

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 17

2 Nephi 2

The Law and the Atonement

We are on the second chapter of 2 Nephi, perhaps the hardest chapter in the book. It's about the Law of Moses. We have often said that the Nephites were living by the Law of Moses. We are repeatedly reassured that salvation does not come by the Law of Moses. Then why is there so much fuss about it? It leads you and guides you on the way. What has got me going here is that I've just been reading the classic work on the subject of the history of law by a Sinologist who is also a scientist, Joseph Needham. He goes to a great extent. He goes all over, using every conceivable definition of law—when the word first appeared in the East, in the West, here, there and everywhere. He decides that law is an idea that is limited to a very special type of culture and to a highly specialized organization of society—namely, where you have a great emperor or powerful king. He lays down the law. Without that there is no law; there's only custom and practice. They are what the anthropologists started calling *mores* at the beginning of the century. There's the way of doing things, so you do them a certain way. He makes a big fuss about that. Being a Sinologist, he makes a big thing about Confucius. He says, "Forget about the law; there's no law at all. You do the right thing. The princely man does so and so. There is the proper way." If Needham only realized it, all his work is just a quibble because we all have the same way. There's a famous Newtonian hymn from the eighteenth century. How does it go?

Praise the Lord, for he hath spoken
Worlds his sovereign word obeyed.
Laws that never shall be broken,
For their guidance he has made.

God has made laws for the worlds. This is from way back in the eighteenth century; it sounds like something from Orson Pratt or Brigham Young. For all the "worlds," you see, and this is Newton. Many people think he is the greatest scientist who ever lived, as far as genius is concerned. So God has made laws which we follow, and we praise the Lord. "For . . . guidance"—what does that mean? Well, the *guidance* is the *huda* of the Koran. Incidentally, he [Needham] never mentions that, and it is very important. People who live in the desert always want guidance, of course. He also forgets a lot of other things. Remember our friend Solon? At the beginning here he makes quite a difference between *ethos* and *nomos*. He wrote a work called the *Eunomia* that we quoted from about the wickedness of the people, their greed, and the injustice of their society. He called it the *Eunomia*, the "proper *nomia*," the proper following of the rule. *Nomos*, the same word as *name*, is "what has been declared;" whereas, the *ethos*, ethics, is just what people do. *Ethnoi* is the way it is translated in the New Testament. The *ethos*, the ethics, is just the customs and practices. We do things certain ways in our society; we wouldn't think of doing them another way. If you did a thing the wrong way—got on the wrong side of a horse—that would be outrageous, for example. Customs and everything we do are controlled by these laws that nobody laid down; they have never been declared. Of course, they break down in the city, and we have to have laws. Everything has to be written down. We have

become the most legalistic and the most litigious people in the world. The city of Salt Lake has more lawyers per cubic inch than any other city in America—it does, really. It has the highest percentage of lawyers. So we are stuck by the law. But the Book of Mormon tells us over and over again that the law is not going to save—of course, it isn't. It's for our guidance. It's that with Confucius. It's the Tao, the way you follow. It's just a quibble whether it's written down or not.

Our word *law* comes from *lag*, the old Scandinavian, Norse word. The idea is that you have to have a built-up empire and you have to have an emperor in charge doing it, he [Needham] says, because that came with the despots in the seventeenth century, and with the Chinese emperors. As soon as the emperor took over, then you would get the idea of law. But that's not so at all because the law is what is pronounced from the *logberg*. Once a year the whole community would come together. The remains of these still stand in Iceland. It's a circle, and they still have it in Switzerland. All the people would be summoned to a great assembly. From the top of the mountain, as Moses read the law, our Norse ancestors would read the law. As I said, it is still the law in Iceland. They recited it from memory if they knew it. That was the *god*i which pronounced it. *God*i means "man speaking for God." The *god*i was the high priest. The king and the *god*i were often identical, but the high priest would pronounce it. Incidentally, our friend [Needham] had nothing to say about Egypt either, so he skipped a lot of things.

Well, the law is the guidance, and you have to have it to get there. But it is devised for our weakness. It caters to our weakness and we have to have it. It's not the goal—it's the way that gets you there. It's like the iron rod; you cling to the iron rod. We love iron rods, and think if we have an iron rod we already have it made. We just keep the iron rod, and that's our goal. The iron rod is just to get you to the temple. That is not supposed to be the temple. It's not supposed to be the object. You don't stick to the law all the time.

