deep, but to those who have an interest in the subjects themselves it should be understood that this is not intended to be the final word on understanding the scriptures. The reader is encouraged to study these things with an open mind and heart, but with the carefulness that the Gospel of Jesus Christ deserves. In these pages the reader will be introduced to several of the guiding principles to be used in reading the scriptures in order to understand more perfectly the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In doing so, it is hoped that the Bible and the Book of Mormon may be examined as equal books of holy scripture for the wisdom contained in their pages and the truth that they lead the reader to find in following the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

May God grant that you find truth and spiritual strength, even Salvation and Eternal Life through Jesus Christ as you apply what you find in the books which have been carefully written by his holy prophets and apostles. Amen.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction to and summary of the holy scriptures	
A. Doctrine versus Teaching.....	3
B. Principles of continuity between Old and New Testament times.....	6
C. The Chronicler of History – the record keepers.....	12
D. A summary of biblical history.....	15
E. A summary of Book of Mormon history.....	25
II. Common doctrinal topics	
A. Grace.....	29
B. Works.....	32
C. Faith.....	39
D. Love.....	44
E. Baptism.....	49
F. Priesthood.....	57
III. The living God	
A. Prophets.....	63
B. Revelations.....	75
C. Miracles.....	79
D. Personal Testimonies.....	87
IV. The Church of Jesus Christ	
A. The founder of the religion – Jesus Christ.....	91
B. The founder of the church – Jesus Christ.....	103
C. The ordinances of the church – established by Jesus Christ.....	113
V. Parting thoughts	
A. Life.....	118
B. The Call.....	122

I. Introduction to and summary of the holy scriptures

A. Doctrine versus Teaching

In writing about the doctrines and teachings of the holy scriptures, it is perhaps useful to describe the difference between what a “doctrine” is versus what a “teaching” is. In one view there is little difference – a doctrine is a teaching of some description. Upon further inspection it can be seen that the terms do reference different concepts.

First, the term “teaching” would seem to indicate a simple description of facts that may exist for past, present or future times. Commandments would fall into this category; the “law” is another. From the ten commandments (Exodus 19) to the sermon on the mount (Matthew chapter 5), these are teachings that were ingrained into every Israelite from the inception of the nation of Israel until the last books of the New Testament according to the beliefs of the various adherents in those Testaments.

These commandments, laws, statutes, and ordinances form the basis of right and wrong, good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, and are the foundation upon which Christian and Jewish religious customs are built. One cannot be “righteous” if they also are “murderers” for example. And “murder” in the New Testament time period can be just an extension of being “angry” at another, placing anger and murder on similar footing with each other.

The scriptures are replete with teachings on various matters, and are firmly entrenched in our understanding of what it means to be a Christian or a Jew.

Second, the term “doctrine” would at the outset seem on par with teaching, except that it designates something more than simple facts about things past, present or future. Solomon alluded to this in his writings:

Proverbs 4:1-7

1 Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.

2 For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

3 For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.

4 He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

Solomon gave advice to obey the law, with the expectation that the process of obeying the law was the key to get wisdom and understanding. Knowledge of the law may be one thing (i.e. a “teaching”), but one can know the law and disobey it, which is not wise (i.e., a “doctrine”). The pursuit of wisdom and understanding through obedience to the law is the doctrine advocated by Solomon.

In the Book of Mormon, we can find an example of doctrine as provided by Jesus:

3 Nephi 5:29-43

29 And there shall be no disputations among you as there hath hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine as there hath hitherto been;

30 For verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention; and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger one with another;

31 Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

32 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine. And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me;

33 And I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me;

34 And whoso believeth in me and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

35 And whoso believeth not in me and is not baptized shall be damned.

36 Verily, verily, I say unto you that this is my doctrine; and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also;

37 And unto him will the Father bear record of me; for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost;

38 And thus will the Father bear record of me; and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

39 And again, I say unto you, Ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in no wise receive these things.

40 And again, I say unto you, Ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God.

41 Verily, verily, I say unto you that this is my doctrine; and whoso buildeth upon this, buildeth upon my rock; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

42 And whoso shall declare more or less than this and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell standeth open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.

43 Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken unto the ends of the earth.

In this passage are provided at least two examples of doctrine – the first being that the doctrine of Christ is to do away with anger and contention. The second being that the means of being saved is to become submissive to God and to follow his instructions in order to become a child of the kingdom of God.

Doctrine, therefore means not only to have a knowledge of facts, but to have a framework of understanding of the meaning of those facts. Or in other words, doctrine includes the way to understand something.

We can find some additional examples from the scriptures that help us.

Mark 1:23-27

23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,
 24 Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.
 25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

The fact that Jesus could cast out an unclean spirit using just the words “Hold thy peace, and come out of him,” is something the audience didn’t fully grasp. Though they were aware of people possessed with unclean spirits, there was nothing they could do about them except to keep them away from others. Indeed, “What new doctrine is this?” from their perspective?

For one, it forced them to reconsider what spiritual power really consisted of. From their experiences, a possessed person could not be dealt with: the devil had them and that was that. Jesus showed them a new approach for dealing with the situation because God has power over unclean spirits. Their understanding to that point was limited to only facts, and the law of Moses said nothing about how to cast out an unclean spirit; rather, if anything, they were to be taken outside the congregation and executed.

For another, it opened their eyes to an entirely different view of God. This was a **living** God, and he was fully aware of the conditions men lived in. As a **living** God, he was also an **interactive** God. Jesus didn’t just show them the power he had, but he showed them that God is reachable and takes an interest in their livelihood. It showed them that not only does he have an **interest**, but that he has **compassion** upon them when they suffer, as this man had suffered with the unclean spirit.

Such a revised view of the being they should worship was indeed a new doctrine – or at least new to them. It was a new way for gaining understanding that they were not aware of beforehand.

Although these terms of “teaching” and “doctrine” sometimes cross over each other at times, their more full meaning is distinct and necessary for gaining a greater appreciation for the way that God has both taught and how he demonstrates his will for us so that we can prepare ourselves for the greater riches of eternity.

I. Introduction to and summary of the holy scriptures

B. Principles of continuity between Old and New Testament times.

Even the casual reader of the Bible can find within its pages certain things in the Old Testament that appear different from the New Testament. Often within the Old Testament it appears that judgments are ruthlessly harsh, while in the New Testament there are many occasions when something that was dealt with by execution in the Old Testament are, in fact, dealt with through forgiveness. That, along with other differences often leads people to the conclusion that the authors of the Old and New Testaments didn't really agree on much at all. This appears to be a discontinuity between those books.

That is the conclusion we may reach if we only casually read both Old and New Testaments, though. On a deeper reading of both books, however, we can see how the seeming changes are part of a larger picture. The Old Testament is a history of God's dealings with mankind from the beginning of the world up through a time roughly 300-400 years before the birth of Christ (not including the Apocrypha), whereas the New Testament only covers a time from the birth of Christ until about 90 years after the birth of Christ.

Such a difference in the amount of recorded history is not without some difficulty in explaining all of the different ways in which God deals with his people. Yet, even so, we find on a great many occasions when we are able to see God being equally harsh and equally forgiving in both the Old and New Testaments, and it is not the result of a capricious (that is to say, changeable or malicious) nature. Different circumstances demanded different responses to maintain the same laws.

To provide some examples, we can pick almost randomly from any range of different events in Biblical history, such as the following:

Old Testament – harsh judgments:

Leviticus 10

1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.
2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.
3 Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

2 Chronicles 26

14 And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones.
15 And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.
16 But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.
17 And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men:
18 And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense:

go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God.

19 Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.

20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.

New Testament – harsh judgments:

Acts 5

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

Acts 13

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

With these two examples from each Testament, we can readily see that harsh judgments can be found in both, yet we can also see that the punishment fit the crime. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had violated commandments of God in front of the entire congregation of Israel. Had the punishment not been severe, it would have announced to the nation of Israel that God accepts practices that he did not give when it comes to service in the priesthood, commandments that were given -- items that were understood, and accepted by the entire congregation of Israel. By willingly disobeying God, it would

have taught Israel that they had no need to obey God either. The consequences of inaction on God's part would have been more severe than how God dealt with the lives of these two men.

Similarly, in the days of king Uzziah, his long history of faithful service to God was no excuse for taking into his hands in his last few years of life the priesthood duties that he was not called to perform. It demanded a response. When he was struck with leprosy, he realized just how severely he had exercised his pride, and with the remaining time he had he could repent of this evil that he had done. Again, it showed that God is willing to follow-through with his promises, which includes both blessings and cursings, even if the one he must punish would normally be called a friend.

But the really interesting element of the continuity that exists between Old and New Testaments is that it is the same God either blessing or cursing. Very often we are told by those around us that Jesus forgives and that it is acceptable to sin as long as you are sorry about it. But the New Testament tells a very different story, one that more aligns with what God did in the Old Testament.

Ananias and Sapphira were a married couple that were members of the church in good standing, so far as we are led to believe at the beginning of the passage, but their choices to exercise greed and to lie about the contributions they were making to help the poor were necessarily met with judgment, and harsh ones at that.

When both Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead at the feet of the apostles, it was because they had not just lied to the apostles, but to God also. Here we find a very important thing: God cannot be fooled. The church was growing quickly at the time and without doubt there were some who became members without the full conviction of duty and love that they professed to have. Good intentions and full dedication are not entirely the same thing, and in the case of this couple, the two things were at opposition to one another. They may have meant to do well, but they were willing to lie about how they did it. They loved money more than God, and that would be a poor standard to uphold while the church was growing as it was. What if the person they sold the land to had told other members of the church? It would have set a lower bar for the love of Christ than it was due.

When the sorcerer Elymas sought to turn others away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the judgment against him was swift. Although his punishment was temporary, not only Elymas, but all those around him were made to understand what the difference was between the power of Satan and the power of God in spiritual authority. Notably, the punishment fit the crime – he was blind to the truth of God, and was made to live in literal blindness for a short time so that he could learn wisdom and repent.

We can see from these examples that God did execute harsh judgments in both Old and New Testament times. Were that all to discuss, we would be motivated only by fear that God would punish us as well as them, but God also gives blessings and offers forgiveness in both Old and New Testament times. We will look at some of those next.

Blessings and forgiveness – Old Testament

2 Kings 22

8 And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

9 And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD.

10 And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

11 And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.

12 And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,

13 Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

14 So Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

15 And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

18 But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;

19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

Jonah 3

1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.
9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?
10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

Blessings and forgiveness – New Testament

Acts 2

29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.
30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;
31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.
32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.
33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.
34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,
35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.
36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.
37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?
38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.
40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.
41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.
42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.
43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.
44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;
45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.
46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,
47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Acts 8

- 1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,
- 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.
- 3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:
- 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
- 5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
- 6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.
- 7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.
- 8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.
- 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.
- 10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.
- 11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,
- 12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.
- 13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:
- 14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.
- 15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:
- 16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.
- 17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.
- 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.
- 19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.
- 20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

In both the Old and New Testaments, we find God not only being a forgiving God, but one that rewards obedience, whether in spiritual or physical (temporal) blessings. This forgiveness is dependent upon repentance, which is a condition that is uniformly true in both Old and New Testaments. These are just a few examples, but there are many more that can be found.

Thus, whether it is punishment for sin or blessings with repentance and forgiveness, we find that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and is willing to bless and forgive all regardless of their stature in society or public life. All are alike to God, and in this we have hope for both ourselves and the people of this generation and the generations yet to come.

I. Introduction to and summary of the holy scriptures
C. The Chronicler of History – the record keepers.

The identity of the people that kept the record that we have as the books of the Bible is sometimes at question because there is no name given to identify them. Chief examples of this include the books of Chronicles and Kings, in which it appears that an observer has recorded these things over a period of almost a thousand years. Other examples such as the books of Judges, or Esther, or Ruth likewise were probably not written by the people whom the books are named after. This was the job of a Chronicler – a record keeper, and due to the nature of these books it appears that we may have only just a small fraction of the content that these narrators may have been able to draw from.

It is evident to us that Moses wrote the first five books of the bible, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. However, the last chapter of Deuteronomy records the death of Moses and the subsequent events in which Joshua takes his place as the prophet, chief judge of Israel, and captain of Israel's armies. Since it is unlikely that Moses recorded his own death, it seems that someone else must have done so.

Very often this task fell to the scribes. It was their job not only to record the events they observed, but to function as the personal recorder for the leaders they served, as well as to make copies of those records for distribution to the people.

In other cases it seems apparent that the prophet himself did write the words of their book. Isaiah, for example, likely penned his own words, as it says that he wrote with a man's pen (*"Moreover the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Mahershalalhashbaz."* - Isaiah 8:1)

The New Testament differs somewhat from the Old Testament in that most of the books are written by the people identified by the title of the book, or at the end of the book. In many cases they may have used scribes to record their words since they were more skilled at putting pen to paper, as it were, but in some cases it is evident that they specifically did it themselves. (*"Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand."* - Galatians 6:11)

Besides the purely informative content they included, the third person narrative often found in the scriptures is frequently interspersed with commentary. We see this most clearly in the books of Kings and Chronicles, in which it does not just describe what they (the kings, tribes of Israel, other nations, etc.) did, but whether it was good or evil. To this end they give us insight into the workings of the law and the commandments, and this meant that the record-keeper had to know what the law and commandments said as well as what they meant.

With such an overview of how events transpired, it seems clear that there were writings of these events that the Chronicler had which we do not have. For example, it would be difficult to imagine the books of first and second Chronicles to have been written by a single person that was present from the beginning to the ending of the events described in them – more than a thousand years of history. If so, where are the books that the Chronicler of Chronicles and Kings drew their information from? Or was it given to them by revelation from God? That is a distinct possibility, and cannot be discounted – Moses recorded the events from the beginning of the world up to his time, and it was given to him by

God and not because he lived through those events himself. But is it always the case that long stretches of history were given directly by revelation?

It seems unlikely that the people during the reign of the Judges of Israel would not have kept any record of events themselves, nor for the others that kept a history of Israel in one form or another. If this is true, then where are the original books written by these people from long ago?

There is some indication of other books that we do not have. For the sake of brevity, there at least ten other books referenced in the Old and New Testaments that are simply not found anywhere in the sixty-six books we have in the King James bible.

Those ten other books identified in the King James Bible include the following:

- The book of the wars of the Lord
 - The book of Jasher
 - The book of the acts of Solomon
 - The book of Nathan the prophet
 - The book of Gad the seer
 - The prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite
 - The visions of Iddo the seer
 - The book of Shemaiah the prophetess
 - The book of Jehu, the son of Hanani
 - The book of the purchase
- (see below for references)

It would seem, therefore, that the writers of the books we do have drew at least some of their information from sources that we do not have. It is important to realize this because many today claim that the word of God as found in the Bible is complete and perfect, and that there is no more. However, the Bible's own text suggests that this is not the case.

- - - see also - - -

Numbers 21:14 Wherefore it is said in the **book of the wars of the LORD**, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,

Joshua 10:13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the **book of Jasher**? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

1 Kings 11:41 And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the **book of the acts of Solomon**?

1 Chronicles 29:29 Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the **book of Nathan the prophet**, and in the **book of Gad the seer**,

2 Chronicles 9:29 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the **book of Nathan the prophet**, and in the **prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite**, and in **the visions of Iddo the seer** against Jeroboam the son of Nebat?

2 Chronicles 12:15 Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the **book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer** concerning genealogies? And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.

2 Chronicles 13:22 And the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings, are written in the **story of the prophet Iddo**.

2 Chronicles 20:34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the **book of Jehu the son of Hanani**, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel.

Jeremiah 32:12 And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the **book of the purchase**, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison..

I. Introduction to and summary of the holy scriptures

D. A summary of biblical history.

The standard biblical canon – the list of books accepted as authoritative scripture by most churches in the Christian tradition – consists of 66 books covering a time period from the beginning of the creation until the reign of Christ and the new heaven and new earth. The historical narrative, however, covers the time from the creation until about 90 A.D. If we consider the first five books of the Old Testament as being written by Moses, as is generally believed to be the case, then the books themselves have a writing date from somewhere between approximately 1,600 and 1,400 B.C. The last book of the New Testament was written by most estimates around 90 A.D. Several places in the Bible have time gaps in which nothing is recorded.

Ignoring for a moment how the current Bible came to be in our modern-time hands, the books themselves are somewhat out-of-sequence according to the times that they cover, but there is also overlap between some of the books. Consider the books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Ezekiel, which for the most part occurs over the course of decades in the same century. The New Testament also has numerous books that overlap one another in time, with the four books of the Gospel being a notable example. In other cases, the time during which the book's contents take place is very unclear, such as the book of Job. In it, no kings, judges, national conflicts, or other events can be readily identified in relation to other books.

The Old Testament

The narrative begins with the book of Genesis, which literally means “In the beginning.” It describes the steps God took in sequential order, from the formation of a life sustaining earth, to the creation of living things in the plant kingdom and animal kingdom. It continues with God's creation of the first man, named Adam, whom God made in his own image. Presumably this means that the physical form of Adam was created with the same appearance that God the Father has in spiritual form. From Adam was taken a rib that was used in the creation of the first woman, named Eve. They were given a lush garden east of a territory called Eden to take care of. It was in this garden that the first reference to Satan is given, who tempted Eve to disobey the commandments of God. She in turn led Adam to do the same, and it was then that, having committed the first sins on the newly formed earth, God cast them out of the garden where living would require work in the form of planting crops and preparing food.

Out of the idyllic garden, Adam and Eve began to have children. Within the first generation, Cain⁺ killed Abel because of the continued temptations of Satan. After this, generation upon generation faced conflict, with patriarchs who remained righteous while preaching the gospel to their generation. By the time of the ninth generation from Adam, the wickedness upon the earth reached a point where God cleansed the earth with a flood. From Adam until the flood, these are the generations:

+Cain may not have been the first or second child born to Adam and Eve

1.Adam	6.Jared
2.Seth	7.Enoch
3.Enos	8.Methuselah
4.Cainan	9.Lamech
5.Mahalaleel	10.Noah (<i>600 years old at the time of the flood</i>)

Each of the righteous men were called patriarchs, and in that 9th generation from Adam (the 10th generation of man) the patriarch's name was Noah, who with his family were commanded to build an Ark – an unguided boat – large enough to hold both themselves and the major groups of animals. When the floods came, the Ark served to save all those aboard from drowning. When the floods abated, they spread out from the Ark and began to repopulate the earth, but with a promise from God that he would never again send the floods to destroy all land-based life on earth.

The generations from Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, began to repopulate the earth. Although not the oldest of the sons, Shem is the son through whom the righteous patriarchs descended from that time forward. It is believed by some that the term “Semite” (often referred to in terms of the Jewish people) refers to descendants of Shem – “Shemites” – although the origin of the word is not entirely clear.

The generations from Shem until Israel:

11. Shem													
12. Arphaxad													
13. Salah													
14. Eber													
15. Peleg					15. Joktan								
16. Reu					Languages confounded at Babel								
17. Serug													
18. Nahor													
19. Terah (+two wives)													
20.*Abram (Abraham)			20.Sarai (Sarah)	20.Nahor	20.Haran								
21.*Isaac		21.*Ishmael			21.*Rebekah		21.Lot ⁺⁺		21. Laban				
22.**Jacob	22.Esau	Ishmaelites					22.Dtr #1 ⁺⁺		22.Dtr #2 ⁺⁺	22.**Leah	22.**Rachel		
23.Twelve Tribes of Israel	23. Edomites						23.Moab		23.Benammi				
							Moabites		Ammonites				

* Abram (Abraham) married his half-sister Sarai (Sarah), has child with Hagar (an Egyptian handmaid of Sarah's) per her request

*Isaac married to his cousin Rebekah

**Jacob married to his second cousins Leah and Rachel, plus two handmaids (one handmaid from Leah and one from from Rachel)

++Lot had a son with each of his two daughters, who slept with him after getting him passed-out drunk on two consecutive nights.

In the 6th generation from Noah, the people living in the area now known as Iraq began in the city of Babel to build a tower to get to heaven, which hubris and pride angered the Lord enough that he changed their languages. The effect of this was to cause them to scatter abroad throughout the earth. Until that time all the people had just one language, but because they had collected together with the intent of making a name for themselves and wanted to build a tower to reach heaven (presuming they could become like God), the Lord separated them from one another.

