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The Testimony of Christ Through the Ages

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The Testimony of Christ Through the Ages

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Joseph Fielding McConkie

*I*f all that Joseph Smith had been allowed to translate from the gold plates was what we know as Jacob chapter 4—that is, if the Book of Mormon consisted only of that single chapter—that chapter alone would be sufficient to justify the mission and ministry of Joseph Smith. Jacob 4 speaks of a universal apostasy, identifies the heart of doctrinal corruption, and bears a perfect testimony of Jesus Christ. It also includes the following significant doctrinal pronouncements:

1. The announcement that the doctrine of redemption through Christ reaches back to the days of Adam, and that all true prophets knew and testified of the Savior. (This announcement defies the theological traditions of both the Christian and Jewish worlds.)

2. The announcement that not only did all the holy prophets teach and testify that Christ is the begotten Son of God, but they also worshiped the Father in his name. (Again this denies both Jewish and Christian traditions. It also plays havoc with the doctrine of the trinity.)

3. The announcement that the law of Moses was a symbolic representation and testimony of Christ, just as was Abraham's offering of Isaac. (By so teaching Jacob establishes the fact that an apostasy had taken place among the Jews.)

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4. A warning to religious zealots and theologians to not look beyond the mark, and thereby repeat the error of the Jews.

5. The assurance of a future day when the Jews will be brought back to the sure foundation of that Christ known to their fathers.

Let us briefly consider the biblical and other scriptural support, as well as the theological implications, of each of these pronouncements.

The Testimony of Christ: The Central Issue in All Gospel Dispensations

The central issue of all gospel dispensations has been the divine sonship of Christ. In a real sense, the very first dispensation took place in the councils of heaven when God taught the gospel to all his spirit children even before the foundations of the earth were laid. The great issue of our pre-earth estate was the choice of our eldest brother to be the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. As every Latter-day Saint knows, Lucifer, a son of the morning, sought that honor for himself. When the Father chose the Firstborn, Lucifer rebelled and there was war in heaven. A third part of the hosts of heaven followed the Rebellious One and were cast out. Though the place of battle has now shifted from the heavens to the earth, the war with its central issue remains the same.

“Ye heard before the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you,” Paul said in his epistle to the Colossians Saints (Col 1:4-6). That is to say, your faith which centers in Christ was first made known to you in heavenly places. The Joseph Smith Translation adds the phrase, “as in all generations of the world,” indicating that what is true of the Colossians is true of the Saints of all gospel dispensations.

The revelation on the degrees of glory (D&C 76) is a primary source for that knowledge in our dispensation. In that revelation, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were shown “those

things which were from the beginning before the world was, which were ordained of the Father, through his Only Begotten Son” (D&C 76:12-14). In another revelation the Savior reaffirmed this doctrine by asking Joseph Smith: “Will I appoint unto you . . . except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?” (D&C 132:11).

From the book of Moses we learn that an angel of the Lord instructed father Adam on the role of Christ as the divine son, saying: “Thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore. And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will” (Moses 5:8-9).

The fulness of the gospel was also taught to Adam’s children though many would not listen. The scriptures tell us

they would not “hearken unto [God’s] voice, nor believe on his Only Begotten Son, even him whom he declared should come in the meridian of time, who was prepared from before the foundation of the world. And thus the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world, until the end thereof; and thus it was. Amen (Moses 5:57-59).

Enoch also understood the doctrine of divine sonship. The Lord commanded Enoch that he “should baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, which is full of grace and truth, and of the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of the Father and the Son” (Moses 7:11). In response to Enoch’s question, “When shall the blood of the Righteous be shed, that all they that mourn may be sanctified and have eternal life?” The Lord said, “It shall be in the meridian of time, in the days of wickedness and vengeance.” Enoch was permitted to see “the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation

of the world; and through faith I am in the bosom of the Father, and behold, Zion is with me” (Moses 7:45-47).

Noah also went forth teaching repentance and baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” even as his fathers had done (Moses 8:24). “And the Lord ordained Noah after his own order, and commanded him that he should go forth and declare his Gospel unto the children of men, even as it was given unto Enoch” (Moses 8:19).