We have the Ten Commandments, the laws of Moses. Ah, yes, there is *the law* as far as this goes. But it is written for barbarians, as Paul tells us. The best clue to this whole thing, that matches these various chapters in the Book of Mormon, is the tenth chapter of Hebrews. It's beautifully expressed, and fortunately I brought that along. In chapter 2 here, it says the law is going to get you there. Now what are the Ten Commandments? Do you have to be told every day that you shouldn't kill? That you shouldn't lie? That you shouldn't commit adultery? That you shouldn't bear false witness? Do you have to be reminded of that? No, the time comes, the Lord says, when "the law is written in their hearts." Only a savage or a barbarian would have to be told over and over, "Now, you mustn't kill anybody today." But we still have to be reminded. We think if we've kept the law, then we are saved—that's all there is to it. But that's not it at all. That's where it begins. This is the least requirement. It starts out with the Word of Wisdom, for example. Do we have to tell people every day, "Well, don't go out and get drunk"? We don't have to be told that. Even with smoking now, people are warned; we don't have to go to the Word of Wisdom for that. Most of you would never think of doing those things. It wouldn't occur to you because, as it says when it is given to us in Doctrine and Covenants 89, this is adapted to the weakest of all Saints; this is the lowest requirement. This is the mere beginning—the least thing that can be expected of you. We start with the Word of Wisdom. It's the same thing with tithing.

Then we get to the Ten Commandments. The Lord was asked, what is the first and great commandment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might,

mind, and strength” (D&C 59:5). “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:39–40). Well, if you love the Lord with all your heart, might, mind and strength and if you love your fellowmen that much, you are not going to go out and murder, and you’re not going to go and steal. You don’t need any of the [other] commandments at all; those two obviously cover the whole thing because you will do what is right. As Isaiah and Jeremiah say, “The law is written in your heart.” You wouldn’t think of doing those things because it is part of you. But again, it’s just going to lead you where you are going to go; that’s the purpose of law. So Atonement is way up there. It’s a very interesting thing in the book of Hebrews because they are still living by the law. Paul had to tell about these things, and he talked in terms of the “bloody sacrifice” that was made. This would be done away with; it was just a type and a shadow of things to come. He told them, Don’t think in fulfilling that you have fulfilled the law. That’s not it at all; it looks forward to another sacrifice [paraphrased]. This is the passage where it talks about that great and last sacrifice—the sacrifice that will just have to be made once. Whether it will be made in other worlds [or not] is another thing, of course. That’s in the Newtonian hymn, “Other worlds, for their guidance.” But we have our guidance when we have this given for us. But, you notice, this puts the Atonement way out there. We are nowhere near that league until we have fulfilled all these things. As long as we are here, we are in a miserable condition of things. That’s what we are going to have here.

Now, let’s look at the main points as we go along here. In the 2 Nephi 2 we’ll start out with a very encouraging announcement in the fourth verse. This is a handbook of the Atonement. “The Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.” The door is wide open. You can choose your own pace, and you can advance as you please. It’s going to be a very individual thing. And you begin on an upbeat note—the plan is made. There are various things that you might question. What can he possibly be talking about here when he says, “he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain [verse 2]”? We mentioned that the last time. It means that you get credit for what you have endured. But then he says, “The Spirit is the same [you are always going to have the same Spirit], yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.” So that’s the first note in this handbook of the Atonement—the gospel. The other world opens out to us. Then the next verse: “And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.” You will be able to judge for yourself. Without that, of course, you wouldn’t be able to get very far—that’s an important thing. So you don’t have to look at the fine print in the law all the time to find what is good and bad. That is a sign of decadence, intrigue, dishonesty, etc., when people have to write finer and finer print in the law, because you know what’s right yourself.

Brigham Young was so impatient with lawyers. He detested lawyers because they are not necessary. Any person with a little common sense would know what’s the right thing and what’s the wrong thing to do. (There are many stories told about Solomon on this subject.) But we know sufficiently good from evil; we don’t have to split hairs about it. You know when you are doing right and when you are doing wrong. “And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified.” The law won’t justify you. A person might say, “I’m justified because I kept the law.” No, that won’t justify you all the way because there are various laws that are written in various ways, and lawyers can make it go any way they want to. They can show you are breaking the law or keeping the law. You are not going to be justified just by the law. A good example is the rich young man. He went to the Lord and asked, “What shall I do to become a follower of you?”

The Lord said, “Have you kept all the commandments?”

He said, “Yes, I have—I have kept them from my youth.”

The Lord said, “No, there is one you haven’t kept. You go and sell everything you have and share it with the poor.” That’s what you do; it’s the law of consecration. That’s the law that none of us can take. We get up to there and then we stop. We draw the line there. You are not going to be saved by the law unless you go all the way. Then it will deliver you on to a better world. Meanwhile, we are stuck with it. There’s no appeal; from a sentence of the law, you don’t get an appeal anyway. “Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.” This is for lack of Atonement; you have to go beyond that. The point is that we are not capable of doing what is right. “Man is born to evil as the sparks fly upward.”