From that time forward, nations and kingdoms came and went until the Lord called Abram, later renamed to Abraham, to go to the land of Canaan (the modern day boundaries of the nation of Israel) so that he might give it to Abraham and his descendants for a place of inheritance. God covenanted with Abraham for the land and for the promise that God would make Abraham the father of many nations. Abraham's son Isaac was born, and to Isaac was given the same promise. This continued on through Isaac's son Jacob, and from Jacob to his twelve sons, which became known as the 12 tribes of Israel.

After a prophesied drought began to take place throughout the middle-eastern nations Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, where they were preserved by the king's favor towards them due to the good work of one of the sons of Jacob, named Joseph. (The king of Egypt is historically known as Pharaoh.) Having been preserved through the famine, Israel stayed in Egypt where they ultimately became slaves after a few generations. This had been prophesied to take place by Abraham, who was given to know by God that Israel would be in Egypt for four hundred years.

When the four hundred years were fulfilled, God prepared a prophet named Moses to deliver them out of the bondage of the Egyptians. After ten plagues ranging from water being turned into blood, to lice and burning hail, ultimately culminating in the death of the firstborn of all the Egyptians, the Pharaoh of the time allowed the Israelites to leave. The Pharaoh changed his mind after the Israelites had gone, however, and sent an army to bring them back; but the Israelites were delivered by God through the Red Sea, which God parted so that the Israelites could walk through on dry ground. The Egyptians attempted to follow but were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea while in the midst of it when the Lord let the wall of water on both sides collapse in upon them.

After this deliverance, the Lord gave a law to Moses and the Israelites, which included the ten commandments and what is considered in the Old Testament to be "The Law of Moses". The ten commandments consisted of the following (Exodus 20:3-17):

1.	Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2.	Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.
3.	Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
4.	Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
5.	Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
6.	Thou shalt not kill.
7.	Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8.	Thou shalt not steal.
9.	Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10.	Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

The remaining laws and commandments consist of how the people should conduct themselves towards one another, and how justice should operate when the law is violated. Additionally, a system of animal sacrifices and other offerings was set in place which detailed the manner of how sacrifices and offerings were to be made, what could be given as an offering, and so forth. Each of these was a very strict law, and for many offenses the penalty was death.

Other laws included the establishment of fairly strict dietary laws and laws governing how those suffering from serious illnesses like leprosy should be handled.

In addition to the establishment of laws, the priesthood was formally organized, sanctified and designated for the spiritual needs of Israel. A system of judges was also organized to enable fair and reasonable treatment of both smaller civil and larger criminal cases according to the law that had been given.

When given the opportunity to go into the land of Canaan – the promised land given to Abraham and his descendants – the people of Israel sent spies into the land to give a report on what they could expect when they arrived. Besides giving a detailed report of the bounteous vineyards, fruits and other crops, all but two of the spies reported that the inhabitants living in the land were unconquerable giants. When the people of Israel were given this report, they believed the ten that gave the unfavorable report, but the two remaining spies reported that God would give them strength to overcome these giants.

Because of their lack of faith, God condemned Israel to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, after which the ones that displayed this lack of faith would be gone and the next generation would enter the land and possess it as a land of their inheritance. The two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, would be permitted to enter the land. Indeed, Joshua would ultimately succeed Moses as the leader of the Israelites and would lead them into the land.

For forty years the Israelites wandered from place to place in the wilderness, passing through one nation's boundaries and into another, sometimes being given safe passage by the nations they would enter, other times they fought wars with those that opposed them. When the forty years were complete, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land because he had displayed, in a fit of anger at the selfishness of the Israelites, disobedience to a commandment he had been given by God. Moses was permitted to view the land from a mountaintop, but was not allowed to enter. Prior to this, Moses designated and ordained Joshua to succeed him in delivering Israel into the promised land.

Joshua led them, parting the Jordan river, which was overflowing at that season. This allowed Israel to cross into the promised land on dry ground. After the last had crossed the boundary, the Jordan river began its flow again normally. Israel entered the land and from city to city overthrew or drove out the inhabitants. For the vast majority of these cities, the Lord sent hornets to drive out the inhabitants and thereby did not require a military conquest. (See Exodus 23:28, Deuteronomy 7:20 and Joshua 24:12)

Upon entering the land, Israel did not fully comply with the commandments to drive out the Canaanite inhabitants as they had been told to, which led to strife and unrighteousness among the Israelites.

Once Joshua finished his leadership of Israel, the governing of Israel was left to a system of judges that God would call from time to time, often prophets, to judge Israel and to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. This form of government continued for several hundred years until the people of Israel demanded a king.

The prophet and chief judge at the time of this demand was a man named Samuel. He was called to serve as a prophet and a priest when he was still very young. When he grew older, he was highly respected in all of Israel, which was now a nation with boundaries. The people demanded that he should appoint to them a king to govern how they went in and out of battles and to control their daily affairs as a nation. Samuel detailed to the people what would happen when they had a king, but they insisted anyway. When Samuel objected to this, God told him that he would appoint them a king because they asked for one.

Saul from the tribe of Benjamin was the newly appointed king, and from the beginning of his reign he led the armies of Israel against Israel's enemies, but when God commanded him through Samuel not to take any of the spoils of war from one of their defeated enemies, Saul took it anyway. Because he was the king of Israel and had publicly broken the commandment of God, God appointed another man to reign as king of Israel, and this was David, who after many wars established a secure national border.

David's son Solomon began his reign faithfully, but because he descended into grievous sins the Lord split the kingdom into two parts – the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. After Solomon had finished out his days, this split took place, and from then on there were disputations and wars between the northern and southern kingdoms. The southern kingdom included the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and half the tribe of Manasseh, while the northern kingdom included the remaining tribes.

For the next several centuries, these battles continued, the northern kingdom having its own kings, and the southern kingdom having its own kings. The southern kingdom, often called the kingdom of Judah due to the kingly royal line having its roots in the tribe of Judah (i.e., David was of the tribe of Judah), would endure successes or failures depending on whether their king was righteous or unrighteous. From David until Zedekiah, the role of prophets in the history of the nation was very important. Prophets such as Elijah, Elishah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others lived during this time, very often prophesying about impending disaster due to the unrighteousness of the kings or of the people. In some cases, the kings would listen to the prophet and do what God had commanded, and the kingdom would be saved from destruction. Other times they would not and they were defeated.

After a series of unrighteous kings and of the southern kingdom of Judah devolving into wickedness, the prophets foretold the overthrow of the kingdom by the king of Babylon, named Nebuchadnezzar. This in fact took place about 586 B.C., and many of the more elite class of Israelites such as princes and heads of families were taken captive into Babylon, where they served in captivity as subjects to that king.

The books of Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel cover this period of time when Judah had been taken captive into Babylon. Through a series of prophetic dreams and visions, these prophets were given to know that they would be held captive for 70 years by Babylon. After this, Babylon itself was conquered by the Medes and Persians (modern day Iran), which was an even larger empire.

The prophet Nehemiah, who had lived in captivity, yet who served the king, found favor with king Artaxerxes of the Media Persian empire and was given leave to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah did the organizing of people in and around Jerusalem to work in the rebuilding of the walls and the gates of the city, and with Ezra the priest they returned the city of Jerusalem to the prescribed worship and repentance as found in the law of Moses. King Cyrus of Babylon furthered the work by commanding that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt to its former beauty, and provided means for doing so. Although efforts were made to stop its inhabitants from rebuilding these things, the royal decrees previously handed out in favor of rebuilding the city and the temple overruled those that opposed the rebuilding effort. The decree extended to returning all of the things that had been stolen out of the temple by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when he had sacked Jerusalem earlier.

Following these events, Israelites began to return to the land of Israel from their various places of captivity. Many of the remaining books of the Old Testament are books of prophecy given by a variety of prophets, such as Micah, Joel, Amos, Nahum, Zechariah and Malachi. These serve as warnings and promises of God concerning Israel both in the near term and in the more distant future.

The New Testament

The New Testament begins with what are called the four Gospels, but more correctly they are the recorded memories of four disciples of Jesus Christ who were with him and knew him personally, describing his lineage, birth, life, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection. Of especial importance is knowing who he is, what he taught, the work he did, and to show how he is the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies concerning him. This is the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

During this time in Israel's history, the empire of Rome had conquered the nation and ruled over it through four presiding tetrarchs, or regional kings appointed by and loyal to Rome, and under each king there were governors which ruled over territories, such as Jerusalem. While Rome retained governmental control over Israel, they allowed relatively unrestricted religious freedom, and selected governors and kings to rule that were acquainted with these practices.

The governmental control of Rome extended to performing such activities as collecting taxes and ensuring that Rome was not in danger of being threatened by their subservient nations. While this kept relative peace, it was at the pleasure or displeasure of those tetrarchs to rule as they saw fit as long as they weren't called into question by Rome. Thus, after Jesus was born to Mary, there was an order sent throughout the nation to kill all children under the age of two, and Rome said nothing to object.

The religious "freedom" permitted by Rome allowed for self-regulation of the various and diverse religious practices of the nations ruled over by Rome. Thus, for centuries the nation of Israel had a Sanhedrin council consisting of twenty-four high priests, one of which would be voted in for the term of a year to serve as the designated high priest for performing the yearly sacrifice required by the law of Moses and to serve as the chief judge in religious affairs of the nation.

There were primarily four ruling religious sects in Jerusalem apart from the Sanhedrin council – 1.The Pharisees, 2.The Sadducees, 3.The Scribes, and 4.The Elders. Each of these wielded a significant amount of religious political power, and were generally regarded as the most highly educated, most highly respected and most highly contentious sects among the Jews at Jerusalem. Some of the differences between these groups consisted of differences in belief about the resurrection, some about the non-scriptural traditions each group held, and some held power because they provided services that the other groups did not perform.

The prophesied birth of Jesus Christ to a virgin was fulfilled after the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, telling her that she had been chosen for this purpose. She accepted this role, and the Holy Ghost (sometimes called the Holy Spirit of God) caused her to conceive and give birth to Jesus, without having ever been with a man. This miracle fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which stated,

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The interpretation from the Hebrew word "Immanuel" is "God with us." Jesus was this child.

The declaration that God would choose this avenue for bringing a savior into the world was understood by priests, who when questioned about it identified exactly this verse, and another verse from the Old Testament that describes where Jesus would be born – the city of David, or in other words, Bethlehem.

From the time of his birth until he began his ministry there is little recorded about the life of Jesus as he grew up, but what little is provided indicates he was not a normal child. He did not have to be taught by any teachers, but he understood the law better than the most expert "doctors of the law" even from a young age.

When he did begin his formal ministry at about the age of thirty, Jesus first went to a cousin of his named John – also called John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus. John was a prophet of God, and was

widely recognized as being a prophet because of both his prophecies and the miracles that he performed. He was also a priest of the Aaronic, or Levitical order, as his father Zecharias was. After Jesus was baptized by John, he began his formal ministry, which initially consisted of the calling and ordination of twelve apostles. These apostles went wherever Jesus went for the space of about three years, during which time he taught them the Gospel that they were to teach and preach, along with ordinances and the spirit of the law that was the original intent for which the law of Moses was given. Though they were with him for those three years, even they did not fully grasp the Gospel Jesus wanted them to give. In fact, it would not be until after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection that they received the Holy Ghost – the Spirit of God – as a directing and instructing comforter which would give them power of understanding and power in deeds to accomplish the will of God concerning the promulgation of the Gospel.

In a case of betrayal, one of the twelve apostles, Judas Iscariot covenanted with the high priests to deliver Jesus to them for the price of thirty pieces of silver. Prior to this Jesus, knowing fully well what Judas had planned to do, while they met in an upper chamber to partake of the Lord's supper before going to the garden to pray told Judas, *"...Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly."* (John 13:27) so that all things might be fulfilled that had been written in the scriptures concerning the sacrifice of Jesus at the specified time. Judas quickly left the gathering and went to meet with the high priests to arrange the betrayal. That betrayal came in the garden of Gethsemane in the form of a kiss, the prearranged signal for the Roman soldiers to capture Jesus and take him to trial.

Jesus was brought up on false charges by witnesses that were told what testimony to give, and was brought before the Sanhedrin council for judgment. When the falsified testimony was given, the council sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate, who was the designated governor over Jerusalem. Pilate interrogated Jesus and could find nothing in his responses to merit the death penalty, but in an effort to appease the Jews that called for Jesus' crucifixion, he gave them a choice between letting Jesus go free or letting a convicted murderer free. The crowd chose to let Barabbas to go free, and for Jesus to be crucified. To this end, Pilate turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers tasked with such grisly work, and they crucified Jesus, first by scourging him with a cat-o-9-tails (a torture whip with metal shards on the ends of the whip), and they platted a crown of thorns on his head, all the while mocking him, spitting on him, biting him, punching him, and slapping him. As Jesus was led out of the city, he was compelled to carry the cross that he would be crucified on, but when his strength failed, a man in the crowd was given the task to help him carry the cross. Outside the city gates in a place called Golgotha the soldiers set the cross in place and nailed Jesus' hands and feet to it.

For the space of three hours, Jesus hung on the cross, slowly bleeding to death and suffering from the physical effects of the crucifixion. When the time arrived, Jesus spoke these words,

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

When instructed to make sure that Jesus did not stay up on the cross overnight, which was a regulation related to the sabbath day, the Roman soldiers that crucified Jesus pierced him in the abdomen with a spear. Out of the wound came blood and water. Confirming that he was already dead, they did not break his legs as would be the traditional way to finish killing someone on the cross. In all of this, Jesus' bones were not broken, which also was the fulfillment of a prophecy given by the ancient prophet and king of Israel, David.

One of the twenty-four Sanhedrin council members was a man named Joseph of Arimathaea. He was a believer in Jesus and was opposed to the decision of the council when they ordered the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Joseph convinced the Romans to let him put Jesus in a newly carved sepulcher that had never been used for that purpose. The council, not willing to let Jesus' body be stolen for the sake of a faking a resurrection story by his disciples, placed guards in front of the tomb and placed a large stone in front of it and had it sealed shut.

Three days later, there was a great earthquake, and two angels came to roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb, and Jesus arose from the dead. He had been resurrected, and thus, was in an immortal body. Several of Jesus' apostles witnessed this along with his mother Mary. After speaking briefly he then ascended to heaven. On several occasions afterwards Jesus appeared to the apostles, ultimately spending forty days with them to teach them more concerning the kingdom of God and showing many miracles among them. This confirmed to them that all he had taught them was true.

Following these events, the apostles were then instructed to go out into the world to preach the Gospel in a statement often called the "Great Commission," though it is never stated as such in the scripture itself:

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.
17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.
18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

From the end of the four books of the Gospel there proceeds the account of what the apostles did after the fifty days from the time of the resurrection. The apostles met, as instructed, and received an endowment of power from the Holy Ghost which gave them the gifts necessary for the ministry they were to perform. This book, appropriated titled "The Acts of the Apostles" provides a summary of the works of the apostles from this time until a time perhaps twenty to thirty years later. The length of time is not particularly well specified, but it follows primarily the acts of Peter and one of the newer apostles named Paul.

From the book of Acts to the last book of the New Testament named Revelation, are a series of books that consist of epistles, or letters, written from the apostles Paul, James, Jude, and John to either specific congregations (the books refer to them as "churches") or to the overall church as a whole. In them are encouragement for ministers of the Gospel, revelations concerning near or distant events, advice regarding the management of the affairs of the church, detailed explanations of scriptures, and spiritual insight concerning Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and recommendations for how to better proceed in the ministry. There are also occasional references to events current to the time of the letters.

These epistles to the churches illustrate the privations of persecution and how to deal with it, but also gives consolation to the churches that God is watching over them and is aware of both their struggles, their failures, their triumphs and their diligence (or the lack of it). During this entire period of time

Rome has ultimate political and military power over Israel, but warnings are given concerning a coming darkness that would cause the church to crumble from within. Letters to Corinth, Thessalonica, Colosse, Galacia, and Rome written by Paul often reference former visits he had made to each of those locations, or give expectation for future visits. The book of Hebrews is written primarily for the Jews who needed an understanding of how the law of Moses foretold the new law of Christ. General epistles from such notable authorities as James, Jude, Peter, and John give a general encouragement to be dedicated to the Gospel, while also providing warnings against sin in its various forms. They also gave prophecies concerning the unfolding of events important to the church and to the end times. Epistles to Timothy, Philemon, and Titus are specifically intended for the recipient in the book title, but are preserved for us to understand the trials faced by ministers and how to maintain diligence.

The book of Revelation finishes out the current Bible as one of the more lengthy books, and perhaps the most controversial book in the New Testament. The first several chapters are revelations of God to seven of the named churches in the region, with individual advice for each. Following this, John records the vision God gave him concerning the unfolding of the future events that ultimately lead up to God's complete and utter victory over both Satan and his followers. The time during which this prophecy takes place appears to begin some time after the first century A.D. and concludes at a time some three thousand years later when God reigns upon the earth for ever and ever.

The meaning of the various terms and events in the book of Revelation has always been debated, but not often well understood because of the rather illusory language used in the prophecy. Nevertheless, it has been one of the most debated and written-about books of scripture among the Christian-based churches.

The modern Bible containing both Old and New Testaments has been through many hands, with councils discussing the assemblage of books that should be included as authoritative and legitimate scripture beginning perhaps as early as the fourth century A.D. The number and identity of the books recognized as necessary for a standard reference to scripture varied widely from the first councils that met until some time after the eleventh century A.D. Very often the language included in translations extant at the time depended on the current view of the Catholic church leadership, or other various kings throughout Europe. The modern standard Bible was solidified with the 1607 edition of the authorized King James translation, which was requisitioned by England's King James I. This was one of the first English language Bibles ever produced, and still serves as a standard of comparison for many ministers of the Gospel. Subsequent translations have relied upon different manuscripts of the same books, or upon different "scholarly" interpretations of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Some biblical translators have taken an entirely different approach to translation, choosing to give a "meaning" based translation instead of a literal word-for-word translation, while other translators have used the approach of magnifying the language using exaggerated or superlative language instead of the language found in the text itself. One translator has chosen to remove as many references to the term "spirit" in reference to the soul of man wherever it can be found, because the church sponsoring it does not carry the belief in the spirit of man, much as the Sadducees of Jesus' time.

Whatever the means used for the work of translation, the Bible remains one of the most popular books by number purchased in all the centuries since the invention of the printing press.

- I. Introduction to and summary of the holy scriptures
 - E. A summary of Book of Mormon history.

Perhaps the best place to begin is the introductory summary found at the beginning of the Book of Mormon itself:

- - -

THE BOOK OF MORMON
AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF MORMON UPON PLATES TAKEN FROM THE
PLATES OF NEPHI

Wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; also to the Jew and Gentile; written by the way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. Written, and sealed up, and hid unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof; sealed up by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile: the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

And abridgment taken from the Book of Ether; also, which is a record of the people of Jared; who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven: which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. And now if there are faults, they are the mistakes of men; wherefore condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.

- - -

This is a bit of a mission statement along with a small summary, but the details of the history are left to the pages of the book itself. To provide a brief summary of outline of the Book of Mormon, we may say this:

During the few years just preceding the overthrow of Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon about 600 years B.C., prophets such as Jeremiah were prophesying about the wickedness of Israel, and that they would be destroyed. The fulfillment of that prophecy led to seventy years of captivity in Babylon, and many of those at Jerusalem were kept as captives in the kingdom of Babylon under the kings (Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar), until the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon (read the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, and etc. for details). One such prophet who declared the destruction and captivity of Jerusalem was a man by the name of Lehi. After Lehi prophesied concerning these things, the Lord commanded Lehi to take his family and depart from Jerusalem, because he had a place prepared for his family to flee to. Lehi's family consisted of his wife, four sons, and some daughters. Before making their final departure from Jerusalem, they were commanded to take a record called the Brass Plates with them, and to bring a family that was friends to them, whose patriarch was named Ishmael. When they left Jerusalem, they departed into the wilderness where the Lord led them to a place bordering what we would now call the Indian Ocean.