Of Abraham we are told that the Lord appeared to him and called him “to bear his name in a strange land,” a land which would be granted to him and his seed after him as an everlasting possession if they would hearken to the Lord’s voice. Indeed, Abraham’s seed were to bear the priesthood and carry the gospel of Christ to all other peoples (see Abr 2:6-11).

And Abram said, Lord God, how wilt thou give me this land for an everlasting inheritance? And the Lord said, Though thou wast dead, yet am I not able to give it thee? And if thou shalt die, yet thou shalt possess it, for the day cometh, that the Son of Man shall live; but how can he live if he be not dead? He must first be quickened. And it came to pass, that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest, and he believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted it unto him for righteousness (JST Gen 15:9-12).

The first chapter of the book of Moses identifies the doctrine of divine sonship as the central issue in Moses’ day also. It will be recalled that when the Prince of Darkness came to Moses declaring, “I am the Only Begotten, worship me,” it was “in the name of the Only Begotten” that Moses commanded him to depart (Moses 1:12-23).

The doctrine of divine sonship was introduced in the meridian dispensation with Gabriel’s testimony to Mary that she would bear “the Son of the Highest,” and that the Lord God would give “unto him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32). Thus Christ declared himself to be “the Son of God” (John 10:36), and the Father himself testified saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17).

We find the following dialogue in the Joseph Smith Translation: “And [the Pharisees] said unto him, We have the law, and

the prophets; but as for this man we will not receive him to be our ruler; for he maketh himself to be a judge over us. Then said Jesus unto them, The law and the prophets testify of me; yea, and all the prophets who have written, even until John, have foretold of these days” (JST Luke 16:16-17). Again in the book of John we read of Christ saying, “I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them” (10:7-8). The Joseph Smith Translation corrects the text to read, “All that ever came before me *who testified not of me* are thieves and robbers” (JST John 10:8; emphasis added). In harmony with this teaching, Peter declared that all the holy prophets since the world began had promised that the Messiah would rule and reign during the glorious day of refreshing we call the Millennium (Acts 3:21).

Now, if we accept Peter’s testimony of Christ and his statement that there is “none other name under heaven given among men . . . whereby” salvation can be obtained (Acts 4:12), we are locked into the conclusion that reliable references to someone’s having the gospel can only be interpreted as their having the gospel of Jesus Christ. To suppose that there was an Old Testament gospel and a New Testament gospel, that is, a brutish low-level gospel that was supplanted by a refined high-brow gospel, is to suggest that the atonement of Christ is not infinite or eternal, or for that matter, even necessary if one prefers the old way. Joseph Smith reasoned thus:

It will be noticed that, according to Paul, (see Gal. iii:8) the Gospel was preached to Abraham. We would like to be informed in what name the Gospel was then preached, whether it was in the name of Christ or some other name. If in any other name, was it the Gospel? And if it was the Gospel, and that preached in the name of Christ, had it any ordinances? If not, was it the Gospel? And if it had ordinances what were they? Our friends [in the sectarian world] may say, perhaps, that there were never any ordinances except those of offering sacrifices before the coming of Christ, and that it could not be possible before the Gospel to have been administered while the law of sacrifices of blood was in force. But we will recollect that Abraham offered sacrifice, and notwithstanding this, had the Gospel preached to him. That the offering of sacrifice was only to point the mind forward to Christ, we infer from these remarkable words of Jesus to the Jews: “Your Father Abraham

rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John viii:56). So, then, because the ancients offered sacrifice it did not hinder their hearing the Gospel; but served, as we said before, to open their eyes, and enable them to look forward to the time of the coming of the Savior, and rejoice in His redemption. We find also, that when the Israelites came out of Egypt they had the Gospel preached to them, according to Paul in his letter to the Hebrews, which says: “For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (see Heb. iv:2). It is said again, in Gal. iii:19, that the law (of Moses, or the Levitical law) was “added” because of transgression. What, we ask, was this law added to, if it was not added to the Gospel? It must be plain that it was added to the Gospel, since we learn that they had the Gospel preached to them. From these few facts, we conclude that whenever the Lord revealed Himself to men in ancient days, and commanded them to offer sacrifice to Him, that it was done that they might look forward in faith to the time of His coming, and rely upon the power of that atonement for a remission of their sins (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 60-61; hereafter *TPJS*).