I like Voltaire’s story of Memnon, a man who wanted to be perfectly wise. Every morning he would get up and make a solemn resolve, a covenant, that he would never make any mistakes or do anything unwise that day. “We deceive ourselves in all our enterprises. That’s what we are made for—that’s our very nature. Every morning I make good resolutions, and all day long I just make an ass of myself.” Just one blunder after another. You are not going to escape it as long as you are in the flesh. That’s what this chapter is going to tell us again. You’re not going to escape that. So here we’re stuck with it, and just by keeping the law you are not going to be justified because the law is tailored to our own weaknesses and our own uses. That’s what it is—the least we can do. Then after that you will be free, but this is the first requirement to sort of get us on the road. The *law* is called *the way*. It’s very often called *the way*. There are the *two ways*—the way of righteousness and the way of darkness. In the Book of Mormon and everywhere in early Christianity, the doctrine of the two ways is very prominent.

Verse 7: “Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends [the set terms] of the law be answered.” This is where you come in, you have to be able to accept this. Merely keeping the law isn’t going to do it. You can keep the *set terms* and the *ends* and escape the sentences etc., but this is another thing entirely, you notice, a broken heart and a contrite spirit. A court can’t test you on that or anything else like that. They can’t look into your heart; they have to deal with facts, always with facts. Of course, this is silly. “Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth [this great gulf between us and reality], that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God.” That is the question, you see. Standing up in the court and getting cleared by the judge or the jury is one thing. But standing in the presence of God who can see everything, every flaw and everything you have in you, that’s another thing. We would rather have the rocks and the mountains cover us than have to do that. That’s the worst torment we can have—worse than any hell. Anything but that, you see. [People might say], “Give us hell, we can enjoy hell, but don’t let us have to do that.” Well, that’s true. That’s the hardest thing we could do, to be so completely out of place. Hell is a place where you are out of place, where you don’t want to be. But the worst thing about hell is that you belong there, that you are among your own kind, etc.

Well, he goes on here, “There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah [how is this going to be

done?], who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.” We cannot achieve it all; this is another thing here. This is a very important part of it if we are going to carry on. The whole thing is this other life we are concerned about. That’s what the gospel looks for. We have the rules for this life. People write books on “the happy life,” etc. They are just careerism, as far as that goes. Your career goes up, and then it comes down with a bump. And that’s that. Recently, in *Business Week* there were some interviews with top executives who had retired. They are broken men. You go into your office to clean out your desk and have everybody in the office snub you when the day before you were top man. They were all bowing on their knees and kowtowing, and then the next day they say, “Who’s this guy?” That’s too much for some people to take, and some of them commit suicide. I could name some that did that. They just couldn’t take that comedown, but everybody has to come down. You are not going anywhere here; that’s the whole point of our existence here. We’ve got to think in other terms. If life is to be endurable, we have to think in other terms.

As A. E. Housman wrote,

Men at whiles are sober,
And think by fits and starts.
And if they think, they fasten
Their hands upon their hearts.

If you could stay drunk, you could endure this life. But men at times are sober and then it is just too bad because you see the terror of it. But not if we have the gospel. This is the nice thing. The obvious idea that we are preparing for something better is very plain here. I read something on that yesterday; I’m not going to read it now though.

Verse 9: “Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God.” What does he mean by the *firstfruits*? That’s an image that the Jews all understood. It means the best you have—the best and most beloved. It is the prize. It couldn’t be anything less, you see. Nothing less than the supreme sacrifice could be made. You can’t settle for less here. “Inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved. And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him.” Then after your resurrection, you still have “to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him.”

With the Lutherans, death erases everything. A person’s death is his own atonement. If that was the case, there would be no place for hell. We’d all be equal in the hereafter, which is not so, of course, no more than we were before [this earth life]. “Wherefore, the end of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment . . . is in opposition to that of the happiness.” Being bound by punishment rather than by your spontaneous good will is the opposite “of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement.” Permanent happiness and exaltation is the end, the object of the Atonement. To answer that, you must have something better than that [law]. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.” This is an important point. Why? Well, the first law of energy for one thing (Newton’s first law, actually) is that all motion is equal and opposite in direction. All motion is equal in force and opposite in direction. If you push in this direction, you are going to have an equal and opposite resistance in the other direction. It’s a natural law.

Without that [opposition in all things], we wouldn't have anything, "neither happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility."