From this seaside place, they built a ship and were guided across the Indian and Pacific oceans to the New World, likely in the region of Central America. Once settled in to their new home, the two older

brothers, Laman and Lemuel, who had been rebellious during the trip, attempted to kill their younger brothers. By this time, which was several years after their departure from Jerusalem, Lehi and his wife Sariah had two more sons named Jacob and Joseph. In order of age their family consisted of Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi, Jacob and Joseph. Nephi himself was a prophet who had been guided many times along the way, and he was warned by the Lord that his older brothers Laman and Lemuel were going to try to kill him, so he and his family, along with his brothers Sam, Jacob and Joseph, and their families, fled northward a few day's distance so that they might begin a new life away from their older brothers.

Over the course of the next 550 years, generation after generation would face wars with the descendants of Laman and Lemuel – called Lamanites by this time. They received warnings, prophecies, blessings and cursings, changes in government and internal intrigues amongst themselves. Through it all God interacted with them by his own voice, by angels, and by prophets prophesying.

By the time of Christ's birth, they witnessed signs and wonders in heaven that foretold the time of Christ's birth, and in a spectacular two day period they had a day, a night, and a day without darkness, and they observed the new star that had been prophesied.

Over the next thirty-three years they again faced unbelievers seeking to destroy those who believed in Christ, until the day when Christ was crucified. On that day a great storm arose, darkness overflowed the land, and cities were buried in the ocean or were covered by earth, and only the more righteous of those on the land were spared destruction. For three days it remained dark, which marked the time that Christ's body was in the tomb at Jerusalem. After the three days the darkness dispersed.

Later that same year, the survivors witnessed Jesus descending from heaven to visit them in his resurrected body. During his time with them, he taught them many of the same things that he taught his disciples at Jerusalem, and was able to show them miracles such as raising the dead, healing the sick, and casting devils out of those who were possessed. During this time he established his church among them, which bore his name – the Church of Christ.

For the next 200 years the people lived peaceably one with another, and the church prospered in its work. After this, however, jealousies again crept in and wars began anew among them. In the last battles recorded, hundreds of thousands of Nephites were destroyed by Lamanites, and any of those who would not join the Lamanites were also killed. The last writer in the Book of Mormon was Moroni, whose father had begun the work of abridging from the larger set of records available to him.

In addition to recording the events of his own time, Moroni found another record among those they had collected, which described another group of people who left the old world and journeyed to the new world. They were called Jaredites, being called after the name of their leader, Jared.

The Jaredites were a people that lived in or near the city of Babel, where there was a massive effort being taken to build a tower to get to heaven. The events this relates to are described in Genesis 11.

Genesis 11

1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Jared and his brother (only referenced as “the brother of Jared”), being warned that the Lord was about to confound their language, asked the Lord not to confound the language of them or their families, to which the Lord agreed. When further asked what they should do, the Lord directed them to depart out of Babel and take a journey where he would lead them.

Jared and his brother, and their friends and families, did as the Lord enjoined them to do, and departed from Babel. From there they followed the Lord as he led them in a cloud. Over the course of time the Lord led them to a place by the ocean, where they were then instructed to build barges, which were essentially vessels that didn't have sails or a rudder to guide them. When they completed building these eight barges and entered in, the Lord sent wind and rain so that the barges would be pushed out across the ocean, where they traveled for the course of almost a year and landed in the new world, probably also in the region of Central America.

This relatively short book (only six chapters) covers a period of nearly a thousand years from their arrival in the new world to the times when they faced wars, righteousness, wickedness, prophecies, and promises, and in the end through works of darkness their ultimate demise as a nation, in which two branches of the people destroyed one another in a final war.

Only the record of the Jaredites remained, a record that was found by one of the Nephite civilizations that followed after, with Moroni being responsible for including it in the record started by his father, Mormon.

The testimony received by both major groups of people, even many centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ, as well as by Jesus himself, and in the years that followed, was that Jesus Christ is the only way and the only means for salvation and eternal life. We receive from this book the insights and explanations of many of the principles of the Gospel of Christ as provided by prophets and other leaders, and of the meanings of events as they transpired from the time of Adam and Eve. Through all of this testimony we are given renewed assurance that God's commandments are inviolate and his judgments are just, but he is also merciful, kind and gracious to those who seek him and who seek to establish his righteousness.

The Book of Mormon differs from the Bible in that the Bible has a recognized history of a continuous process of changes, additions and deletions to both books, verses and individual words, whether by scholarly research or by theological decision. The original manuscripts penned by the authors of the books in the Bible have been long lost to history, and may only exist as dust due to the fragile nature of the materials they were written upon. The Book of Mormon, by contrast, endured just a single translation process from the source book written by the original writer on durable metal plates. The translation from this record was performed between 1827 and 1828 in Palmyra, New York. The means for the translation was provided in the form of what are called “interpreters” provided by God to the translator, Joseph Smith, Jr. The interpreters are referenced in the text of the Book of Mormon itself:

Mosiah 5:72-74

72 Now Ammon said unto him, I can assuredly tell thee, O King, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God.

73 And the things are called interpreters; and no man can look in them, except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not, and he should perish.

74 And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.

Mosiah 5:78-81

78 But a seer can know of things which have passed and also of things which are to come;

79 And by them shall all things be revealed, or rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them;

80 And also, things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.

81 Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore, he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.

One of the kings in the Book of Mormon used these same interpreters to translate the even older record, which we now have as the book of Ether, which describes the Jaredites.

Mosiah 12:18 And now, he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow.

Joseph Smith, Jr. received the interpreters along with the plates of the Book of Mormon, which were inscribed upon by the original writers of the Book of Mormon. Joseph proceeded with the work of using the interpreters as directed by God from time to time, and afterwards it was published in English in 1830 as The Book of Mormon.

Since the original 1830 publication, several additional authoritative printings of the Book of Mormon have been published containing a few typographical corrections and grammatical adjustments, perhaps most notably the 1908 edition published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). This 1908 edition is widely recognized as the standard reference material for ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that use the Book of Mormon. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS, Utah-based) ministers use a publication of the Book of Mormon that differs in chapter and verse divisions, along with some punctuation that differs from the 1908 RLDS Book of Mormon, but the text of the two versions is largely identical, both of which use the 1830 edition as the primary source reference.

II. Common doctrinal topics

A. Grace

Among the many subjects discussed in the pages of the Book of Mormon are subjects that are still in active discussion by religious leaders and theologians today. In like manner as Paul wrote concerning the truth of these doctrinal elements, writers in the Book of Mormon likewise felt a need, and were instructed to explain these subjects for the betterment of the people in understanding them.

The subject of grace has been often viewed from different angles, and notably this was one of the subjects that the apostles in the New Testament wrote about. For the sake of comparison, a few key scriptures from both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon will be listed so that the truth of what they both testified about can be revealed.

New Testament

Acts 15:7-11

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Romans 3:23-25

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

Romans 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Book of Mormon

2 Nephi 7:42 And remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.

2 Nephi 11:44 For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

Ether 5:27-28

27 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying, Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness; and if men come unto me, I will show unto them their weakness.

28 I give unto men weakness, that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

Moroni 10:29-30

29 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in no wise deny the power of God.

30 And again, if ye, by the grace of God, are perfect in Christ and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father, unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy without spot.

In this doctrinal element, both the New Testament writers and the Book of Mormon writers are in agreement – it is the grace of God in Jesus Christ that brings about salvation. Unlike many popular beliefs, however, the saving grace of Christ is not provided to those that persist in pursuing wickedness. Paul clearly writes that grace comes from the application of faith, which is obedience to God.

While we all have failings, areas of sin in our lives, it is the willingness to submit to God that distinguishes saints from sinners. We may have all sinned, but a sinner is one who never seeks to improve his standing with God. A saint, on the other hand, repents, seeks to redress his wrongs, and relies upon Christ. Even though he may still commit sin, a saint is one who dedicates his life to serving the Lord and eradicating sin from his life.

Thus, the grace of God is not applicable to one who persists in sin, delights in sin, or promotes sin. A man of faith cannot do any of those things and expect to receive anything but punishment from God. Therefore, grace is for those with faith or that would have faith if they knew anything of God.

What is also evident from Paul's writings is that salvation is something that cannot be achieved by our own effort. Salvation can only be provided by Jesus Christ, and it is by his grace that he accomplishes this.

It is in this area that the Book of Mormon writers provide some clarification, namely, that if we did all that we could do, salvation would still elude us because we cannot make ourselves into saved beings, as this is the role of the grace of Christ. But without doing all that we can do to repent and serve Christ, it would be as though no grace were available for salvation.

In one other area concerning grace, we find that the Book of Mormon provides further insight, namely, that if grace is applied to those who diligently seek to serve the Lord, what about those that are either too young to understand, those who are incapable of understanding (due to mental problems) or that have never been told the Gospel of Christ? What becomes of them?

Moroni 8:11 Behold, I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach: repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent, and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children; and their little children need no repentance, neither baptism.

Moroni 8:25-28

25 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law.

26 For the power of redemption cometh on all they that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing.

27 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.

28 Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law.

Thus the Lord is indeed merciful and gracious, and in this he is both a fair and just judge.

II. Common doctrinal topics

B. Works

It seems more frequent today that the term “works” is associated with just “bad works”. Often used in conjunction with the term grace (discussed in A. earlier), it is given a bad reputation. But this need not be so.

Rather, works include everything you do. Sometimes you do good works, sometimes you do bad works. In either case, works represent to a very great extent the kind of person you are. If you help those in need, or if you kill people, there is little doubt as to the intent to which you pursue your beliefs.

But there are also more subtle variances on this. If you do something with the intent of accomplishing good, and something bad results, are you judged according to your results, or according to what you had intended to accomplish? In this we can only rely upon the one who really knows – God.

The good-or-evil judgment is what most Christians (or so-called) seem to have the greatest difficulty expressing. Very often the events of life fall into what many might call a gray area – it is neither supremely good nor supremely evil. Even those whom we might consider “evil” can seem to do good works, but they may do so with the intent of personal gain or public acclaim or credit. Conversely, those whom we might consider “good” can be guilty of doing such things with the intent of personal gain, public acclaim, or credit also. Thus, judgment in this life is one that must be carefully considered, but judgment in the life to come is for God to reveal.

In these cases, the Book of Mormon makes it much more clear as to how justice works.

Before getting into the Book of Mormon, however, let us begin with what the New Testament says:

Matthew 3:10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Matthew 12:30-37

30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Matthew 16:27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Revelation 20:12-13

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

From the Book of Mormon we read the following:

Mosiah 1:124-127

124 And now, I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded me.

125 And thus saith the Lord: They shall stand as a bright testimony against this people at the judgment day,

126 Whereof they shall be judged, every man, according to his works--whether they be good, or whether they be evil;

127 And if they be evil, they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore, they have drunk damnation to their own souls.

Mosiah 8:81-84

81 But there is a resurrection; therefore, the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.

82 He is the light and the life of the world, yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened, yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death.

83 Even this mortal shall put on immortality; and this corruption shall put on incorruption and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil--

84 If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness, and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation,

Alma 8:93-104

93 Now Zeezrom saith again unto him, Is the Son of God the very eternal Father?

94 And Amulek said unto him, Yea, he is the very eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are;

95 He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

96 And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else.

97 Therefore, the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death;

98 For behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead, and stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

99 Now there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death;

100 The spirit and the body shall be reunited again, in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time;

101 And we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

102 Now this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous;

103 And even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but all things shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body,

104 And shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ, the Son, and God, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

Alma 16:195-201

195 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes, that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly? Or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

196 If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins,

197 And that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him to be judged at the last and judgment day according to their works.

198 And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts; and as it beginneth to swell, even so nourish it by your faith.

199 And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life.

200 And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do, if ye will. Amen.

Alma 19:66 And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good;

3 Nephi 12:25-28

25 Behold, I have given unto you my gospel; and this is the gospel which I have given unto you, that I came into the world to do the will of my Father because my Father sent me;

26 And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, I might draw all men unto me;

27 That as I have been lifted up by men, even so should men be lifted up by the Father to stand before me to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

28 And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father, I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

Mormon 3:22 And then ye must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

From these passages in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, we find the same doctrine presented to us, that according to our works, and especially according to our desires and intents, we shall be judged. Often the term “fruit” and “works” represent much the same thing. If, out of the intents of our hearts we perform a work, we will be judged according to that, and not according to any other standard such as wealth, popular status, etc. Thus it is as “trees,” that if we bring forth good fruit – good works – we will not be “hewn down”, but those that bring forth bad fruit – bad works – they will be hewn down and cast into the fire.

One may ask, “But if someone does not know what good is, how can they know to do good?” The reality is that the Lord knows us more personally than anyone else possibly can. If we have been taught to do evil our entire lives, is it the person doing the evil, or the one who taught them to do evil that must be brought to judgment? Consider the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee:

Luke 18:10-14

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The one, a Pharisee, who received the greater education in matters of the law, was not justified, even though he went to the temple to pray, and fasted, and gave tithes. The reason for not being justified was that his heart was not right – he served only his own pride. The publican, in this parable, though not as educated in the ways of the law as the Pharisee, knew his place in the sight of God and humbled himself in true worship.

Thus, God is able to judge according to the intent of the heart, and not only the deeds that they might perform.

John 3:17-21

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

This makes clear that when someone once learns of Jesus Christ and the true manner of love and worship, they have a choice to make, and that choice either brings salvation or condemnation.

James 3:4-14

4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

Therefore both works and intent must be judged through the spiritual insight that only God possesses, and because works follow intent, we must know that both are of value in the day of judgment.

Someone seeking to do good will not knowingly do evil, nor will someone who is evil do good except to deceive, and this is also evil.

The Book of Mormon has the same message, though phrased somewhat differently:

Moroni 7:3-9

3 Wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope, by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven.

4 And now, my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men; for I remember the word of God which saith, By their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also.

5 For behold, God hath said, A man, being evil, cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent, it profiteth him nothing.

6 For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness.

7 For behold, if a man, being evil, giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore, it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore, he is counted evil before God.

8 And, likewise, also is it counted evil unto a man if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such; wherefore, a man, being evil, cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift.

9 For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ, he cannot be a servant of the devil.

Using this standard of measure, should we believe that God will use grace to save those who persist in evil and that make a mockery of his commandments, seeking only to satisfy their own pride? Or will he use grace to save those that have sought him, that strive to do his will, and that keep his commandments? Will grace be sufficient for salvation if we have chosen evil the more part of our lives, or if we have chosen the better path? We must also remember the following admonition:

Luke 12:45-48

45 But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;

46 The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

47 And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Therefore we can know assuredly that God will be fair in judgment since he knows our thoughts and intents, as well as our works. Knowing the will of God is a greater responsibility, and thus more is required for those who know the will of God than for those that remain ignorant. But willing ignorance – that is to say – being unwilling to learn to do good – is equally contemptible. Choosing to be ignorant of God's will, as opposed to simple ignorance of God's will, is evil itself, and is represented in how the devils fell from the presence of God:

Jude 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

2 Nephi 6:58-66

58 Oh, the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men!

59 When they are learned, they think they are wise; and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves;

60 Wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness, and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

61 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

62 But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world.

63 For because they are rich, they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god.

64 And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also.

65 And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.

66 Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.

But on the other hand, those who seek to do good and apply themselves to understand and to do the will of God without concern for how others might see them shall be blessed.

Matthew 6:1-4

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

3 Nephi 5:93-97

93 Verily, verily, I say that I would that ye should do alms unto the poor; but take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven.

94 Therefore, when ye shall do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as will hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward.

95 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,

96 That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.

97 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward.

If we are commanded to do good works, then we will not be punished for obedience on the day of judgment.

II. Common doctrinal topics

C. Faith

Many books have been written on the subject of faith, with many great expositions on its tenets, features, and meanings. Faith is a subject of both great simplicity and great depth. Modern churches, or perhaps more correctly, modern theologians often use the term “faith” very loosely as compared to how it was used in the days of the Old and New Testaments, with the term “belief” being used as a synonym for “faith.” Such does not seem to be the case in the scriptures, although the terms are invariably linked to one another.

The New Testament writers spent considerable time on the subject of faith, evidently considering it to be of great importance. Perhaps most notably, the book of Hebrews addresses the subject of faith head-on, starting with a definition.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

As definitions go, it is very blunt, but does it really explain the meaning of faith? The remaining thirty-nine verses of the chapter give numerous examples of faith as it was exercised by those who came before the writer. For a subject as important as faith a simple one line definition is truly inadequate, nor should we expect it to be. We would not expect the grace and works of God to be put into a single sentence as a complete definition either.

It is equally interesting that in the Old Testament the term “faith” in the King James Version is only used once, whereas the term “faithful” is used in the other fifty-six references to faith. Why this is interesting is that it places the term “faith” into context as an action as much – or more – than simple belief. One is faithful when they exercise their faith, or, as James the apostle would later write:

James 2:17-18

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Clearly, faith and works are not the same either. Works are the result of faith.

Galatians 5:5-6

5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

If faith “worketh by love” it must needs be that a dormant faith is one that is not exercised, or is not motivated by love. So a faith that does no work is a faith without love.

If faith is the substance of hoped-for things, what form does that substance take? It seems reasonable to conclude that it is in the form of the evidence of things not seen. When God made his covenant with Abram (renamed to Abraham) the Lord told him that he would become the father of many nations. While that fulfillment did not occur within Abraham’s lifetime, the promise was nevertheless assured

because God's word cannot return to him void – meaning, that all other things can perish, but the word of God must be fulfilled.

Isaiah 55:8-11

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Abraham's faith was secured by the permanence that he had in the certainty that God would fulfill his promise, and it was further supported by the fulfillment of the promise that he would have a son in his old age, which was to be fulfilled in the birth of Isaac. Until the time that Isaac was born, the promise of God was still afar off because, after all, how can one become the father of "many" nations if he hasn't any offspring to "make" those nations with?

James 2

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Abraham began to see how the promise to him would be fulfilled because he now had a son, and that son would have sons, and those sons would have sons, and so on. Abraham was called the friend of God because he believed God. Not only did he believe God, but he took preparatory actions in the expectation that God would fulfill all the remainder of his words.

This assurance of the validity of God's promise is the essence of faith. God provides reasons for hope, and evidence of that hope comes from doing our part of the covenant, knowing that God will fulfill his part of the covenant.

If Abraham's hope, however, were strictly in the eventual completion of God's promise that he would be the father of many nations, it would surely be a fleeting joy. If the fulfillment were only for future generations, Abraham would have had joy for a season, but that was not sufficient reason for him to be so exceedingly zealous towards God as we see that he was.

Indeed, Abraham was commanded to offer up Isaac as a burnt sacrifice, the one person in whom he could expect the promise of being the "father of many nations" to be fulfilled. Yet Abraham offered Isaac anyway. The New Testament reveals that Abraham had reason beyond his own life to know how this could be fulfilled:

Hebrews 11

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

This tells us that Abraham knew that God had power to raise people from the dead, and it seems evident that this was because he knew that in the meridian of time, Jesus Christ would face the crucifixion, death, and the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ would bring about the resurrection of all men. Therefore, knowing of the resurrection, Abraham knew that there was hope for something more permanent and fulfilling than the hopes that might exist in this life alone. Abraham believed in the resurrection, and when God commanded him to offer up Isaac, he had assurance that whether Isaac had to be raised from the dead to fulfill this, or if it would happen later in the resurrection, the promise of God would be fulfilled no matter what other circumstances might arise.

Hebrews 11

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

The strength of that assurance is what made Abraham's faith pleasing to God. Abraham acted on this faith by taking all the steps up to offering Isaac as a sacrifice, until the angel told him to stop. Thus, his faith was proved. Contrary to popular media, Abraham knew what he was doing, knew what God would be able to do, and knew that God would make his promise a reality.

Is it foolishness to place hope in something so far off that it can't be expected to be fulfilled in your lifetime? Is it derangement to believe that God can work miracles if the situation demands it? These are the kinds of questions often posed to believers in Christ.

The answer is that it certainly would be foolish derangement if we didn't have reason to expect those things to actually occur. History is littered with deranged individuals who led others on to destruction on the hope of something that they could not justify by any assurance. How then can we know the difference between derangement and divine assurance?