On this matter the Book of Mormon prophets are quite plain and none plainer than Jacob, who said: “For this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us. Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name” (Jacob 4:4-5). Be it remembered that when Alma compared faith to a seed the seed he was referring to was the doctrine of divine sonship. “Begin to believe in the Son of God,” he said, “that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; 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” (Alma 33:22). This was the word or seed which he challenged the Zoramites to plant in their hearts, promising them that if they would plant and properly nourish that seed, it would become a tree, springing up in them unto everlasting life (Alma 33:1, 22-23).

In like manner, Abinadi testified to the corrupt court of king Noah saying:

For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things? Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth? Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted? (Mosiah 13:33-35).

The foundation of every dispensation of the gospel is the testimony that salvation or redemption comes only in and through the Son of God. If Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son, if he in fact worked out an atoning sacrifice, if he, through that atonement, broke the bands of death and made resurrection possible, then salvation is in him. If salvation is in him, it can be in none other; and if salvation can be in none other, then all true religion and all true scripture will harmoniously testify of him. So it must be from the days of Adam:

Yea, and Enoch also, and they who were with him; the prophets who were before him; and Noah also, and they who were before him; and Moses also, and they who were before him; And from Moses to Elijah, and from Elijah to John, who were with Christ in his resurrection, and the holy apostles, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, shall be in the presence of the Lamb. And the graves of the saints shall be opened; and they shall come forth and stand on the right hand of the Lamb, when he shall stand upon Mount Zion, and upon the holy city, the New Jerusalem; and they shall sing the song of the Lamb, day and night forever and ever (D&C 133:54-56).

God Can Only Be Worshiped in the Name of His Son

It is not necessary at this point to cite scriptural texts to support the idea that the Father can only be worshiped in the name of the Son. We have already quoted the testimony of God, angels, and prophets to that effect. The system ordained by the Father, the system by which salvation comes, is one in which we worship

in the name of another—a holy name, a name above all other names—that of Jesus the Christ, who is the Son of the living God.

How is it, we ought to ask, that salvation is vested in a name? We are reminded that Jesus of Nazareth repeatedly emphasized that he had no power, authority or doctrines in and of himself. In the Gospel of John we have well over a hundred statements in which Christ attests that he is sent to do the will of the Father and that he does all that he does in the name and by the authority of the Father. His purpose was to glorify the name of the Father in all that he did. Thus the Son received the name and power of his Father, and through that name and by that power extended the promise of salvation to all who would take upon themselves his name as he had taken upon himself the name of his Father. Such is the system of salvation.

The idea that blessings come through a name finds expression in one of society's oldest traditions. It has been the custom of fathers in all ages, and we suppose among virtually all peoples, to place their name upon their posterity. As the crown of womanhood is in granting life, so the crown of manhood is the conferring upon one's posterity the family name. Often ceremony and ritual are associated with a father placing his name, his most prized possession, upon the newborn. In the giving of a name the father declares the child to be his; he makes of him or her a rightful heir of all that he possesses, and effectually promises to love and protect his progeny, for the child is but the manifestation of his own flesh and blood. The children in return are taught to love and respect their parents, and to so live as to bring honor to the name that has been given them as a sacred trust. The rebellious child can be disinherited and thus be caused to forfeit all blessings associated with bearing the family name.

Such traditions appear to reach back to man's most ancient roots. Adam was first created, then Eve was given as a help meet for him, and God "blessed them, and called their name Adam" (Moses 6:9). Thus Eve took upon herself the name of him from whom she is represented in a figurative sense as having received life, and they twain became one flesh. This perfect union that was to exist between them, represented by Eve's being created from the rib of Adam, is cited as the reason that a man was to leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife that they too might become one flesh or one name (see Genesis 2:23-24).

The giving of a name to something implies dominion, rule, or stewardship over that being named. Thus Adam, who had been commanded to subdue the earth and have dominion over all life forms upon

it, was directed of the Lord to give all things a name (see Genesis 1:28; 2:19-20.) Again, we find that after the creation of the woman it was Adam who at God's behest gave her the name Eve (see Genesis 3:20; Moses 4:26). She would bear his name, and he would rule over her (see Genesis 3:16); that is, he would protect and provide for her, and he would be her king, while she would be his queen (*In His Holy Name* 7-8).