In this we find the Book of Mormon to be an invaluable resource. The case for faith is laid out in surprisingly easy-to-understand detail.

Alma 16

149 Now as I said concerning faith, that it was not a perfect knowledge, even so it is with my words.
150 Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.
151 But behold, if ye will awake, and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

152 Now we will compare the word unto a seed.

153 Now if ye give place that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts;

154 And when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves, It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding; yea, and it beginneth to be delicious to me.

155 Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless, it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge.

156 But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then ye must needs say that the seed is good; for behold, it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow.

157 And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith, for ye will say, I know that this is a good seed, for behold, it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.

158 And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness; therefore, if a seed groweth, it is good; but if it groweth not, behold, it is not good; therefore, it is cast away.

159 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment and planted the seed, and it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

160 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant;

161 And this because you know; for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

162 Oh, then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light is good because it is discernible; therefore, ye must know that it is good.

163 And now, behold, after ye have tasted this light, is your knowledge perfect? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith; for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed, that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.

164 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say, Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up and bring forth fruit unto us.

165 And now, behold, if ye nourish it with much care, it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.

166 But if ye neglect the tree and take no thought for its nourishment, behold, it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root, it withers away; and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

167 Now this is not because the seed was not good; neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable.

168 But it is because your ground is barren and ye will not nourish the tree; therefore, ye cannot have the fruit thereof.

169 And thus it is if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life.

170 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold, it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life;

171 And because of your diligence, and your faith, and your patience with the word, in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure.

172 And ye shall feast upon this fruit, even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not; neither shall ye thirst.

173 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

From this passage we learn that faith is an actionable process, and not just a set of beliefs. Not only this, but that faith is a process that leads to knowledge. Suppose then that someone demands a sign to show that the promise is sure. Faith that demands signs does not have hope, but vanity. Indeed, Jesus told the apostles that signs would **follow** those who believe, but he did not say that signs would **lead** those who believe.

Matthew 16

4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

Mark 16

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

During Jesus' time in the wilderness before he began his ministry, the devil tried to tempt him with the same argument as those who claim to need a sign first before they will believe:

Luke 4

9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:

10 For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee:

11 And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

12 And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

Seeking signs is a rapid way to get in trouble with the living God. Working through the process of faith is what makes the difference between seeking signs and having signs to follow since the assurance of eternal life comes from doing the works of faith and love, not from getting a shortcut to knowledge.

The Book of Mormon continues to unfold this interpretation just as the Bible does:

Ether 5

4 Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.

5 And it came to pass that Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people which they did not believe because they saw them not.

6 And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen;

7 Wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith; for it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers after he had risen from the dead;

8 And he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world.

9 But because of the faith of men, he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen;

10 Wherefore, ye may also have hope and be partakers of the gift if ye will but have faith.

By these things we can see that the Bible and the Book of Mormon harmonize with the same message concerning faith.

II. Common doctrinal topics

D. Love

Love is possibly the most important of the relationship topics that can be found in any scripture. There are two major extremes when discussing love: the very short definition, and the very long definition. In fact, many books have been written upon the subject, either from a religious perspective or from a secular one. Love is understood from many perspectives, and yet misunderstood from many perspectives also.

1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Moroni 7:52 Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail; but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with them.

John 15:12-13

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

These few verses do not explain everything about love, but it gives us a snapshot of how God views love. The importance of love in the Gospel of Christ cannot be overstated. Love is what makes God the kind of being described by the scriptures. Although God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present, it is his attributes of character that make the knowledge of him precious and worthy of worship. Love is one of those characteristics.

By the term “love” we take our definition from those things the people acquainted with God – the prophets and apostles – used to describe him. The apostles spoke of God’s love in their ministry because it was Christ’s love that they experienced first-hand. The prophets had conversational knowledge of God, and he explained it to them for our benefit.

The immensity of God’s love for each of us is incalculable. It permeates every action he has taken for our benefit, even in chastisement. We know this from the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:9-10

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

The only compelling reason for God to want us to be partakers of his holiness is because he loves us.

Love therefore is a motivation in addition to a feeling. A motivation such as love is able to endure all manner of inconvenience and suffering in order to achieve the goal it will accomplish. This higher-

order of love is the view God took by offering his Only Begotten Son, but it is the same that he has laid out in hopes for us to emulate when he said “That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”

God viewed the offering of Jesus Christ as a pleasure to do, though the suffering necessary for this was beyond the capacity for the human mind to completely grasp.

Ephesians 1:4-6

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

As a character attribute of God, it is also his desire for us to share the same attribute with one another. Only by doing this can we be made more like him, being made conformable into his image.

Romans 8:28-32

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

It is often said that Love and Hate are opposite forces, but if that were the case then a being having love could not hate, yet God also has hate.

Deuteronomy 16:22 Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth.

Amos 5:21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

Zechariah 8:17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.

We must understand that the hate that God has is not directed to people, but to actions. The things that separate man from his love of God or that would replace that love with a love for someone or something else are in direct conflict with the purpose God has set forth in the sacrifice of Jesus. Hating evil is not sufficient to be a righteous person, but righteousness comes from the love of God dwelling in us, nurtured and invited by those who seek it.

To give illustration to the importance of love, we can see that it is in the top of the first commandments given for man to obey:

Mark 12:29-31

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

We note here that it is not just “to love God” that has been given as a commandment, but that this love should fill us entirely “with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”. A devoted believer that is lacking love has the potential for being the most destructive to the cause of Christ, and thus we can see the need for the superlative “all thy...” being included to emphasize its importance.

Thus far the love of God has been the driving motivational factor in discussion, but is love only a divinely centered concept, or does it share in the more common, everyday elements of human interaction? The second commandment explains the importance of allowing love to extend beyond the divine as long as it doesn't interfere with the first commandment.

Love as God shares it with us is extended, and perhaps given evidence for, as the ability that we have to have love for one another. The love of a husband for his wife, or the love of parents for their children, or the love of one person for another all carry the same imprint as God's love for us, if it is based on the same condition of desire for good.

There is what some call love that is not based on a desire for good, but for selfishness and possession. A man may love his possession, his home, or his money, or any other material thing, and it is this that Paul wrote to Timothy as “the root of all evil”:

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

If there is a love that emphasizes such possessiveness as to exclude others from also having it then this is evil, and is not set forth and established by God. There are those that delight in doing evil, loving the corruption of it and the power it gives them over others, and this love is an idol to them, placing themselves over God. Thus, not all forms of love are pleasing to God.

For further detail we can see how Solomon (before his great transgressions) was given wisdom to identify the curious state of the nature of wickedness in contrast to righteousness, and how the love for lesser things is destructive to the soul.

Proverbs 2:6-22

6 For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.

8 He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.

9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

10 When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;

11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:

12 To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things;
13 Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;
14 Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;
15 Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths:
16 To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;
17 Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.
18 For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead.
19 None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.
20 That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.
21 For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.
22 But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

Along similar lines, the prophet Jacob in the Book of Mormon explained how the selfish and willingly ignorant place themselves above God, having only a love for themselves that is driven by the whisperings of the evil one.

2 Nephi 6:57-74

57 Oh, that cunning plan of the evil one!
58 Oh, the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men!
59 When they are learned, they think they are wise; and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves;
60 Wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness, and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.
61 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.
62 But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world.
63 For because they are rich, they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god.
64 And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also.
65 And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.
66 Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.
67 Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart; for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day.
68 Wo unto the liar; for he shall be thrust down to hell.
69 Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth; for he shall die.
70 Wo unto them who commit whoredoms; for they shall be thrust down to hell.
71 Yea, wo unto those that worship idols; for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.
72 And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.
73 O my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one.
74 Remember, to be carnally minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life eternal.

The carnal mind is what eliminates the worship of God and places greater importance on the values of this world and the things of it, destroying hope and faith in the process. Without the expectation of greater joy or of receiving greater spiritual gifts such as eternal life and of the love of God, or of the fellowship with others of like mind, destruction would be sure and swift. Any desire for evil must necessarily take away the hope of eternal joy in the presence of God also.

Is love for our fellow man excluded by our love for God? Not at all. Rather, it is encouraged. This form of Godly love can only function to serve God and his purposes for us. The beneficent love for others is the very depiction of God's love for us, and God loves his image being reflected in us.

God gave Adam his wife Eve knowing that the love man had could not be complete without being able to share that love with others, whether in the form of the love a husband has for his wife, or the love of a wife for her husband, or their love for their children, the love of children for their parents, or their love for others. It is one of the perfections of God to give us that love and for us to share it with others.

Paul gives this as a representation of Christ's love for the church as follows:

Ephesians 5:22-30

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Jesus Christ gave himself as the great prototype of love from which all godly love flows. To the intent that Jesus proceeded with offering himself as an innocent victim in our place, we can deduce that his confidence in the plan of salvation was perfect. The love he had for us in doing this can be shared, otherwise he would not have sent his disciples out to preach the Gospel of Christ.

One of the effects of love is that it eliminates fear. John wrote the following:

1 John 4:17-18

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

This also suggests the idea that "perfect love," whatever the term might mean, contains confidence instead of fear. Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice not with the fear he would never again see Isaac alive, but with the confidence that God would fulfill his covenant even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead. In other words, Abraham's love of God gave him the confidence for his faith to be realized regardless of the immediate sense of loss. It assured him of the outcome, of the hope.

The tender, caring love we have for God and for our families and neighbors is the fulfillment of the law of Christ, against which there is no commandment.

II. Common doctrinal topics

E. Baptism

From the time of the end of the Bible until modern times, the subject of baptism has provoked much speculation, with some factions declaring that baptism is not necessary, others declaring that it is necessary, and many disagreeing on the particulars of how it is to be performed, who can perform it, what prerequisites must exist prior to it, and what must follow after. The Bible provides necessary instruction to its necessity, and provides meaning to its place in doctrine and theology, while the Book of Mormon complements those elements with further insight and instruction.

The New Testament describes baptism by first providing examples, explaining its purpose at the same time.

Matthew 3:1-12

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,
6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.
7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:
9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:
12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John plainly baptized “with water unto repentance,” further explaining the need for a second baptism “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” This explains the “what” part, but to get the details of how baptism with water was performed, we have to look to later verses and books.

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.
14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?
15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.
16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:
17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

From this key example, Jesus went into water, otherwise he could not have come “up straightway out of the water.” This indicates Jesus was immersed in water, and not sprinkled by water. Another example sheds further confirmation upon this, so that not only Jesus, but others after Jesus were baptized in the same manner:

Colossians 2:10-12

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

By using the term “burial” in reference to baptism, it gives stronger indication that this is not just a baptism *by* water, but a baptism *in* water, which is a further indication that baptism is to be done by total immersion *in* water. No other baptisms recorded in scripture indicate any other method.

The Book of Mormon agrees with this in numerous places.

3 Nephi 5:21-27

21 And the Lord said unto him, I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven.

22 And again, the Lord called others and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize.

23 And he said unto them, On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you.

24 Verily, I say unto you that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them: Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

25 And now, behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying, Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

26 And then shall ye immerse them in the water and come forth again out of the water.

27 And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily, I say unto you that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

Thus the Bible and the Book of Mormon agree on the method for baptism, with the Book of Mormon providing some key pieces of information to clarify how it is to be performed. Specifically, this ordinance has structure and is to be performed by one having authority from Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, authority was granted through the ordination of disciples. This is described in the following passage:

Mark 3:13-15

13 And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.

14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,

15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

This is reiterated in what some call “the Great Commission” -

Mark 16:14-20

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

This “commission” was specifically given to the eleven of the original apostles whom he had ordained. This was not a commission given to all of Jesus’ followers, but to those whom he ordained to this purpose. Similarly, the one that baptized Jesus was John, who was specially prepared for this purpose.

John 1:6-8

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

When Jesus was baptized by John, it was by someone “sent from God” and not by any others who might profess authority to do so. So, too, was Jesus then given authority to baptize, with witness given by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

For completeness, we also find this account in Mark.

Mark 1:9-12

9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:

11 And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

12 And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

Matthew and John also record these events.

Matthew 3:16-17

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:
17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

John 1:29-34

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.
30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.
31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.
32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.
33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.
34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

The importance of showing that all four writers included this is to establish beyond reasonable doubt that the ordinance performed upon Jesus was two-fold. There was a baptism by water, followed by a baptism by the Holy Ghost and fire, in which was recorded the words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This took place when the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove.

Even John was not authorized to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire, so this was a separate act apart from what John performed by immersing Jesus in the water during the ordinance of baptism. John’s testimony also indicated that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire.

This was foretold in another place, but how Jesus came to possess authority to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire is explained in some detail in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 7:14-22

14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.
15 And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest,
16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.
17 For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.
18 For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.
19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.
20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:
21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

That Jesus was a high priest is established by referencing Melchisedec, who was a high priest in the days of Abraham, to whom Abraham paid tithes of all that he had taken for spoils when he defeated the five kings. The writer of the book of Hebrews makes numerous other references to Jesus' priesthood.

Hebrews 5:10 Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews 6:20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Therefore, having authority of God, Jesus also baptized with water as we find in the book of John.

John 3:22-26

22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

24 For John was not yet cast into prison.

25 Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

Thus, having established that John was sent from God, evidently having authority to baptize, and that Jesus, being a high priest and having authority to baptize, the case seems very clear that baptism is not to be performed unless authorized by God to do so. On this matter, the Book of Mormon is consistent with what we have found in the Bible.

3 Nephi 5:18-22

18 And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude), and he commanded him that he should come forth.

19 And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord, and he did kiss his feet.

20 And the Lord commanded him that he should arise. And he arose and stood before him.

21 And the Lord said unto him, I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven.

22 And again, the Lord called others and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize.

This ordinance of baptism must therefore require power and authority if it is to be performed acceptably to God. That power and authority cannot originate with men, but must be conferred by one having authority from God to do so.

If, as we have seen, the baptism of water is "unto repentance," then what is the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire intended to accomplish?

John 14:15-26

15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire must, therefore, refer to the action of the Holy Ghost in being sent to dwell in individuals. When the Holy Ghost dwells in people, he teaches them, helps them remember the things of God, and prepares them to dwell in eternity.

The Book of Mormon explains further along these lines.

1 Nephi 3:30-32

30 And the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in this time as in times of old,

31 And as well in times of old as in times to come;

32 Wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.

2 Nephi 13:17-18

17 Yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

18 But behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying, After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.

2 Nephi 14:2-6

2 But behold, why do ye ponder these things in your hearts? Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost, ye could speak with the tongue of angels?

3 And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels, save it were by the Holy Ghost? Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ.

4 Wherefore, I said unto you, Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

5 Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them, it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark.

6 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

The gift of the Holy Ghost provides us with spiritual blessings that are more valuable than any material things, the key being that baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire is a change and a signal that God confirms upon those that have humbled themselves and chosen to take upon them the name of Christ, that he will dwell in them. Whether this includes revealing mysteries, speaking with the tongues of angels, or showing the path an individual must follow, these are all tasks that the Holy Ghost will perform once he dwells in you.

If baptism with water is unto repentance, then baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire must be a bestowment of the Holy Ghost and a promise that God will dwell in those who make this choice and endure to the end, which gives hope for eternal life, comfort in times of trial, assurance of God's will, and blessings of a diverse nature.

How is the gift of the Holy Ghost – the baptism of fire – to be performed? For baptism in water, it seems evident that the physical action is detailed well enough, but how does this translate to baptism by the Holy Ghost and fire? The scriptures again tell us the detail.

Acts 19:3-6

3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

These examples show that when Paul performed this ordinance, he did so by laying his hands upon those who received it. Moreover, his instructions to Timothy indicate that Timothy received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, or in other words, the hands of the elders.

It may be viewed by some that the “presbytery” is just a reference to the appointed leaders of a congregation, and not necessarily a group of people having received special authority from God. In this it may be well for us to see the meaning of “presbytery” as from the original language, Greek:

(from Strong's Concordance)

presbuterion: a body of elders

Definition: a body of elders

Usage: an assembly of elders, the Sanhedrin, officers of the church assembly, presbytery.

Cognate: 4244 presbytérion – properly, a council (group) of elders; a team of elder-overseers serving a local church who lead (feed, shepherd) the people of the Lord

How may we know that the New Testament refers to one who has authority given them from God? Our example of Paul gives us the clue. When Paul himself was ordained as an apostle, it was done through the commandment of God to “certain prophets and teachers.”

Acts 13:1-3

1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

The Holy Ghost sanctioned (called for) the ordination of Paul and Barnabas, which gave them – the “prophets and teachers” – authority to ordain him. The means they used was the laying on of hands. While this was not the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire (that had previously been done), it establishes the means by which the Holy Ghost operates in the performance of spiritual ordinances. There can be no higher authority than the Holy Ghost when it comes to permission or authorization to perform an ordinance.

Therefore because Paul himself was authorized of God to do so, when he “laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them”.

For such an important task, it would seem that not much detail is given in the New Testament, but this is why the Book of Mormon came forth – to bring clarity and understanding where needed for things of truly great importance.

Moroni 2:1-3

1 The words of Christ which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them:

2 And he called them by name, saying, Ye shall call on the Father in my name in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this, ye shall have power that on him whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles.

3 Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands fell the Holy Ghost.

With this simple explanation, we have a more solid understanding of how God set forth this ordinance to be performed.

II. Common doctrinal topics

F. Priesthood

Many views of priesthood picture it in terms of organizational authority by election, as a form of democratic spiritual authority. While true in one sense, priesthood is first and foremost a calling of the Holy Ghost to individuals, which is its more important function.

First mentions of priesthood in the Old Testament of the King James Bible do not provide any indication that priesthood is an elected office, but rather relegate the question of priesthood to simple terms such as “high priest” or “priest.” This detail unfolds a bit further in the accounts of Moses, Aaron, and the sons of Aaron, particularly in regards to ordinances that those priesthood members were to perform.

The New Testament, however, brings to full view the importance of priesthood, not just in terms of organizational authority, but true spiritual authority, and this element of spiritual authority is further examined in the pages of the Book of Mormon.

As it has been elaborated upon in previous sections concerning the baptism by water and the baptism by the Holy Ghost and fire, the term “spiritual authority” represents divinely given – or in other words, God-given – responsibility. Modern day usage notwithstanding, priesthood as ordained by God is not a free reign to do whatever one wants to do, but rather what God commands to do.

Priesthood does have one element of democratic sensitivity, and that is whether a certain individual’s ministry will be accepted by others. Beyond that, however, authority to perform ordinances and to do the other things required of priesthood members is strictly a matter of divine bestowal of power and authority. It is not, however, a way to control people, as evidenced by the inability of priesthood during the reigns of “bad” kings to keep Israel in check with regard to the commandments. Rather, priesthood are to serve the people by using the means provided by God for restoring them to a good relationship with God.

In ancient Israel, priesthood members had a very important place within society. In the days of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, priesthood served first and foremost as the modern day equivalent of law enforcement, courts, medical personnel, and educators. This provided a structure to society that was necessary for maintaining not just civility between people, but spiritual guidance and preparation for a better way of life.

It was not always successful.

Israel went through centuries of both good and bad times, and more often than not it was not the priesthood that made that difference, but the leaders. Kings that were bad led the people to do evil, often casting out the legitimate priesthood from a place of civil authority and replacing them with cronies that would do whatever the king demanded. Monarchies may be efficient, but they are not always moral or wise.

By the time of Jesus’ birth, Israel had been through over a thousand years of trials and tribulations, with a few good times scattered in between when Israel truly turned to God. But after some four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments, it was time for God to re-establish true worship, and to

build his Church. In doing so, one of the first things Jesus did was to call his disciples and teach them. He then ordained them to serve in the apostolic office and thereby serve as special witnesses of him, to bring his teachings to the world and by so doing, bring the message of salvation to the world. If we learn nothing else from this example, it is that the priesthood Jesus envisioned was one of bringing hope, faith, repentance, and even salvation to the world. A careful review of priesthood from the beginning of the Old Testament through to the end of the New Testament reveals that this has always been the goal assigned to those who serve in the priesthood.

Priesthood as described in the scriptures has been a means whereby God provides an interface between God and man. This interface has been constituted by ordinances and sacrifices. There is truly no replacement for the individuals' worship of God, but there are "helps" that make the bridging of that gap more functional and indeed necessary. At its root the term "ordinance" consists of the term "order", and this is where the "order of the priesthood" becomes apparent. Priesthood are "ordered" to perform tasks that bring about an improvement in the relationship between man and his Creator. There is no better example than Jesus himself.

We begin by looking at what the Psalms record about Jesus:

Psalms 110:4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

We note here that this is a declarative statement, not one that is earned or delegated by committee. It is a statement from the Lord and can not be mistaken as coming from any other source. Similarly the New Testament records a declarative statement when the apostles Saul (renamed to Paul) and Barnabas were ordained to be apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Acts 13:1-5

1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

This example shows that the selection process for priesthood as they knew it in the New Testament was one divinely ordered. We further read the following:

1 Corinthians 12:27-29

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

The prophets and teachers who ordained Saul and Barnabas had been set in the church by God, and acting under the direction of the Holy Ghost they were authorized to ordain apostles. Those apostles then went on to preach. Although they had previously been joined to the church, they did not act in the capacity as apostles until God ordered it so. Likewise, after Judas Iscariot killed himself, the remaining eleven apostles could not decide who should replace him. To address this, they called upon God for the necessary guidance:

Acts 1:15-26

15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

We further discover that priesthood is not something that is self-appointed, and is not something that can be conferred upon oneself. The Old Testament illustrates this well with the life of King Uzziah, who served for the most part of his life as a righteous king. Near the end of his life, however, he presumed to take upon himself the role of priesthood without authority from God.

2 Chronicles 26:16-21

16 But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.

17 And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men:

18 And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God.

19 Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.

20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.

21 And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

The judgment upon Uzziah was that he attempted to perform an ordinance reserved only for priesthood, and for this cause he received leprosy. Clearly he did not have authorization from God to serve in the priesthood, so we can learn from this that despite all good intentions, priesthood is only for those called of God and ordained to serve in that capacity.

As though the examples in the Old Testament were not clear enough, in the New Testament the writer of the book of Hebrews makes a bold statement that the offices of the priesthood must be defined by the calling of God.

Hebrews 5:4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

It would seem that there were some in New Testament times that knew nothing of this, believing that they might obtain this authority through purchase:

Acts 18:18-24

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Simon's reasoning was flawed because he did not understand the nature of priesthood or of the Holy Ghost, but would have used this power to earn money and to gain popularity, but he nonetheless saw that with priesthood authority there is power granted by God.

The Book of Mormon addresses many of these subjects concerning priesthood, giving a much more rounded picture of what the role of priesthood is.

Alma 9:63-73

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

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

65 And this is the manner after which they were ordained: being called and prepared from the foundation of the world, according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works--in the first place being left to choose good or evil;

66 Therefore, they, having chosen good and exercising exceeding great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such;

67 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this, they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

68 Or, in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared;

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

70 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world,

71 Or, in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things.

72 Now they were ordained after this manner: being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood is without beginning or end;

73 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

While this passage specifically refers to high priests, the high priesthood is essentially a “template” for all priesthood offices, which has the primary purpose of teaching the commandments so that the people might benefit from the knowledge of the Son of God, that they might know upon whom they may place their faith so that salvation might be theirs to enjoy.

The book of Alma takes place in “Old Testament” times, so it is useful to know what the “New Testament” era in the Book of Mormon indicates concerning priesthood. For this, we begin with Jesus’ visit to the people in the new world described in the eighth chapter of the third book of Nephi:

3 Nephi 8:70-71

70 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one – even until he had touched them all – and spake unto them as he touched them;

71 And the multitude heard not the words which he spake, therefore, they did not bear record; but the disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost.

This makes clear that Jesus set these disciples apart – ordained them – and gave them power to give the Holy Ghost, much as he did for the apostles at Jerusalem. These disciples would then over the course of time ordain others in their stead. Moroni, who lived nearly three hundred fifty years later, would include further information based on the records that were kept during that period when Jesus visited the people in the new world, information that provides a very clear understanding of how they were instructed by Christ to ordain men to the priesthood.

Moroni 2:1-3:3

2:1 The words of Christ which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them:

2:2 And he called them by name, saying, Ye shall call on the Father in my name in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this, ye shall have power that on him whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles.

2:3 Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands fell the Holy Ghost.

3:1 The manner which the disciples, who were called the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers:

3:2 After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them and said, In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest (or if he be a teacher, I ordain you to be a teacher) to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

3:3 And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost which was in them.

From this passage it is made clear that there were different roles for different priesthood offices, with some serving as Elders, some serving as Priests, and some serving as Teachers. In each instance they performed various duties that were uniquely tied to that priesthood office, based on the gifts and callings of God. Elders would bestow the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands, while priests and teachers were not allowed to do this. While showing a brief difference in a few verses, the goal of priesthood is the same regardless of which office is involved – to bring about righteousness through the use of the gifts and callings of God which are bestowed by the power and authority of God to those whom he calls.

III. The living God

A. Prophets

The role of “prophet” in history is a sometimes-misconstrued role by modern religious organizations. To many people the concept of what a prophet is or does is that of predicting future events, much like a fortune teller might do. That has not always been the case if we read from the Bible and the Book of Mormon. If the role of the prophet is purely to tell of future events, it would necessarily be true that very few prophets throughout history would have been needed. Instead, the prophet is much more than a predictor of events. The prophet expresses the mind and will of God to those that need to hear it – to those that God directs the prophet to speak to.

As we look through Biblical and Book of Mormon records, there are a great many passages attributed to prophets that have no “future” elements in them. Moses, for example, is known as one of the greatest prophets, but one of his great contributions was not predictions of future events, but revealing past events. The first book of Moses, in fact, is the Book of Genesis, in which he makes no predictions of his own.

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy round out Moses’ writings with relatively few predictions about the future of Israel. These are considered the books of the “Law” which reveals the commandments of God to men and sets up the nation with statutes, commandments and ordinances they are to perform. While there are a few predictions contained within the pages of these books, the vast majority of the contents which depict communications from God are related to the organization of the people and social conduct.

Many of the other prophets in the Old Testament have similar duties – they communicate to kings and nations what God sees them doing, what he wants them to do or not do, and what to expect based on their choices.

To help people identify true prophets of God and those not sent from God, Moses gave some clarity to this:

Numbers 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

As one example, we find this fulfillment taking place in the life of the prophet Samuel in the Old Testament:

1 Samuel 3:2-21

2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;

4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.

5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.
 8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.
 9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
 10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.
 11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.
 12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.
 13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.
 14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.
 15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.
 16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.
 17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.
 18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.
 19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.
 20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.
 21 And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD

We see that the promise given through Moses was fulfilled in the life of Samuel – the Lord spoke to Samuel in a dream and showed himself to Samuel in a vision.

The Book of Mormon shows this same means for calling a prophet of God in the life of Lehi, who lived in Jerusalem at the time when Jeremiah had been cast into prison.

1 Nephi 1:4-14

4 Wherefore, it came to pass that my father Lehi, as he went forth, prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart in behalf of his people.
 5 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard, he did quake and tremble exceedingly.
 6 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen;
 7 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open; and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.
 8 And it came to pass that he saw one descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noonday;

9 And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament; and they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth;

10 And the first came, and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.

11 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord; and he read, saying, Wo, wo unto Jerusalem! For I have seen thine abominations;

12 Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem--that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof, many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

13 And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord, such as, Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

14 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

1 Nephi 1:24-29

24 For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done;

25 And because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life.

26 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.

27 And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord; wherefore, he did as the Lord commanded him.

28 And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness.

29 And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents; and he departed into the wilderness;

Thus the Lord spoke to him in a dream and revealed himself to Lehi in a vision, just as Moses described.

Prophets are not immune to personal thoughts and feelings. In the life of Nathan the prophet, who served in the court of king David, David shared his thoughts about his desires to build a temple for the Lord. Initially Nathan thought this was a good idea also and stated such, but the Lord came to him and revealed that this was not for David to do, but his son Solomon.

2 Samuel 7:1-17

1 And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies;

2 That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.

3 And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.

4 And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying,

5 Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

The idea that a prophet is never wrong needs to be understood in context. The above case of Nathan was an instance when Nathan offered his personal opinion, but when shown otherwise, he delivered the true message from God. Any prophet, however – even one called of God – is capable of misusing that authority. In the days of Jeremiah, a prophet of God gave a false prophecy and was condemned by God for doing so.

Jeremiah 23:25-34

25 I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;

27 Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal.

28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.

29 Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

30 Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.

31 Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.

32 Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

33 And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD.

34 And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house.

Jeremiah 28:10-17

10 Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it.

11 And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

12 Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying,

13 Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.

14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also.

15 Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.

16 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD.

17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

We see from this example that a prophet that had previously been known as a true prophet, gave a false prophecy, and the Lord brought judgment upon him because he lied before all of Israel.

Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Thus, prophets must walk a very strict line of obedience because they speak in the name of the Lord and he will not let that special calling go without punishment when they do so falsely.

While the primary role of prophets may not be to give prophecies about future events, it is one of their responsibilities. Moses relates some wisdom from the Lord that makes in sum a very simple statement about how to know a true prophet from a false one.

Deuteronomy 13:1-4

1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

This can be seen happening in the Book of Mormon, when a false prophet sought to lead people away from the true and living God and confronts a true prophet of God.

Jacob 5:1-35

1 And now, it came to pass after some years had passed away, there came a man among the people of Nephi whose name was Sherem.

2 And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ.

3 And he preached many things which were flattering unto the people; and this he did that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ.

4 And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts;

5 And he, knowing that I, Jacob, had faith in Christ who should come, he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me.

6 And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil.

7 And he had hope to shake me from the faith, notwithstanding the many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things; for I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me.

8 And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word from time to time; wherefore, I could not be shaken.

9 And it came to pass that he came unto me; and on this wise did he speak unto me, saying, Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ;

10 And ye have led away much of this people, that they pervert the right way of God and keep not the law of Moses, which is the right way, and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence.

11 And now, behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come.

12 And after this manner did Sherem contend against me.

13 But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words.

14 And I said unto him, Deniest thou the Christ which shall come?

15 And he said, If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be.

16 And I said unto him, Believest thou the scriptures?

17 And he said, Yea.
 18 And I said unto him, Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ.
 19 Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ.
 20 And this is not all; it has been made manifest unto me, for I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost;
 21 Wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made, all mankind must be lost.
 22 And it came to pass that he said unto me, Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much.
 23 And I said unto him, What am I, that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true?
 24 Yet thou wilt deny it because thou art of the devil.
 25 Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth, and also that Christ shall come.
 26 And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine.
 27 And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth.
 28 And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days.
 29 And it came to pass that he said unto the people, Gather together on the morrow, for I shall die; wherefore, I desire to speak unto the people before I shall die.
 30 And it came to pass that on the morrow, the multitude were gathered together; and he spake plainly unto them, and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels.
 31 And he spake plainly unto them that he had been deceived by the power of the devil.
 32 And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment.
 33 And he said, I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God; for I denied the Christ and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of him.
 34 And because I have thus lied unto God, I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God.
 35 And it came to pass that when he had said these words, he could say no more; and he gave up the ghost.

The examples given so far illustrate another point that is worth noting. While there may be a chief prophet to the leader of the nation, that does not mean there can be only one living prophet at a time. We can see this playing out relatively early in Israel's history and among another group of people described in the Book of Mormon.

1 Samuel 22: And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth.

Acts 2:29-30

29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.
 30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

(i.e., Gad and David were both prophets at the same time.)

Ether 4:90-91

90 And there came also in the days of Com many prophets and prophesied of the destruction of that great people, except they should repent, and turn unto the Lord, and forsake their murders and wickedness.

91 And it came to pass that the prophets were rejected by the people; and they fled unto Com for protection, for the people sought to destroy them; and they prophesied unto Com many things; and he was blessed in all the remainder of his days.

And also in the New Testament:

Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

Acts 21:8-11

8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

It is important to realize that a prophet of himself (or herself as the case may be) does not possess the power to prophesy except it is given to him/her by the Holy Ghost. We saw this in Saul when the Holy Ghost came upon him and he prophesied, or Agabus when he spoke by the Holy Ghost. This is a spiritual gift and it is not limited to men alone. Acts 21:9 refers to Philip's four daughters who prophesied. This is perhaps made more abundantly clear in the Old testament when king Josiah sent Hilkiah the high priest and others to go see a prophetess (a female prophet) named Huldah:

2 Chronicles 34:20-28

20 And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying,

21 Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

22 And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they spake to her to that effect.

23 And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me,

24 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah:

25 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.

26 And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard;

27 Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

28 Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.

The role of prophet is never identified as a priesthood role in any scripture. It is true that many of the prophets did hold priesthood office as well, but some did not. David, for example, was a prophet, but he was not permitted to enter the inner court of the tabernacle because he was not a priest. He ate the shewbread which was appointed for the priests, but he never received an ordination to the priesthood. Jesus references this later on, but it is to show that God is not without mercy to those that stand in need.

It is important to recognize that “prophet” is not a priesthood calling. Priesthood has always been restricted to the male members of the church, going all the way back to the days of Melchizedek, the priest of Salem (see Genesis 14:18). The reason this is important is because priesthood are to administer the ordinances in the place of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the bridegroom, not the bride.

As priesthood are to administer ordinances in the place of the bridegroom, it would not be fitting for women to serve in this capacity as they represent the bride. It is not a sexist form of discrimination, or discrimination of any kind, but a recognition that Adam was first made, then Eve. If Eve had been made before Adam, perhaps the Gospel would be very much different, but as that is not the case we find that the role of priesthood is for men only.

Another woman filling the role of prophetess was Deborah, who also served as a Judge in Israel before it had kings.

Judges 4:4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

A prophet, therefore, as we see in the Old and New Testaments, may be male or female. We remember that both Adam and Eve spoke with God, Deborah in the days of Barak, Huldah in the days of Josiah, and Philip’s four daughters in the New Testament.

It is perhaps important to make a distinction between those who are prophets and those who have the gift of prophecy. Paul identifies the gift of prophecy as a spiritual gift in his first letter to the Corinthians -

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

This is likewise explained in similar terms in the Book of Mormon by Moroni, the last prophet in the Book of Mormon:

Moroni 10:8-14

8 And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God.

9 And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men to profit them.

10 For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God that he may teach the word of wisdom; and to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; and to another, exceeding great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

11 And again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles; and again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things; and again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits; and again, to another, all kinds of tongues; and again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues.

12 And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally according as he will.

13 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

14 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.

Having the gift of prophecy is something that may be temporarily given to a person, perhaps to deliver even just one message, but to be a prophet is a calling with responsibility and a life-long commitment, but it is not one that includes ordinances unless that person is also separately a member of the priesthood.

Samuel, for example, was both a high priest and a prophet. He traveled from town to town and offered sacrifices for the people, which only a priest or high priest could do. Abraham was a prophet, and seemingly a priest of some description because he built altars to God and offered sacrifices upon them, yet even he received a blessing from Melchizedek, which is one of the ordinances of God that priesthood of his (Melchizedek's) order are to perform. In due turn, Isaac also served in this capacity, both as prophet and priest, as did Jacob (Israel) because each of them bestowed blessings, prophesied and offered sacrifices, and they knew God personally from conversations in visions and dreams.

In fact, among all the examples provided in scripture of those having the spirit of prophecy, perhaps the least likely candidate for the role of "prophet" would be that of Saul just before he became king of Israel. He "prophesied" but was not necessarily a "prophet." The people viewed him as a prophet because he traveled with a group of prophets, but his later actions seem to indicate that if he were actually a prophet, he must have lost his conversational relationship with God.

Indeed, Saul sought the word of the Lord from a woman with a familiar (or evil) spirit, which was strictly forbidden under the law of Moses (see Leviticus 20:6 - "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that

soul, and will cut him off from among his people.”). This ultimately led to Saul’s own demise as well as that of his son Jonathan.

1 Samuel 10:1-13

9 And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day.

10 And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

11 And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?

12 And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?

13 And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place.

1 Samuel 28:5-12

5 And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled.

6 And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

7 Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.

8 And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.

9 And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

10 And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, As the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.

11 Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.

12 And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.

When Paul gave his explanation of how the Lord set up his church, he details in specific order the following:

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Paul repeats this order of organization for the church in his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

This sets the priority in the church, not of having prophets as the first established position, but the apostles. This is not without reason. An apostle is a special witness of Christ, and is authorized to baptize with water and with the Holy Ghost, lay on hands, and to do other priesthood-related tasks. The role of prophet is a secondary – although also very important – role within the church, and this is to provide the mind and will of God for direction, counsel, warning, and hope. All of these roles were set in the church, not just one, and they are all important for the function of the church of Jesus Christ to be fulfilled.

III. The living God

B. Revelations

Often closely associated with the activity of prophets, revelations are part of the mystery of godliness. God has an unmatched view of history, not being limited by time as we observe it, and being ever-present to witness all things. The first real understanding of what it means to receive a revelation comes from Moses' recorded history of the beginning of the world.

When Moses wrote the book of Genesis, he speaks of a time before men existed. As we read in Genesis, we come to a realization that it is impossible for a man to know how "the beginning" took place unless provided that information by a witness. God is that witness, and he gave Moses that witness to write it down. Moses did not "guess" the specific details. God essentially "dictated" either by his voice or by showing it to him in a vision or dream such that he had enough understanding to write it down.

Even if the account of creation had been handed down from Adam, Adam himself would not have been privy to the knowledge of what came before he was formed out of the dust, unless God had revealed it to him also. That may indeed have happened, but the book of Genesis is called the first book of Moses for a reason. God gave that information to Moses and he included it in the written record for his own people and the people since.

A revelation can be a "reveal"-ment from something in history, or it can refer to something in the present, or even something yet to be. We distinguish "revelations" from "prophecies" because they represent a different aspect of communication from God. Revelations from God follow more along the lines of factual transfers of knowledge than persuasive explanations or motivations.

Often enough a revelation will have some impact on our opinion of the value of history, or of current events, or even future events, but the primary focus of a revelation is simply to reveal knowledge. If we say a prophet received a revelation from the Lord, it does not necessarily mean that they have stood in front of an audience to reveal that knowledge. It may just be written down. Prophecies, on the other hand, tend to be more often conveyed from the speaker to the recipient by voice. There are certainly exceptions, and there is nothing to prevent God from throwing in a prophecy with a revelation, or a sermon for that matter.

These distinctions aside – and there may be legitimate, differing views on this subject depending on circumstances – what God chooses to reveal are as much a part of his character as the subject of what he is revealing.

Indeed, much of revelation has God as the subject of what is being revealed. God expresses himself to his creation so that they might know his character and how to faithfully please him. Since the beginning God has instructed men that they should worship him as the only true and living God, but worship is without glory if it is in complete ignorance. There can be no respect of his character if there is no knowledge of his character. But knowledge must come from some source, and that source must be the creator.

From the simplest of utterances to the most in-depth explanation, the Lord makes his personality and life known to man so that they might have reason to worship him, and not to compel them out of ignorance. Some examples of these traits (characteristics or attributes) follow:

God is a jealous God, who shows mercy:

Exodus 20:1-5

- 1 And God spake all these words, saying,
- 2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
- 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
- 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
- 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

God is full of mercy, grace, long-suffering, goodness and truth:

Exodus 34:5-7

- 5 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.
- 6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,
- 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

God is a God of greatness, glory, victory, majesty, honor, riches and power:

1 Chronicles 29:10-13

- 10 Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.
- 11 Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.
- 12 Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.
- 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

God is holy, clean, great and terrible (meaning: amazing; beyond imagination; awesome):

Psalms 99:1-3

- 1 The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved.
- 2 The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people.
- 3 Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.

Alma 5:36 And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness nor anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God;

Alma 14:88 Blessed be the name of our God! Let us sing to his praise; yea, let us give thanks to his holy name, for he doth work righteousness forever.

1 Peter 1:15-16

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

God is unchangeable:

Malachi 3:6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Alma 5:35 Neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left nor from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round.