Such is the order and pattern of heaven. God, the Eternal Father, placed his name upon Jesus of Nazareth, his Only Begotten in the flesh, and by so doing testified that the Galilean was his own Son, and that the love and protection of heaven would be with him. Christ, a rightful heir to the dominion, power, and glory of his Father, was entrusted to act in the divine name. In turn, the Savior invited all his earthly brothers and sisters to return to that heavenly family of which they were once a part, to take again the family name, and become heirs to the blessings associated with it.

Thus, we are saved by taking upon us the name of Christ as he was saved by taking upon himself the name of his Father. The idea of taking upon ourselves the name of another is a perfect teaching device. It dramatizes the absolute necessity of our becoming one with that person or assuming in all things his nature and character. This is the nature of true worship. We can worship by doing those things that the Son did, that is by doing those things that make us one with him and that made him one with the Father. To worship in that way is to think as Christ thought, to believe as he believed, to act as he acted, and to experience as he experienced. True worship requires the heart, the might, the mind, and the soul. It is the system by which we become like the Father and the Son. It is both meditative and active, it combines both belief and works, and it cannot be deviod of either.

An Apostasy Among the Jews

From the Pearl of Great Price we know that the covenant God made with Abraham centered in the obligation of his seed to be special witnesses of Christ among all the peoples of the earth as he had been a special witness of Christ in Paddan-aram,

Palestine, and among the Egyptians (see Abr 3:15). The seed of Abraham were to bear “*the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God*” (D&C 107:3), which Abraham had received at the hands of Melchizedek (see D&C 84:14), and by that authority they were to declare the gospel of salvation among all who were willing to hear it. The fourth chapter of Jacob affirms that the Abrahamic sacrifice was “a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5). We would have a hard time supposing that Abraham did not understand this after he had been instructed by the angel of the Lord who stayed his hand from slaying his “only son” and who renewed with him the terms of that covenant which required his seed to be ministers of Christ among all men (see Gen 22:16-18). Indeed, there were many even “before the days of Abraham who were called by the order of God; yea, even after the order of his Son” (Hel 8:18), for so the priesthood had been known from the beginning (JST Gen 14:28; D&C 107:1-4).

Jacob tells us that the Nephites, a transplanted branch of the house of Israel, worshiped the Father in the name of the Son and that it was for this reason that they kept the law of Moses which pointed their “whole souls” (see Omni 1:26; Mosiah 2:21) to Christ. Further, because they kept the law for that purpose, he said, “It is sanctified unto us for righteousness” (Jacob 4:5). Now, what better evidence could we have of an apostasy among the Jews than their profession of a covenant they did not keep or their strained observance of a law they no longer understood? Their system of worship was like a grave, an ornate sepulchre without the hope of resurrection.

Theirs was no longer a personal God. The idea that they were created in the image and likeness of God was dispelled as symbolic or allegorical, or anything else as long as it was not literally so. This, of course, had a domino effect. Such doctrinal concepts as God as King, Judge, Husband, Father, and Master were each in their turn neatly labeled as metaphors. The Septuagint reflects textual alterations directed at purging Holy Writ of the idea that God and man are of the same race. Rather

than stating that the Lord met Moses as recorded in Exodus 4:24, he meets a divine messenger; rather than allowing the seventy elders of Israel to see God in Exodus 24:10-11, they see the place where God had been; rather than putting forth His “hand” in Joshua 4:24, he manifests his “power”; wherein the Psalmist said he would see the face of the Lord, referring to the resurrection, and then “[will] awake, with thy likeness,” it was made to read, “I shall be satisfied when thy glory appears” (Ps 17:15), and so forth (Farrar 120; see also fn 2). “Later Hellenists go further by allegorizing the OT, finding abstract content in anthropomorphisms, and substituting philosophical concepts. . . . The rabbis avoid allegorizing but explain anthropomorphism as divine accommodation to human frailty” (Bromiley 329).

Thus both the Greeks and the Jews eliminated the idea that man was in the image and likeness of God as well as the idea that God could beget a child in the flesh. From the Book of Mormon, however, it is obvious that there has been a wholesale discarding of scriptural texts. We are not talking here about the altering of individual texts, nor the art of theological seduction more generally known as allegorizing, we are talking about the disappearance of some of the greatest scriptural works ever written—books written by the likes of Adam, Enoch, and Joseph of Egypt (2 Nephi 4:2); and the writings of Zenos and Zenock, both of whom were quoted by Alma to sustain the doctrine of God’s Son as the source of our redemption (Alma 33:13-15).