God is full of grace and truth:

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

2 Nephi 1:71 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth

God is fierce, almighty and powerful:

Revelation 1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Revelation 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

1 Nephi 5:148 And ye also know that by the power of his almighty word he can cause the earth that it shall pass away;

God is full of goodness, power, wisdom, patience, and long-suffering towards the children of men:

Mosiah 2:8-9

8 For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness and your worthless and fallen state,

9 I say unto you, If ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men,

God is Omnipotent (all-powerful) and manifests himself through his Spirit:

Mosiah 3:3-4

3 And also, we know of their surety and truth because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

4 And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things.

God is a God of justice and judgment:

Psalms 89:14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

Alma 19:66

66 And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good;

67 And if their works are evil, they shall be restored unto them for evil; therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, everything to its natural frame--mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption, raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil;

68 The one on the one hand, the other on the other--the one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good, and the other to evil according to his desires of evil. For as he has desired to do evil all the day long, even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh.

69 And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so shall he be rewarded unto righteousness.

Ether 5:27-29

27 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying, Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness; and if men come unto me, I will show unto them their weakness.

28 I give unto men weakness, that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

29 Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness; and I will show unto them that faith, hope, and charity bringeth unto me the fountain of all righteousness.

If God had not communicated these parts of who he is, (and this is an incomplete list of his attributes,) mankind would surely have never understood why it would be necessary to worship or follow the Lord, how to recognize him, or get a glimmer of who and what he is. Without a knowledge of these characteristics, man could not have known what life or death were, and there could not have been a plan of redemption (salvation). The revelation of God to man is as essential to man's existence as the plan of salvation.

III. The living God

C. Miracles

The natural world as we know it is something that has been studied for thousands of years. With the advent of modern science we can observe a standard set of rules that appears to be relevant in all places where such rules apply. Those rules exist so that life is not a disordered, chaotic state or condition of being. Gravity, for example, appears to apply universally to all objects, and can be used to predict the motions of the moon, planets and stars. These realms of physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology and other fields of scientific discovery enable us to interact with the world in such a way that we can both understand how to live in it and use it to our advantage.

So-called “natural” science such as this operates on a strictly physical level. When examples of exceptional differences between what we perceive and what we understand should be possible to exist, we tend to start using the superlative term “supernatural” because they go beyond our everyday experience with known rules. There are times when we recognize that the rules we know and understand are inadequate to describe or explain these “supernatural” occurrences, which often leads to new discoveries. But there is a category of events that completely bypasses all possible explanation by physical laws, and we call these events “miracles.”

Possibly the first miracle we can consider is the existence of God. There is no physical law that could accommodate the existence of a being whose attributes are described in the previous section on “revelation.” The entire universe is subject to him, and according to his revealed word, he existed before everything else because everything we know of (and things we don’t know) were created by him. This may seem to be just another fact we know about God, but his very existence defies all explanation, and therefore fits into the category of “miracle.”

By comparison, all other “miracles” seem much smaller. A being that is capable of existing prior to all the known physical universe, that is able to create the known universe with all its attributes, rules, and conditions is surely capable of performing other miracles besides those big items. When Jesus turned water into wine, we could surmise that he manipulated the elements on an atomic and molecular scale, but the means for doing so is completely beyond our understanding, and indeed may not be possible at all when considering purely physical processes. Needless to say, this miracle must necessarily have been less difficult to perform than to create the universe.

Numerous examples can be found through scripture and in more modern experience that attest to the existence of miracles. Feeding multitudes of people with just a start of a few fishes and loaves of bread is but one example. Raising people from the dead, healing people from any host of infirmities and diseases, having sufficient manna delivered six days a week for almost forty years to feed a population of a few million people, and so forth – these attest to the benevolence of a merciful, gracious God that has sufficient power to make these miracles take place.

Though it has been speculated for some time on the processes that led to the existence of life on earth, the best of science for over 600 years has been inadequate to the task of reproducing the same task using even existing elements of DNA or biological matter, much less elements that don’t exist. Thus, the existence of life on earth is by definition a miracle.

If God created the heaven and the earth, as found in Genesis, and Jesus did the work of creating them, as indicated in the book of John, the physical elements we now know probably didn't exist until God created them. Cosmologists speculate on the origin of the universe as beginning with an infinitesimally small spec of infinitely dense energy that exploded, which then expanded and formed the universe as we now see it over the course of billions of years. If that is true, the existence of that original spec of pre-universe singularity is not adequately described by the science that speculates its original existence. Speculation that it didn't need a cause to exist leads back to a supernatural explanation, which must depend on a supernatural being that could exist without the universe.

That level of metaphysics is speculative to the extreme and is the subject of arguments between Creationists and Evolutionists, and will never be resolved unless or until God chooses to reveal more detail. Suffice it to say that the universe is larger than the human mind can really grasp, and even our own part of the universe where we reside is full of enough wonder to last lifetimes. Speculation about how the original singularity of the universe came into existence, or if it ever existed, is quite unproductive except in the expenditure of time and money in its pursuit. Those that demand answers to these questions forget that God is a living God and is under no obligation to reveal things that are unproductive to our understanding of him or his motivations for creating all things. God is a creator, and the pursuit of a creator is to create, whatever his motivation for a given creation might be.

At a more local level, on this earth, miracles have been recorded throughout history.

Not all miracles, however, are accounted to the work of God. The term "supernatural" does not itself give indication of the relative quality or motivation for the circumstance to which it applies. We subscribe the term "divine" to those works ascribed to God, and "deception" to those works ascribed to the devils and his angels.

During the dialog between Moses and Pharaoh, we find miracles were performed by both God and the devil.

Exodus 7:8-12

8 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

9 When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent.

10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

11 Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.

12 For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

One could argue that the magicians in Pharaoh's court were simply employing tricks to make it appear that their rods were serpents, but the text gives no indication that these were mere tricks. Indeed, they were called "sorcerers" which implies they used supernatural means to accomplish their "miracle."

If this were the only case of Pharaoh's magicians performing supernatural tasks, we could argue that it was just a trick. But this was not the only instance.

Exodus 7:15-25

15 Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand.
16 And thou shalt say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear.
17 Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.
18 And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall lothe to drink of the water of the river.
19 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.
20 And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.
21 And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.
22 And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.
23 And Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he set his heart to this also.
24 And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.
25 And seven days were fulfilled, after that the LORD had smitten the river.

It seems clear that while God did perform a miracle, the magicians were able to reproduce the same miracle using their enchantments, which is why the Pharaoh was unconvinced and hardened his heart. Indeed, we find that the magicians reproduced the plague of frogs as well. When it came to the plague of flies, however, the magicians in the court were unable to match that. It was enough, however, that Pharaoh may have been convinced that Moses and Aaron were simply better magicians than those in his court, so he hardened his heart further up until the time that the firstborn in the land died.

What this illustrates for us is that the magicians exercised a supernatural power – which they called magic, while Moses and Aaron exercised the power God gave them. God's power in performing miracles surpassed that of the magicians, who had only Satan to depend on.

In a modern age we have certain expectations about what is sane and what is insane, with the very idea of magic being in the latter category. The uncomfortable concept that there are forces which defy the physical laws that we know about leaves us vulnerable and feeling ignorant, which is anathema to modern sensibilities. Our common everyday experiences tell us that without the “normal” behaviors of things we can't control our own destiny.

Consider the idea that prior to the invention of the electric light, or the radio, many items we take for granted today would have been considered witchcraft three hundred years ago. Today we accept these things as explainable and normal, but until it was discovered to be so, it would be a supernatural event. While we can explain these things today, the notion of performing some miracles may very well be the application of laws that we do not know yet.

Nonetheless, it is likely that there are some things that cannot ever be explained through strictly physical or “natural” processes. God is a spiritual being after all. It stands to reason that the physical reality we are familiar with on a daily basis is only half (or less) of what exists.

We get a glimpse into that spiritual realm by some of the experiences of prophets as they recorded them.

Isaiah 6 (entire chapter)

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.
4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.
5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.
6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:
7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.
8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.
9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.
10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.
11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,
12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.
13 But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

Exodus 24:9-11

9 Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel:
10 And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.
11 And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.

Genesis 28:10-17

10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.
11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.
12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.

17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

2 Kings 2:9-12

9 And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

10 And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

12 And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

2 Kings 6:15-17

15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

1 Nephi 1:7 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open; and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

Alma 12:101-110

101 And Ammon began to speak unto him with boldness and said unto him, Believest thou that there is a God?

102 And he answered and said unto him, I do not know what that meaneth.

103 And then Ammon said, Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit?

104 And he said, Yea.

105 And Ammon said, This is God.

106 And Ammon said unto him again, Believest thou that this Great Spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth?

107 And he said, Yea, I believe that he created all things which are in the earth; but I do not know the heavens.

108 And Ammon said unto him, The heavens is a place where God dwells, and all his holy angels.

109 And King Lamoni said, Is it above the earth?

110 And Ammon said, Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning.

From these passages we can discern that there is a spiritual existence that parallels our physical existence, in the sense of being co-resident in some fashion. The makeup of that spiritual realm which the prophets were able to see is unknown to us, but the existence of it is made very clear in the scriptures. If these two different realms are able to interact in some manner, and one consists of some form of substance that cannot be measured by our physical realm, the performance of miracles by the one on the other should not be surprising. A spiritual realm that exists which we cannot measure does not necessarily abide by the same physical laws that exist in the realm that we are familiar with and that we can measure.

Yet even so, there must be rules because “*The heavens is a place where God dwells, and all his holy angels.*” (Alma 12:108). God has rules and conditions that he has set forth, whether in our physical existence or in the spiritual existence, else there would be no distinction between good and evil. We know this because Satan himself once attended the heavenly court until his rebellion.

Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

Luke 10:18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

Jude 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

After Satan fell, he then wandered throughout the earth as detailed in the book of Job.

Job 1:7 And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

As Satan was a spirit both before and after his fall, it should not be surprising that he has some power that is outside the realm of just the purely physical.

2 Thessalonians 2:7-10

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Since Satan has the ability to perform signs and wonders also, which by any measure must fall into the category of “miracles,” we must be conscious of the need to discern between those that are given by God and those that are given by Satan. This explains why the magicians in Pharaoh’s court were able

to keep up with Moses and Aaron up to a point. But it should be clear that in any “competition,” the Lord’s miracles are superior to Satan’s.

Paul described the working of miracles as a spiritual gift that God gives to individuals:

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Paul does not provide an expiration date for these gifts, but in each case he uses the term “is given” in the present tense - “it is the same God which worketh all in all” - “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” - “to one is given by the Spirit,” etc. etc. This places a present tense to the Living God interacting with his creation regardless of when that time might be.

But it is equally important to recognize that God can do greater miracles among those that have faith in him.

Mark 6:5-6

5 And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief.

In this case the majority of the people didn’t believe or have sufficient faith that any mighty miracles could be worked, but nevertheless he still healed a few that were sick. We can see why because of what we find in the Book of Mormon:

Moroni 7:35-43

35 And Christ hath said, If ye will have faith in me, ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.

36 And he hath said, Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved.

37 And now, my beloved brethren, if this be the case, that these things are true which I have spoken unto you – and God will show unto you with power and great glory at the last day that they are true – and if they are true, has the day of miracles ceased?

38 Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men?

39 Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them?

40 Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?

41 Behold, I say unto you, Nay, for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men;

42 Wherefore, if these things have ceased, wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain; for no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name;

43 Wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made.

So then we know that it is by faith that miracles are performed.

Modern occurrences of miracles are often “explained away” with “hand-waving” arguments. That is to say, a theoretical explanation for how something “could have” happened under just the right circumstances may be given without having substantial evidence that those things did happen exactly that way. It is a common tactic for unbelievers to cast doubt on the “miraculous” component of events.

Numerous examples in modern times include, for example, car accidents in which one person is able to lift one half of a car after they offer a quick “help me God” type of prayer to free someone that is trapped. The ability to do this is often explained in theoretical terms such as a surge of adrenaline that allows the person’s muscles to multiply in strength, thus giving the person what they need to save someone’s life.

Such an argument doesn’t explain how both muscles, tendons, and bones (including the backbone and the disks between the vertebrae) were suddenly able to handle a weight of more than a thousand pounds – especially for those that are not in good physical condition. A “hand-waving” argument such as this attempts to dismiss the possibility of supernatural means without actual evidence for doing so. For those who dismiss miracles or even the possibility of miracles, they do so because the idea of supernatural intervention is wholly unpleasant to the carnal mind.

III. The living God

D. Personal Testimonies

There are a lot of people familiar with the Bible that have chosen to take the perspective that it is just a book, and whether true or not it happened a long time ago and may possibly be either exaggerated or an outright fabrication. This perspective is one that perceives the Bible as a series of stories, as opposed to history. The difference is that the term “story” is generally applied to something that could be a work of non-fiction or fiction, and may or may not represent actual events. History, on the other hand, is an acknowledged set of accurate facts regarding past events. It is now common for a given retelling of historical events to be distorted or fabricated so that the general public has a distrust of any book purporting to represent history, including the Bible.

God is aware of all this.

The problem many people have with the scriptural account of history is the inclusion of miracles and supernatural interaction. If it were not for these two primary elements of scriptural history, there would be little for any to dispute about concerning either the existence of God, whether he interacts with people, or what constitutes good and evil.

It is the scriptural depiction of God as a living being that makes the difference. A being that is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) is not limited by the confines of the end of a book.

Matthew 12:26-27

26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?
27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

If God is indeed the God of the Living, then that pertains to us today just as it did for those in the days of Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem, and as it did for Abraham, and indeed Adam. The testimonies of God interacting with mankind must continue to this day and to new days yet ahead of us.

We find this is in fact the case.

Those that are willing to see and know the Creator are more inclined to realize that he is present with them, and is available to them. They that care nothing for God are less inclined to see the wonders that are all around them, even if the evidence is as clear as can be. This is what distinguishes a personal testimony from a remarkable circumstance but otherwise uninspiring part of daily life. If you are unwilling to see it for what it is, then you will not see it. If you are willing to see it, then you can observe God working in modern times. We must exercise discernment, however, because there are deceivers in the world whose purpose is to dissuade you from a proper belief and faith in God.

Personal testimonies are for those who can hear and appreciate them. Jesus once gave this advice:

Matthew 7:6-11

6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.
7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

For those that profess an exercising faith in God it is personal testimonies that give witness to the continued interaction of God with his creation. Faith leads to knowledge, and the knowledge of God reinforces the assurance that God is true to his word, and this increases our faith.

Personal testimonies are what comprise much of the scriptures. From Adam's conversations with God in the garden of Eden, down through time until the last verse of biblical or Book of Mormon text was written, and to more modern revelations, the scriptures we have are what others have testified concerning God's interaction with them.

2 Peter 1:13-21

13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;
14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

What is a testimony?

When courts are used for the judging of cases brought to them, witnesses are asked to describe what they themselves, in the first person, experienced in relation to the case. They are asked to give testimony of what actually took place. Thus, we can see from this example that testimony is your own personal accounting of events that you witnessed first hand. This is your personal testimony.

Sharing your personal testimony of events is not intended to raise or lower your standing with others, but to help others so that they might learn from it and, hopefully gain strength from it themselves. Hebrews chapter 11 gives numerous examples of testimonies of the struggles of people to show how they exercised their faith, but it does not help you if you do not learn from it. The purpose it was shared for was to reinforce your commitment to the Lord.

When is a testimony a testimony and not a simple coincidence?

This is possibly one of the most difficult things to understand about what constitutes a personal testimony about God intervening in your life, either for good or for evil. To declare that something is not a personal testimony may be to risk the loss of something that could be meaningful to the right person, but to declare that something is a personal testimony when it has little value of any kind can diminish the sense of what makes God a living God.

Suffice it to say that what is remarkable to one person may be mundane to another, and vice versa. Not many can testify that they saw God's name emblazoned across the heavens, but not all should draw divine conclusions from every event, however unremarkable it may be in their life.

First and foremost, it is something that has meaning and value and is true. If it is none of these things, it probably does not constitute a personal testimony of God.

I can give personal testimony concerning a call to the priesthood.

Prior to the call I had a number of dreams in which I was in prayer services on Wednesday nights, and this was at a time when I was working the night shift at a local company. In those services I was leading the singing of hymns, and the hymns themselves were ones that evoked the recognition of the power and authority of God.

Some few weeks later, a priesthood member called on the phone asking to meet with me, so I drove to the priesthood member's house. While driving there I began to have doubts about what this was about since it was not mentioned in the phone call, but ultimately after looking to the setting Sun on the horizon there came a peace and a calm assurance, with the question posed to my mind by thoughts other than my own, "Why doubt that this is a call to the priesthood?" After this, all my doubts vanished, and upon entering the house the priesthood member declared, "We believe that you have a call to the priesthood."

A few months later I chose to change my work schedule to be able work days and to be able to have a more regular way to visit with family and friends. An unintended consequence was that I was also able to began to attend prayer services, but upon doing so was asked to lead the singing of hymns, just as originally shown in the dreams.

Testimonies like this may not be perceived the same way as the one who received it, but nonetheless they can bolster your faith if it has value to you.

I can also testify that at a later time, I had a dream in which I was standing outside on a gravel driveway at night, facing an old-style, but well-kept log cabin with a front porch and handrail along the length of the house. This was evidently on a hill overlooking a forested section of land. Over to the right was a young woman with long brown hair sitting in a chair facing away from me. The impulse was given to me that I should go and confirm her as a member of the church, though this was at a time when I did not hold the priesthood office of elder. Regardless, obeying the impulse, I walked over to her behind the chair and after laying my hands on her head began to pray, "Our father in heaven..." when a vision opened up and an angel appeared in the vision.

The angel appeared much as a man, but was fully white and wore white garments and a white robe. He then lifted his left arm, which lifted his robe as well, and a rainbow shown out from the robe. From this point forward, new scenes were brought before me, and the realization came to me that the description of what took place in those scenes was to be used in the confirmation prayer, which I then proceeded to do. At the conclusion of those scenes, the vision ended and I closed the prayer in Jesus' name and lifted my hands from the young woman's head. The dream then ended, and I awoke refreshed and joyful at what I had just seen. Though the scenes I witnessed in the vision within a dream are gone from memory, it was the event itself which was an indication that another call to the priesthood was due to take place at a future time. This call did indeed take place a number of years later.

Someone may say, "But surely this was just the desires you had for holding priesthood office manifesting themselves in a self-serving dream!" That is why not all personal testimonies are valued by every one. Did it illustrate a true fact that actually took place? Absolutely. Are these dreams and the subsequent events out-of-the-ordinary events? For this witness, yes, they were. They fall outside the norm of typical experience, and that is why they stand out as unique and notable.

To all of the myriad testimonies that have been given, new ones are added. This should not be surprising for those who believe in Christ. It is Christ's continued life and existence evidenced in the scriptures by the resurrection of his body from the dead that gives us hope for a brighter future if we remain faithful. A living God is an interacting God. A living God is a creating God, and an eternal God is one that can give eternal life. God truly is no respecter of persons, meaning that he does not place one above another because they have more wealth or more respect among peers. God places respect upon those that obey him and keep his commandments. To them he the more joyfully grants a place in his kingdom to dwell with him for eternity.

We may draw this conclusion upon personal testimonies: If they are true and they lead you to a greater belief in God and to follow him more circumspectly, and to have greater love for him and your fellow man, it is a testimony that is given to you by God for the benefit of those who are able to hear it and accept it, even if that person is just you.

Ecclesiastes 12

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

IV. The Church of Jesus Christ

A. The founder of the religion – Jesus Christ.

We may be tempted to think of religion in the simple one verse phrase given by the apostle James:

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Without context this statement places great simplicity on the concept of what religion is, allowing it to encompass many different religions which may place concern upon and affection for widows and fatherless children. James, however, did not write his letter to pagans or to other religious organizations. Rather, he wrote this as a general letter to the Church of Jesus Christ, which alone makes it specific to the religion of Jesus Christ.