Looking Beyond the Mark

The grand question is how such plain and precious truths as the personal nature of God and the sonship of Christ get perverted and lost. It is the prophet Jacob in the Book of Mormon who answers this question:

The Jews were a stiffnecked people [he wrote]; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs

fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble (Jacob 4:14).

There are two equally effective ways to pervert the word of truth—add to it or take from it:

This is my doctrine [the Savior told the Nephites], and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; 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. . . . 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 stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them (3 Nephi 11:32, 40).

The Jews both added to and took from the law that had been given them. “My people do not know the ordinances of the Lord,” said Lehi’s contemporary, Jeremiah. “How can you say, ‘We are wise, we have the law of the Lord,’ when scribes with their lying pens have falsified it?” (New English Bible, Jer 8:8). The words of Christ sustain Jeremiah’s allegation: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge, the fulness of the scriptures; ye enter not in yourselves into the kingdom; and those who were entering in, ye hindered” (JST Luke 11:53). When he inquired about the reliability of the Apocrypha, Joseph Smith was told that “there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men” (D&C 91:2). The 1828 *Webster’s Dictionary* defines *interpolation* as, “The act of foisting a word or passage into a manuscript or book,” or, “a spurious word or passage inserted in the genuine writings of an author.”

What we have here is the perfect pattern of apostasy—both taking from and adding to the law of the Lord. The emphasis of Jacob’s text is that of looking beyond the mark, of going too far, of being “truer than true,” of adding tradition upon tradition, rabbinical ruling upon ruling, and all of this ostensibly to protect the law. The Jewish scholars decked it and bedecked it; they

jeweled and bejeweled it; they garnished and trimmed and shaped and reshaped; they preened, bordered, and embroidered; they adorned and ornamented until the law was unrecognizable, and then they worshiped the creation of their own making and forgot the God of their fathers who was the giver of the law. Fanaticism is addictive, and when we become fanatic in one area it is a short step to fanaticism in another. President David O. McKay suggested there were three kinds of sin—sins of commission, sins of omission, and virtues that were overdone. Any virtue overdone, he said, becomes a vice. In their excessive zeal the Jews made of the law a master rather than a servant. It was this obsession with the Holy Day that caused Christ to say, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

We come back to the fact that the gospel is everlastingly the same and that the first great dispensation of the gospel took place long before the foundations of this earth were laid. The principles by which we are saved were taught to us and known by us long before we commenced our journey in this mortal probation, and they are not to be added to nor taken from. “Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name? Or will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed? And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?” (D&C 132:9-11).

Jacob’s warning about going beyond the mark strikes at the issue of theological and scriptural scholarship. It is an appropriate warning for what we vainly call “higher education.” The glory of the Book of Mormon is in its simplicity. It is important that we not convey the idea that real understanding of the book rests only with scholars. The best of the world’s scholarship, as it has been directed toward the Bible, has not resulted in an increase of faith in that holy book. In fact, one of the primary reasons the Lord gave us the Book of Mormon was to restore faith in the Bible, which has been under scholarly seige for many years (see D&C 20:8-11). It is not without significance that in the revelation given as a preface to the Doctrine and

Covenants the Lord warns us against trusting “in the arm of flesh” (1:19).

How then do we distinguish between genuine gospel scholarship, which is seriously needed in the Church today, and the pedantic intellectual games played by those who have gone far beyond the mark or fallen quite short of it? Perhaps we simply need to ask, “Where does this lead us?” “What is its purpose?” For instance, do the compilations of quotations from selected brethren, which are used to build fortresses to protect otherwise vulnerable theories, represent an honest search for truth? Are our files of quotations used to hide mental atrophy? Does the fact that so and so said it stop all thinking or searching? And what of our preoccupation with internal and external evidences? Is it possible to develop an expertise in scriptural geography and yet be unable to find the straight and narrow path? Are there those of us who know the stories of the Book of Mormon, but not its doctrines?