It perhaps goes without saying that the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ is, of course, Jesus Christ himself. The term “religion” however, evokes a somewhat different concept. In today’s religious environment there are “churches” that are unrelated in any way to Jesus Christ, but for the sake of this discussion topic we shall limit ourselves when referring to “Church” as those organizations that are tied in some manner to the organization Jesus Christ established during his ministry in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

The “religion” as such, however, should generally be regarded as the larger umbrella, much as the “Jewish” religion in the days of Jesus’ ministry primarily encompassed a few sects among those that dwelt in or around Jerusalem, largely consisting of the Jewish people – or in other words, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The “Jewish” religion consisted not only of the Old Testament practices of the Law of Moses, but also (and perhaps to a larger extent) the traditions of the Jews and of the Elders, and other such practices. There were differences of opinion that fit within the identified “Jewish” religion, and these consisted of groups such as the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. There were some very clear doctrinal differences that existed between these groups, but they each claimed hold upon their common ancestral heritage, including the Law of Moses.

The apostle Paul had a unique perspective among the early apostles because he had originally antagonized the disciples of Jesus Christ until the time he was himself converted to the same beliefs.

Galatians 1:13-14

13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

We see from this that Paul (originally named Saul) had been a firm believer in the Jews’ religion, equating it with the “traditions of my fathers.” The way Paul phrases this we get the impression that the “Jew’s religion” was exactly that – the religion held by the Jews that was not necessarily centered on God, but on the traditions of the fathers. We know what that consisted of because Paul tells us:

Acts 26:4-5

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Therefore we know that the Pharisees were part of the “Jews’ religion” of which Paul spoke. We can include the Sadducees, however, because they attended the same court with the Pharisees during Paul’s trial that was attended by the high priest:

Acts 23:6-8

6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

They were in the same court with the same high priest, and though they had differences of opinion about certain doctrines, yet they were essentially different factions of the same religion.

Jesus evidently considered the “Jewish” religion as it was being practiced to be a deviation of that which had originally been set forth in the days of Moses, particularly due to the “traditions of the Jews” that differed from the actual law given to Moses. Those deviations were what in part necessitated a “Great Reset,” or what may be more accurately termed a “restoration,” of the true form of worship as it had originally been intended. Beyond that, however, the greater work of Jesus was to bring completion to the Law of Moses so that the new covenant might be brought into effect.

Mark 7:1-13

1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.

2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault.

3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

4 And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.

12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;

13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

Jesus clearly understood what the traditions of the Jews were and how they violated the intent, if not the letter of the law given to Moses. Those traditions were enforced as much or more stringently than the Law of Moses itself, very often superceding it. It was this religious fervor that Saul attempted to enforce before the time he was converted to the faith in Christ. When he was converted, his energies changed to align with the principles and doctrines that Jesus taught, and which he learned by the revelation of Jesus Christ to him.

Galatians 1:15-17

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, 16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

Jesus' claim to be the son of God was the central distinguishing factor that the proponents of the traditions of the Jews were unable to accept. While they looked forward to a Messiah that would deliver them from the rule of Rome, many could not accept that this Messiah would have the mission to save them from their sins. Instead, they were content to believe that their current form of worship was sufficient for their salvation, primarily because they believed that the law of Moses was their salvation, rather than the God that gave them the law.

There were some in the new world that struggled with the same concept, believing the Law of Moses to be the means for salvation, but to them also the true answer was given. This explanation is found in the Book of Mormon by the prophet Abinadi:

Mosiah 7:92-97

92 Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?

93 And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses.

94 But now Abinadi said unto them, I know if ye keep the commandments of God, ye shall be saved;

95 Yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses, in the mount of Sinai, saying, I am the Lord, thy God, who has brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

96 Thou shalt have no other god before me.

97 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath.

The salvation expected by many was a dim shadow of what God wanted to give his people. They looked forward to a temporal (physical) salvation of governments and national honor, not realizing the need for a spiritual salvation on an individual level. Even the apostles – Jesus' most devoted followers

– were not immune to this lack of understanding in the days following Christ’s resurrection from the dead:

Acts 1:6-9

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

The work of understanding Jesus’ role in the salvation of mankind was the biggest obstacle faced by the people of his day. It was ultimately the reason they gave for ordering his crucifixion, namely, that he claimed to be God, and as such they believed he sought the overthrow of the nation. While the one was true, the other was of much lesser concern to Jesus.

John 5:17-18

17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

The people in the days of Jesus found it hard to accept the idea that he was God. This notion was a contentious one, even though many of the people received him as a legitimate prophet. Numerous times, however, the leaders among the Jews attempted to kill Jesus for this very claim of deity. If the miracles Jesus performed were not sufficient evidence of themselves, his teachings exemplified that claim, and at times this irritated the Jews of his day as they debated with him.

John 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

This teased a reference to the conversation of God with Moses, which the Jews would have understood very well:

Exodus 3:13-14

13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

It stands to reason then that Jesus – “I am” – was the one that stood in the burning bush and introduced himself to Moses, and it was Jesus whom Moses conversed with when the Law of Moses was given:

John 1:1-14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.
 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.
 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
 14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The continuous definition that proceeds from this chapter in John includes the phrases “and the Word was God” along with, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” pointing to none other than Jesus Christ. This identity was an absolutely necessary component for the New Testament to reveal. It is supported in many places by the Book of Mormon:

Mosiah 8:28-37

28 And now, Abinadi said unto them, I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men and shall redeem his people;
 29 And because he dwelleth in flesh, he shall be called the Son of God;
 30 And having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son--the Father because he was conceived by the power of God, and the Son because of the flesh--thus becoming the Father and Son;
 31 And they are one God, yea, the very eternal Father of heaven and of earth.
 32 And thus the flesh, becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.
 33 And after all this, and after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.
 34 Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father;
 35 And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death, giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men,
 36 Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy, being filled with compassion toward the children of men,
 37 Standing betwixt them and justice, having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them and satisfied the demands of justice.

This description lays open the greater role of the Savior – the son of God – in bringing about the plan of salvation, which reinforces the dependency of the religion of Christ in Christ being who and what he is that is so distinctive from other religions. For additional witness to this understanding we find the following:

Alma 8:93-96

93 Now Zeezrom saith again unto him, Is the Son of God the very eternal Father?

94 And Amulek said unto him, Yea, he is the very eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are;

95 He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

96 And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else.

We can see from this larger view of Christ and his sacrifice that truly the Law of Moses was an educational tool only – one that demanded adherence until it was finished, but a tool nonetheless. This first law that was given through Moses was a law with a termination point in the crucifixion of Jesus, showing the true futility of the blood of animals and of diverse sacrifices where there was instead real spiritual power being exercised to bring about salvation. With the conclusion of the old covenant there was room for a new covenant focused on better principles, as explained in the letter to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 8:3-13

3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The old covenant was a stepping stone to the new covenant, serving as a training tool to prepare the people of Israel for the law that was originally envisioned for them, but which they had rejected while they were in the wilderness for 40 years.

Galatians 3:22-27

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Those that had eyes to see would have recognized the representations found in the law of Moses, knowing that animals, which have no capability for committing sin, can also not be capable of redeeming from sin. Jesus, however, by virtue of being in the flesh and of being human, having the capability of committing sin yet abstaining from it, was the only possible means for redeeming mankind from sin.

In that respect Jesus founded the law given through Moses, and would ultimately be the fulfillment of that law. More importantly, it was the religion that was established – the concept of a living, interactive God, a creator of unimaginable power, wisdom and glory, and who conveyed his desires for man to him, and who established commandments demanding purity and holiness – that had been intended to distinguish this people of Israel from all other nations, many of whom worshipped other gods that were an invention of man or of the devil. Though a law was given to Moses, the religion extended back to the time of at least Adam. If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, then surely the religion that he founded has also not changed. The laws concerning sacrifice served an illustrative, though necessary, role in the development of true worship.

What was written on the tables of stone by the finger of God and given to Moses was a starting point, because it was not the end point of how to worship God in a manner that brings honor and glory to him. Many times Jesus explained the need to “endure to the end” to the apostles, and this was not a mistake. The commandments of God are inviolate, but they are not everything. They are the foundation of true worship, but it is a foundation that must be built upon. Indeed, the apostle Paul referenced this idea as follows:

Ephesians 2:19-22

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The purpose of our lives is not to just obey commandments, but to have life. A life well-lived will obey the commandments, but life was not intended to be consumed by commandments, but to be supported by them, otherwise the temple cannot be holy.

As a religion, the Christian religion is the oldest of all religions. That may seem improbable considering the life and ministry of Jesus was “only” about two thousand years ago, yet Jesus’ own

claim is to have existed long before that time. If it was Jesus that spoke with Moses, it was surely the same Jesus that spoke with Abraham, and the same Jesus that spoke with Adam. Adam conversed with Jesus in the garden of Eden. And as John says, all things were created by him. Could Jesus have introduced a religion that included someone or something other than himself at its center?

Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Evidently the Lord could not condone worship of any other being. Nor would an unchangeable being consider changing the religion he gave to his people. Therefore, the Christian religion is the only one that God has ever given to man. The attributes and characteristics of God are not changeable; God could have never given any other concept of deity or worship to man.

Yet the Law of Moses given in the Old Testament differs in some particulars from what was given in the New Testament. Sacrifices requiring the death of animals is entirely eliminated from the New Covenant. The shedding of blood for sacrifice is forbidden. If the religion didn't change, then how can ordinances change?

The religion is the set of beliefs centering around a form of worship. The presence of guiding laws are given to help that worship to take form. Indeed, it is the belief in a need for sacrifice that establishes both the Old and New Covenants. It was this distinctiveness that the apostle Paul used to confirm for those believing Jews that the ordinances concerning sacrifice that had been established long before were, in fact, the representative foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ via the crucifixion. Jesus himself said that the prophets had looked forward to that great event:

John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

Acts 3:24-26

24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Matthew 13:17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

The singular focus of God committing himself to the salvation of man – his eternal life – is one of the most defining characteristics of the religion of Jesus. It is well summarized as this:

John 3:13-18

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Any religion that reports a different set of beliefs concerning the salvation of man or the deity of Jesus must necessarily be a different religion from that which Jesus confirmed among his disciples, but even this was foreshadowed, as the scripture says, by Moses when he “lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” It was always the intent of God to bring salvation to man by the means of the crucifixion, and in this brief hallmark moment Moses unveiled that plan to the people in a most dramatic fashion. Moses believed the same religion as the apostles and disciples in the New Testament.

But one may ask, why did Jesus wait until thousands of years after the creation to make the fulfillment of the crucifixion promise? Jesus, in his own way, may have described it in terms of wine.

Mark 2:22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

Jesus here explained his doctrine in terms of wine. That there were both old and new bottles of wine in his parable is not an accident. Wine generally is appreciated more when it has aged. And in many cases it is the older wine that is preferred because it has matured. Yet, by contrast, the first miracle Jesus performed at the wedding in Cana of Galilee was to turn the water into wine. Not only this, but those who tasted the wine Jesus made said it was better.

John 2:9-10

9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

In this case it was the new wine that was considered better than the first wine, which symbolically illustrates that the new doctrine of Christ is better than the old doctrine of Moses.

The existence of the old wine or doctrine, or as we may consider it now, the Old Testament Law of Moses, is not to be dismissed. Jesus did not say the old wine was without value, only that the new and the old wines, or doctrines, cannot be mixed, or certain disaster would result.

Isaiah once wrote that this was a process of graduation of sorts, with new detail being provided as it is learned and understood.

Isaiah 28:9-13

9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:
11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.
12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear.
13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

It was apparent from the time Moses returned from Mount Horeb (Sinai) with the two tables of stone written by the finger of God that the people were not ready for the better, more superior law. They had corrupted themselves after Moses' absence of just 40 days.

It would seem apparent that the people could not have appreciated the sacrifice of Jesus until they worked through a more physical, carnal (that is to say, bloody) set of ordinances. As Isaiah wrote, the Lord gave them precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. The physical representation of Jesus' sacrifice became more personal when the people had to take the very best of their livestock to make sacrifices. Had Jesus been crucified in Moses' day and had given them the ordinances familiar to those found in the New Testament without first providing for those familiar animal sacrifices we read about in the Old Testament, the people would have neither accepted them nor understood them. The people had to go through a training process so that they might better understand what was required of them and of what God would do for them. Hence, the Law of Moses was given.

Galatians 3:24-25

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The Law of Moses functioned as a teaching tool, yet the sacrifice of Jesus was not intended only for those that lived during or after Jesus' ministry. The Book of Mormon explains it this way:

Alma 19:24-27

24 And now, I will ease your mind somewhat on this subject. Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand.
25 Behold, I say unto you, Is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?
26 Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people, as well as unto their children?
27 Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us, as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming?

If the plan of redemption, or salvation, was necessary to have been taught to the people prior to the time of Jesus' birth and ministry, it must have been able to take effect for them as well as those who came during and after Jesus' birth and ministry, otherwise God would be a respecter of persons. This can be seen from the fact that at the time Jesus was resurrected from the dead, there were others after him, who undoubtedly had died before him, that were also resurrected.

Matthew 27:52-53

52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

The evidence Matthew gives shows that the plan of redemption was not just a matter of the law of Christ taking effect for those who came after the time of Christ, but to those that came before him as well. It shows that the power of Christ's resurrection is capable of applying to people from any time frame. Indeed, the power of both the crucifixion and the resurrection in securing the validity of the plan of salvation could only have been performed by a being with infinite power and that has eternity to guarantee it. As explained in the Book of Mormon, the significance of who performed this sacrifice cannot be diminished or overstated:

Alma 16:207-217

207 Behold, I say unto you that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God has spoken it.

208 For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the eternal God, there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish;

209 Yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen, and are lost, and must perish, except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made;

210 For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice – yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

211 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood, which will atone for the sins of another.

212 Now if a man murdereth, behold, will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay.

213 But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore, there can be nothing, which is short of an infinite atonement, which will suffice for the sins of the world; therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice;

214 And then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall all be fulfilled, every jot and tittle; and none shall have passed away.

215 And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law – every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal; and thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name;

216 This being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice and bringeth about means unto men, that they may have faith unto repentance.

217 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore, only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

In fulfilling the law concerning sacrifice, Jesus opened a new chapter which reveals the true intent of the law of Moses while more firmly establishing how God wants man to worship him. This is revealed in its plainness in the Book of Mormon, which shows what God could have given Israel in the wilderness had they not rebelled:

3 Nephi 4:44-51

44 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I created the heavens, and the earth, and all things that in them are.

45 I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name.

46 I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled.

47 And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.

48 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

49 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings; and ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

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

51 Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin; therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive; for of such is the kingdom of God.

These are the foundational principles of the religion that Jesus Christ gave to Adam and the whole family of mankind, but they would not receive it in Moses' day. After the crucifixion it was codified into the law of the New Covenant.

3 Nephi 7:3-10

3 And it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words, he perceived that there were some among them who marveled and wondered what he would concerning the law of Moses; for they understood not the saying that old things had passed away and that all things had become new.

4 And he said unto them, Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away and that all things had become new.

5 Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses.

6 Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore, it hath an end.

7 Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily, I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled.

8 And because I said unto you that old things hath passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come.

9 For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.

10 Behold, I am the law and the light; look unto me and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.

As these are the principles of the religion of Jesus Christ, any deviations from these principles must therefore reference another religion and another Christ which is not Jesus.

IV. The Church of Jesus Christ

B. The founder of the church – Jesus Christ.

The previous section (A.) described the religious origin of Christianity, but here our focus changes to the foundation of the Church that Jesus Christ established. As there may be denominational differences from one organization to another, yet the same religious principles, these differences may be used to identify the Church that Christ built versus the churches built by others. Among modern churches there are Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Adventists, Assemblies of God, or any host of other named groups that profess many if not all of the same religious principles detailed earlier in (A.), yet possessing very different distinctions in the details of worship, recognition of authority, and other doctrines and ordinances.

The Church of Jesus Christ is specifically identified separately from other churches by the unique practices, ordinances and doctrines that Jesus firmly linked to his church. Among them is this statement by Jesus:

Matthew 16:13-19

13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Some organizations have taken the view that Jesus established Peter as the rock upon which the church would be built, yet this would have violated the entire Old Testament series of teachings in which God is revealed to be a jealous God that will not give his glory to another, much less to Peter, who mere verses later Jesus had to rebuke, and a man who, during Jesus' crucifixion trial denied knowing Jesus three times.

It is the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, upon which Jesus was to build his church. The very act of revealing who Jesus is demonstrates that God is interactive with his creation, and the fact that Peter could see this was due in no part to his own scholarly education (i.e., he was a fisherman), but to the action of the Spirit of God. There are numerous references to this rock in both New and Old Testament scripture:

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

Psalms 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Psalms 62:1-2

1 (To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David.) Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.

2 He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.

Psalms 62:5-7

5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

7 In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

Psalms 89:26 He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

If the religion is the set of beliefs that define a people, the church is the foundation upon which they are established as an organized body set to fulfill a purpose.

3 Nephi 10:1-2

1 But if they will repent, and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them; and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this, the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance; and they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob;

2 And also, as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem;

Other churches may have other purposes, and yet have many of the same beliefs under the same religious umbrella, but only one church can satisfy the purpose that Jesus has established for his own church.

We gain further understanding of the identity and function of the church from one of the parables Jesus provided:

Matthew 22:1-14

1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.
10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.
11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:
12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.
13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

The parable of the wedding in Matthew 22 is described using five principal terms of interest here: the king, the bridegroom, the bride, the guests, and the kingdom of heaven. The king is established to refer to the Father (God), the bridegroom as Christ, the bride as the church, and the guests as being those that have entered into the covenant. Those that have not entered into the covenant are those that are cast out because they are not wearing the wedding garment – baptism. The kingdom of heaven is identified as the assemblage of these different personas that have been made to qualify for fellowship in the wedding party.

The king in this parable had sent his servants out to invite as many as possible to the wedding, but the condition of wearing the wedding garment stands out in a particular way. To this we can reference what many call the Great Commission, (though it is never stated as such), when Jesus commanded the apostles to do the following:

Mark 16:15-16

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.
16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

It is not difficult to to understand from this that the wedding garment is belief and baptism

The storyline of the parable as being related to a wedding is not a convenient accident, but rather a foretelling of future events. It may seem quite the jump in understanding that the bride represents the church, but it is no different than the understanding Paul gives us.

Ephesians 5:22-32

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.
23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.
24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.
25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.
29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The institution of marriage is first recorded between Adam and Eve while they were yet in the garden, and the correspondence between the roles of husbands and wives in marriage as a parable of Christ and the Church extends back to that time in a preparation for knowing what Christ was to do in the fulfillment of time. The apostle John wrote in similar terms in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

From time to time throughout history this motif resurfaces as a reminder of what lays in store.

Isaiah 54:1-7

1 Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.

2 Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes;

3 For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

4 Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

5 For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.

Knowing that the wife in the parable represents the Church, what other importance do the scriptures place upon on this institution (the church)? What conditions, boundaries, laws and even ordinances constitute the Church of Christ as compared to any other church? It was Jesus who said that “upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). If we understand what the rock is, then what is the Church that should be built up?

The apostle Peter makes some interesting observations.

1 Peter 2:1-10

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.
7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,
8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.
9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:
10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Peter describes the Church in the form of a spiritual house, which places a definite impression of the Church as a spiritual place for people consisting of a spiritual people. This seems congruent with Paul's writings concerning the Church:

Ephesians 2:19-22

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;
21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

If Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the Church – this “holy temple in the Lord” – it must adhere to the standards and conditions that Christ sets for it. Any church not having Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone must not be Christ's Church. This ideal is reinforced in the Book of Mormon:

3 Nephi 12:19-24 (Jesus speaking to the people)

19 Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore, ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name, that he will bless the church for my sake. And how be it my church, save it be called in my name?
20 For if a church be called in Moses' name, then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man, then it be the church of a man. But if it be called in my name, then it is my church – if it so be that they are built upon my gospel.
21 Verily, I say unto you that ye are built upon my gospel; therefore, ye shall call whatsoever things ye do call in my name; therefore, if ye call upon the Father for the church, if it be in my name, the Father will hear you;
22 And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel, then will the Father show forth his own works in it.
23 But if it be not built upon my gospel, and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily, I say unto you, They have joy in their works for a season; and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return;
24 For their works do follow them, for it is because of their works that they are hewn down; therefore, remember the things that I have told you.

The “standards and conditions” mentioned above consist of the Gospel of Christ as specified in verse 22. It only stands to reason that the Gospel of Christ is this set of conditions.