The Jews Will Return to Their Ancient Faith in Christ

In Jacob’s preface to Zenos’ allegory of the tame and wild olive trees, Jacob prophesies of a future day when the Jews will return to Christ and recognize him as the only “sure foundation” upon which they can build (Jacob 4:15-17). The doctrine of the gathering is not well understood among Latter-day Saints, even though the Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches it with plainness. It is supposed by many that the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948, together with the return of tens of thousands of Jews to their ancient covenant land, fulfills the prophecies relative to their gathering. It does not.

If we are to properly understand the doctrine of the restoration, we must have some idea of what once was, and why it is desirable that the ancient order be reinstated. Similarly, to understand the doctrine of the gathering, we must have some idea

of what caused the scattering. As we have seen, the story begins with father Abraham who was sent as an apostle, or special witness of Christ, into the land of Palestine. He was promised that if he was true to his office and calling that that ancient land would be given to him and his posterity as an everlasting possession. The Lord also covenanted with Abraham that his seed would be called to hold the Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God, and go into strange lands as special witnesses of his name. Thus the children of Israel became a covenant people. The fact that they were to be a covenant people, and that such covenants are made on a personal rather than a national basis, required a place of covenant. That place of covenant is, of course, the temple, or house of the Lord. Thus Israel was gathered that they might build and maintain a house for the Lord, one in which he might endow them with the knowledge and power necessary to represent him. Through all generations of time the Lord's people have been both a covenant people and a temple building people, and they have gathered together for that purpose. As long as they were true to the covenants they had made, the protecting hand of the Lord was over them. When they chose to break their covenants, to rebel, to live unworthy of his presence, then they were as over ripe fruit falling from the tree of life. If they did not repent, their land of promise—which was merely a physical symbol of their covenant, a reminder of the everlasting inheritance that would yet be theirs—would be taken from them and they would be scattered (see 2 Nephi 25:10-18).

Gathering is the child of righteousness, and scattering the heir of wickedness. The gathering described in the Book of Mormon is of two parts: first, a spiritual gathering, or a return to Christ and a covenant relationship with him; and second, a return to the promised lands which symbolize the covenant that the Jews had made. Thus we find Jacob saying that God had covenanted with “all the house of Israel—that he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall

be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise” (2 Nephi 9:1-2). Again we read:

And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth. And as he hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them. And then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and then shall they be gathered in from the four quarters of the earth unto their own lands, from whence they have been dispersed; yea, as the Lord liveth so shall it be. Amen (3 Nephi 5:24-26).

Conclusions

1. The central doctrine of the Book of Mormon is the testimony of Christ. That testimony centers in the verity that he is literally the Son of God.

2. Given that the Book of Mormon is the book ordained in the councils of heaven to gather Israel, and given that the gathering is first spiritual and only then temporal, the single greatest doctrine of the apostasy, the very doctrine that the Book of Mormon comes in response to, is that of Christ’s divine sonship, for it is the doctrine upon which all other true doctrine rests. Joseph Smith declared the Atonement to be the most fundamental doctrine of our faith. All other doctrines, he maintained, were but appendages to it (*TPJS* 121). Yet, it is the doctrine of divine sonship that gives birth to the doctrine of atonement. If Christ had not been the son of a mortal woman from whom he inherited blood or mortality, and could thus lay down his life, and the son of an immortal Father from whom he inherited immortality, that he could take it up again, he could not have laid down his life and taken it up again (see John 10:17-18). It is the doctrine of divine sonship that gives birth to the doctrine of resurrection as the inseparable union of body and spirit. In like manner, it is the doctrine of divine sonship that assures us that God is a

personal being, that he is literally the father of our spirits. In turn, the knowledge that God is a personal being also gives us the hope that we can become as he is. We have no doctrines that do not trace themselves to the Book of Mormon and its testimony of Christ as the Son of God.

3. The doctrine of the divine sonship, coupled with the commandment that we are to worship the Father in the name of the Son, constitutes the sure foundation upon which salvation rests. That salvation only comes in the name of Christ is and was central to the testimony of all the holy prophets since the world began. It is the foundation of all gospel dispensations and was the central issue in the war in heaven.

4. The doctrines of the divine sonship and the personal nature of God are the chief illustrations that plain and precious things have been taken from the Old and New Testament records, and that the so-called Bible-believing world is in darkness as to the plan of salvation, and will remain so until it has received and believed the testimony of the Book of Mormon.

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