Previously it was stated that there are numerous churches that have names such as Catholic, Baptist, etc. While true that many of them source their religious concepts in biblical narrative, there are likewise many religious concepts upheld by these churches that are not sourced from scriptural texts. Does that allow them to be called the Church of Jesus Christ?

The Book of Mormon makes use of very explicit definitions for use of the term “church,” which harmonize with Biblical scriptures. In particular, the prophet Nephi was given a vision to see events unfolding in latter-day times. To wit, he saw just two churches:

1 Nephi 3:210-237

210 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, Nephi, saying, Thou hast beheld that if the Gentiles repent, it shall be well with them;

211 And thou also knowest concerning the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel;

212 And thou also hast heard that whoso repenteth not must perish;

213 Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God;

214 For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men:

215 A work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other--

216 Either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds, unto their being brought down into captivity and also unto destruction, both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil, of which I have spoken.

217 And it came to pass that when the angel had spoken these words, he said unto me, Remember thou the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel?

218 I said unto him, Yea.

219 And it came to pass that he said unto me, Look and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil.

220 And he said unto me, Behold, there are save two churches only:

221 The one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil;

222 Wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations;

223 And she is the whore of all the earth.

224 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters;

225 And she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

226 And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters;

227 Nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth;

228 And their dominions upon the face of the earth were small because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.

229 And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together in multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God.

230 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth;

231 And they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.

232 And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon the great and abominable church, insomuch that there were wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth;

233 And as there began to be wars and rumors of wars among all the nations which belonged to the mother of abominations, the angel spake unto me, saying,

234 Behold, the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots;

235 And behold, thou seest all these things;

236 And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great and abominable church of all the earth, whose foundation is the devil,

237 Then at that day, the work of the Father shall commence in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants which he hath made to his people, who are of the house of Israel.

This is suggestive that there is a need to recognize the distinguishable differences between Christ's Church and the Great and Abominable Church, which differences will become undeniable and clear.

Among the identifying characteristics of the great and abominable church described by Nephi, it allows, permits, or promotes the following:

- No need to repent – repentance is a doctrine of Christ
- War against the church of the Lamb of God, or in other words, the church of Jesus Christ – persecute humble believers in Christ
- Rule over others – seeking positions of power to have control over others

The great and abominable church is also identified variously as the mother of abominations and as the mother of harlots. This second term “harlots” in the plural sense implies a collection of harlots as opposed to just one. Thus the great and abominable church would be the mother of other churches that fall under its representative umbrella. Thus the church of Jesus Christ would be one, while the other would be a collective church.

It is the founder of the church, however, that makes the most distinguishing characteristic. The founder of the great and abominable church is the devil. That agrees with John in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 17:3-18

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

9 And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.

10 And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.

13 These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

This is the same that Nephi described, but John provides additional detail about the actions of this woman and of the beast.

John records that this great and abominable church – the mother of harlots – reigns over seven kings of the earth, giving indication that at the time of the events five of those kings have already perished, and makes war with the Lamb (Christ) and his followers that are “called, and chosen, and faithful.”

The outcome of this war is that Christ overcomes the beast and his followers, including the great and abominable church. When that will happen is not for us to know beforehand, but for us to recognize when it happens.

When the choice between doing what the great and abominable church does, and doing what the church of Jesus Christ does, it will be a qualitative difference in doctrine and belief; a belief that cannot be mistaken. The teachings of Jesus Christ will be the principles of the Church of Jesus Christ, and the teachings of the devil will be the principles (lies) of the great and abominable church.

Jesus faced similar opposition among the people during his ministry in Jerusalem:

John 8:39-44

39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Thus a church with the devil as a foundation is based on lies and murder, while the church that Christ builds has Jesus as a the chief cornerstone, and that foundation includes his doctrines and teachings.

The church of Jesus Christ is intended to be presented as as spotless bride adorned for the wedding. This is in stark contrast to the mother of harlots, “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls,” (Revelation 17:5). This is a qualitative difference not to be missed – as Jesus commanded the following for his church:

3 Nephi 12:25-35 (Jesus speaking)

25 Behold, I have given unto you my gospel; and this is the gospel which I have given unto you, that I came into the world to do the will of my Father because my Father sent me;

26 And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, I might draw all men unto me;

27 That as I have been lifted up by men, even so should men be lifted up by the Father to stand before me to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

28 And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father, I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

29 And it shall come to pass that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

30 And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence he can no more return because of the justice of the Father; and this is the word which he hath given unto the children of men.

31 And for this cause he fulfilleth the words which he hath given, and he lieth not but fulfilleth all his words; and no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom;

32 Therefore, nothing entereth into his rest, save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

33 Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

34 Verily, verily, I say unto you, This is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do, that shall ye also do;

35 For that which ye have seen me do, even that shall ye do; therefore, if ye do these things, blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

The standard which Christ has set for those in his church is perfection. Though we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, it is the pursuit of perfection through Jesus Christ that makes the difference between those that are faithful and those that are corrupt.

Matthew 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

The church of Jesus Christ is an appeal to people from all kindreds, tongues and nations to seek out and be perfected through the power of the Holy Ghost for the glory of God so that all who love God may stand before him spotless as snow through the redemptive cleansing of the blood of Christ.

Moroni 10:27-31

27 And again, I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift nor the unclean thing.

28 And awake and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion, and strengthen thy stakes, and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

29 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in no wise deny the power of God.

30 And again, if ye, by the grace of God, are perfect in Christ and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father, unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy without spot.

31 And now, I bid unto all, Farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God until my spirit and body shall again reunite and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen.

IV. The Church of Jesus Christ

C. The ordinances of the church – established by Jesus Christ.

In modern times there are many who dismiss the idea of ordinances because of the view that we live in more enlightened times and do not need to hold on to superstitions or archaic practices. This view assumes that performing ordinances is part of a mysticism designed to keep adherents under the control of a ruling class of priests. Yet the same “enlightened” people may still claim belief in God and of salvation through Jesus Christ. The flaw arrives in the view that belief is sufficient for salvation, whereas Jesus proclaimed very different conditions for salvation.

Modern religious views seem to take a buffet approach to ordinances and indeed to the church itself – which is to say, take your pick and use what you want, but you don’t need everything. If that were the intent of Jesus in establishing the order of his church there is no doubt that he would have made some statement to that effect. But he didn’t.

We may survey the various ordinances that Jesus himself conducted, and what his apostles and ordained disciples performed, and by doing so learn what he considered important for the salvation of man.

Blessing of children

Matthew 19:13-15

13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

(This is not to be confused with baptism. Jesus blessed the children so that they might receive the blessings of God through their lives. Baptism would be necessary when they grew to the age of accountability.)

Baptism by water

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

John 3:26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

Acts 8:36-38

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Baptism by the Holy Ghost and Fire

John 3:11-14

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Acts 8:14-17

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

The laying on of hands for healing

Mark 6:5 And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

Luke 4:40 Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.

The laying on of hands for ordination to the priesthood

Mark 3:14-15

14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,

15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

John 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

2 Timothy 1:6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

Moroni 2:1-3

1 The words of Christ which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them:

2 And he called them by name, saying, Ye shall call on the Father in my name in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this, ye shall have power that on him whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles.

3 Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands fell the Holy Ghost.

Moroni 3:1-3

1 The manner which the disciples, who were called the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers:

2 After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them and said, In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest (or if he be a teacher, I ordain you to be a teacher) to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

3 And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost which was in them.

The Lord's Supper

Mark 14:22-25

22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Luke 22:19-20

19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Moroni 4:1-4

1 The manner of their elders and priests administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church:

2 And they administered it according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore, we know the manner to be true; and the elder or priest did minister it;

3 And they did kneel down with the church and pray to the Father in the name of Christ, saying,
4 O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son and witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Moroni 5:1-3

1 The manner of administering the wine:

2 Behold, they took the cup and said,

3 O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son which was shed for them, that they may witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Laying on of hands for bestowing spiritual blessings

Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

Alma 16:112-117 (Prior to Jesus' birth, life and ministry in Jerusalem, disciples in the New World had the same practices as the disciples during and after Jesus' ministry.)

112 O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me, yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek, and Zeezrom, and also my two sons? Yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord? Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ?

113 Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people?

114 O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ?

115 Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our near brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom, that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

116 Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him.

117 And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

118 And after that, they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves, what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

119 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ.

120 Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

All of these ordinances were performed by Jesus at some time during his ministry. Not only this, but he commanded the apostles and disciples to do these same works as part of their ministry.

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

3 Nephi 12:34-35

34 Verily, verily, I say unto you, This is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do, that shall ye also do;
35 For that which ye have seen me do, even that shall ye do; therefore, if ye do these things, blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Each of the ordinances deserves attention, some of which have been addressed in previous sections, but it is sufficient for the sake of discussion that Jesus did not do anything that was not important, especially when it deals with the welfare and benefit of his people.

The ordinances consisted of orders given by Christ for his priesthood to perform, having designated individuals as representatives of Christ to express his authority and power in the work of the ministry. One example of why this is necessary is given by Jesus in his parable from John 10:

John 10:1-14

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.
2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.
4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.
5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.
6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.
7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.
8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.
9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.
10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.
11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.
13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.
14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

While this parable has a deeper meaning than just to identify designated authorities, it illustrates that God has established only one means for performing his work. Those who believe they can invent their own salvation or bypass the ordinances will not recognize the true Shepherd of the sheep, and their efforts will be seen by God as the work of thieves and robbers. One cannot steal his or her way into eternal life by some other means than to enter through the door.

V. Parting thoughts

A. Life

When God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1) it was for an intent or purpose that was entirely his own. Of all the creation he made man in his own image, and all we can presume to know is that he did it for the pure pleasure of doing it. He is a creator, and as a creator he creates.

We do not presume to believe that this was an experiment, or that we are a failed experiment that had to be fixed. All things that God did from the beginning were according to a plan that he alone was privy to at the time of its implementation. He takes joy in doing what he does. He knew that Satan would fall, he knew that Eve would be tempted and that Adam would follow in kind. He knew that the eternal life he desired for man would come at the cost of much suffering on his own part, but he did it anyway because he wanted to be worshipped, or that is to say, he wanted to be chosen as the object of worship, by the free will of those whom he created, and that choosing came at the cost of allowing them the opportunity to not choose him.

The salvation of man is a long-term plan, set in place even before the dust could be brushed off of Adam's skin at the time of his creation. The outcome of that plan is as inexorable and sure as the creation itself. Though all other things can fail, the word of the Lord endureth forever.

Contrary to the musings of dictators and kings, life is not cheap, nor is it for sale. Life is the sole and proprietary property and workmanship of God, patent pending, and trademarked. Far be it from us to contend against that seal of the manufacturer.

Psalms 24:1 The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

To that supreme being who can view all of his creation with his all-searching eye, that the very elements comprising the physical world can cry out to worship, and who had hosts of angels in his company for untold eons before this heaven and this earth were created, the conflicts of man must seem such a small thing. And yet, it has not escaped his attention, for that all-seeing eye sees all things indeed, and not a hair of our heads falls without his notice. He made a resurrection so perfect that no hair can fall again, that no mote of dust could mar, and that will last for another eternity, and all this so that he might finish the work of creation that he started. That work was the creation of a man that would worship him willingly and without reservation for all eternity.

The precision of the creation is still beyond our comprehension. The warranty from our manufacturer is without a time limit, as long as we abide by the terms of the warranty.

Life really is such an interesting thing when you think about it. How do you define it? How can you measure it? How can you know it when you see it? Is a rock capable of life? What makes Carbon, or Hydrogen, or Iron do something that makes it living? Perhaps life was never in the elements, but the spirit put into them.

Men make machines that do animated things, but we would not consider them to be alive in the sense of life. Men cannot create a spirit. No fluid or gas has yet been identified as the materials that a spirit consists of. When children are born, they are not the invention of their father or mother, even if they

are the means by which they enter into this world. James called God the “Father of spirits” and he probably was more right than we ever realized. Ships that travel in the ocean do not invent the ocean.

We are surrounded with life in its myriad forms – from the smallest microbes to the largest blue whale – and yet these all have something we cannot make with our hands or build with the most precise laboratory equipment. The recipe for creating life contains a set of ingredients and processes for which we are not equipped to possess or to carry out.

Creating life is something that seems reserved to the ability of only one being: God. No angel or devil has this ability any more than we do, even though they may have knowledge that far exceeds our own.

If we are unable to create life, do we really have the ability to sustain it? Any living thing in the plant, animal or other kingdoms must consume physical materials for the biological processes to progress, but by extension does the spirit need to consume spiritual materials for the spiritual life processes to progress?

There is a different kind of economy if you will; a different kind of feeding process and a different kind of digestive process when we think upon how to feed our spirit. The physical bodies we have will perish, but our spirit must remain because there is a resurrection into which that spirit must return.

This should not surprise us though. Words and spirit are two terms that seem tied to each other since the beginning:

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

John 6:68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Hebrews 11:3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

For our bodies there is healthy food, there is junk food, and there is poison. For our spiritual selves we should expect nothing less. When people speak with vile words, they project a poison for others to consume, and if they delight in hearing it they consume that same poison. Likewise if they speak rudely or without concern, they give away junk food to their hearers, and those who enjoy it consume it. But when people speak words of the faith of God, and of love for him and their fellow man, those that hear it can begin to taste something of that wonderful spiritual food that God has prepared for them, and those who feast upon it will gain strength to their spirit.

It is an economy of spiritual food, and there are banquet tables of all kinds of it, but only those that desire good can taste of the goodness that God has for them.

Imagine if you will a buffet table filled with all kinds of wonderful foods, but over half of the buffet was shuttered so that you could not get to everything. Would you not be upset? But that is how many see the scriptures – many will see only half of the buffet because they have closed the shutters to the Book of Mormon, and will only use the Bible, so they can never taste of the goodness within the Book

of Mormon. Instead, they have restricted themselves to a diet that only allows them to taste some of the love of God.

And the buffet table of spiritual food is not limited to these two books of scripture. God provides the increase where increase is needed, and he knows what his people need. He will not, however, throw food into your mouth. You must reach out for it.

So, too, in our spiritual life we limit our life to what we can imagine without asking what more we can live. Openness to God is not emptiness of mind. He will not force you to open the book, and he will not force you to be good. But he will force you to choose, because that is one thing he cannot do for you.

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Romans 14:17). If the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, then its inhabitants must be likewise be so conditioned by the life given them by the Holy Ghost to be comfortable with the conditions of that kingdom.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

This was no mere idle way of signing off. Paul really meant these things to be forefront in their pursuits so that they might not be injured by the poisons of the wrong buffet table.

We are surrounded with all kinds of life, whether of the physical kind or the spiritual kind. Life defies the odds that may be placed against it. We see this in the bacteria embedded in volcanic rock. We see it in the coldest depths of the Antarctic. We see it in the air and in the earth and under the earth and in the oceans and under the oceans. God created so much life that we are bombarded by it with our senses and with our minds.

Spiritually we are bombarded with life, and likewise there are good and bad spirits just as there are good bacteria and bad bacteria. But always we have choice. It is in our programming, to borrow a term from computer science. We get to choose whom we will follow, and that choice will determine who our father truly is.

Romans 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

John 8:42-47

42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

46 Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

47 He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

Whom will you hear?

V. Parting thoughts

B. The Call

For years following Christ's ascension to heaven, his disciples suffered privations of every kind, including punishment to death. This was a strange group of people indeed, who took delight in persecutions and praised God in the act of being killed by lions or by sword or by any number of barbaric means. They had attuned themselves to a hope fueled by faith that what they suffered was to become glory heaped upon them in the life to come.

This happened over the course of centuries, and in some areas it has returned to be sport for those that believe they are getting the victory by killing those that would have hope in Christ. It is surely a short-sighted view.

The evangelist Stephen, when faced with his own mortality, looked up to heaven and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. It is not without some comparison to how we face the days before us. We must look to heaven for help, and remember with compassion those around us even as they seek our destruction. Like Stephen's executioners, they know not what they are doing.

What matters to God is not whether we have wealth in the form of gold or silver, or large tracts of land, or of large homes or other precious things. These are all the creation of God himself anyway, so to what end would God feel compelled for us to enjoy all of these things when the plan is for them to be melted with a fervent heat?

2 Peter 3:10-14

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

Instead, God calls out to us for something better. He calls us to him so that we might enjoy the fullness of the love he has for us, and that is something for us to consider when we realize that he is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present. An infinite and eternal loving God wants us to share in his love for us.

How can we recognize that call? It is in the beautiful sunrise or sunset, the grand array of the stars in the sky, the stately motions of the moon and planets through our skies, and the peaceful waterfall that showers us with mist. We see it in the kindness people can share with one another, or in the happy gatherings of family or friends.

Do we see other things also that are not so pleasant? Of course. What we choose to focus on is the food we feed ourselves. Some of the greatest poetry of the scriptures was given at the hardest times in the lives of the writers, but it was not because they loved terror and death and violence. The greatest works they produced were because they still knew through it all that God was watching over their souls and loved them with an everlasting love.

God calls us to him because he wants us to be instruments for helping others. Should people see light flash from horizon to horizon with a message, they would be interested for a few minutes, but then the interest would fade; but someone who can give them hope will be remembered for a lifetime.

God calls us to him for his own names' sake. The Son of God was invested with the experience of human life as well as that of deity because people need someone that can bridge the gap between the life of man and the life of God so that all justice might be fair: Jesus Christ is that bridge.

God calls us to him because he will be bringing a city with him at the conclusion of time, and that will be a city of righteousness, a New Jerusalem laid up in store for the next eternity to begin.

God calls us to him because he has so much to give us that we cannot even conceive of its glorious splendor.

The hope of the resurrection and the promise of eternal life were worthy enough for the apostles and other disciples to gladly give their lives in the hopes their testimony would bring many to the knowledge of God. This call to righteousness heralds a new urgency because the days are always growing closer when we must stand before God to give an account of ourselves.

As Israel stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, they set up borders around the mountain to prevent the people from going to the top where they would see God. It would have destroyed them entirely. Today we stand at the foot of Mount Zion, and the border has just one gate that can be opened to admit one person at a time, whereupon people may begin this spiritual and living journey. Jesus will walk along that path with you to guide you along the way. The mountain exists in front of you wherever you may be, but it is just a narrow gate and there is no other way.

If I may indulge another personal testimony:

I had a dream once in which I was standing in what appeared to be a campground, with rows of cabins and a porchlight next to each cabin. It was night-time in the campground and all was peaceful and quiet. Surrounding the campground was a thick forest. What seemed to be a few miles distant was an enormous mountain many thousands of feet tall that dominated the horizon, so tall that the Sun had not yet set at the top of it.

I found myself being lifted up through the air and being brought closer to this mountain. Eventually I was brought to a dirt road that circled and climbed around the mountain some distance from the peak, but still in the light of the setting Sun. I was able to stand and look over the side of the mountain, and saw an unbroken forest from horizon to horizon, and the Sun was only just barely above the horizon. The day was almost over.

As I looked around at this scene I didn't understand why I was being shown this, but it was vivid and real enough that I could jump and land back on my feet, I could pinch myself and it hurt. Not knowing what to think, I walked over near the edge where I had an unrestricted view of the base of the mountain, and as I looked down at the base of the mountain I could see my name written in cursive in beautiful red handwriting along the tops of the trees.

After seeing this the dream ended, and I pondered that for some time. I came to the realization that the top of the mountain was what I should attain to in spiritual life, but that I was still just in the tops of the trees, not even having scaled the slopes of the mountain. It was a message that I should remember to be humble, and that I had a lot of growth to do before I could enjoy the full light of the Sun.

In olden times when Israel stood at the base of the Mount, and they heard the trumpet sound longer and louder, they knew that God had descended upon the mount, for it burned with fire and was covered with smoke. The trumpet call for us is the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ. It will sound longer and louder and the earth will tremble. It has the power to change men and transform them into something better, something Jesus can smile upon and say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

The most pertinent and burning question for you is this: will you hear the call of God, and will you prepare to climb that spiritual mountain, feasting upon the word of God and beginning the first steps towards salvation so that you may enjoy the fellowship of the saints in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?