I have some interesting quotations here from the early church fathers on this subject. These were the earliest writers, and they make it rather clear. This was a popular doctrine before—the idea that there must be opposition in all things, the right and wrong. He says in verse 13 here, "And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin [to break it], ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness."

Why the price must be paid. You might call this the commercial view, which is also a biblical view, of the Atonement—that a price has to be paid. We have gone into a debt to God the Father, and we can never meet it. Somebody else has to pay it. If you say then that anything you do is all right, that there is no sin, then note the dead, bored, blank faces of people who believe that and practice it. There's the unconcerned libertine or the professional killer. He has to sear his conscience with a hot iron. If it makes no difference, as it says here, then you have nothing. It balances out to exactly zero and there's nothing here. As he says, there's no happiness or anything else. As soon as people say, "Well, I can do anything I want to do—it's perfectly clear that God is dead and all is permitted," then the whole structure of society collapses. Nobody is happy and it's pretty horrible. You see this all the time in your prime—time TV, etc. The scene becomes macabre, as a matter of fact, when it becomes absolutely amoral. There was a great amoralism in the seventeenth century. With the sudden [scientific] enlightenment, they decided "God is dead, all is permitted." So they did all sorts of things. Of course, they were the most bored, disappointed, and fearful people in the world. You get that in Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann's "Tales of Hoffmann" and things like that. Oscar Wilde wrote about things like that—the jaded, you do anything you want. The best example I can think of is Septimius Severus, perhaps the most successful man that ever lived. From being a sergeant in the army, he became the emperor of Rome. He was the strongest of all the emperors, ruled over the most [territory], and was the mightiest. As Gibbon says, "He was the principal author of the decline of the Roman Empire" because he put the military in charge of everything. He had done everything and achieved everything, and on his death bed he said, "*Omnia fui et nil expedit*. I've been everything, and nothing is worth a damn."

The same thing happened with Diocletian. He was the greatest manager perhaps of ancient times. He managed an empire that was in complete disarray. He put it in "apple pie" order. It included the whole East and the whole West. It went from Asia all through Europe and Africa, and he put it in perfect order. Then in A.D. 303 he retired and built the palace at Spalato. It's an enormous building; the whole city is inside this palace. Everything is dedicated to trying to achieve immortality. He did everything. You find the walls are covered with victory wreaths to represent victory over death. He has a tomb exactly like Constantine's tomb, which has twelve columns all focusing the power of the apostles. But Diocletian was a great Christian persecutor; he didn't believe in that. This was twenty years before Constantine's rule. He had the twelve months, moons, concentrating power. His tomb was in the center to act like a burning glass. The life force was to enliven it. It's the greatest rigmarole you ever saw. My daughter's father-in-law is the architect who is restoring all this. I spent some time there. You can spend whole days wandering around the palace. Underneath the ground there is a complete duplicate of the palace above. Room for room, passage for passage, closet for closet, everything is exactly as above. He had the three levels. He always had these mystic ideas. The point is that these

men who reached the heights of success were absolutely haunted. They were bitter and disillusioned and everything else. So don't expect that [worldly success] to bring you happiness. That's a truism. I don't need to go on like this. You know perfectly well that that's the way it is, except a lot of people don't seem to know it. They talk about success and careers and all that sort of nonsense.

I was going to read here from the early church fathers. Irenaeus came from Ephesus in the early days and in the year A.D. 170 became bishop of Lyons in France. You notice that 170 is quite early, quite soon after the Apostles. He wrote a very interesting writing on this subject. He is answering the Gnostics here, but he doesn't give them an answer. He ends up by agreeing with them. The Gnostics had to invent their strange theology to explain the problem of evil. God is either evil because he permits evil to happen, or weak because he can't help it. They had various answers, and he had various answers. But it's this problem of good and evil he is talking about, and he calls it "the Ancient Law of Liberty." Then he very properly quotes Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" That's God speaking, I wanted you to, but you wouldn't. He gives them their freedom: they don't have to if they don't want to. He is not going to force them; that is what Irenaeus is telling you. He wrote, "God made man free from the beginning. . . . For God never uses force. . . . He placed in man the power of election even as in the angels. . . . Glory and honor, he says, to all who do good, and it is due them because they could have done evil [that's reasonable enough]. . . . Now if God made some men good and some bad simply by nature, there would be nothing praiseworthy in their virtue or blameworthy in their vice, for that being their nature they could not do otherwise. But since to all is given equally the power of doing good or bad exactly as they choose, they are rightly praised or blamed for what they do. . . . That is why the prophets *appeal* to men to do good and eschew evil." Then he explains, "God wants men to do good, but even the Gospel allows anyone who doesn't want to do good to do evil. To obey or disobey is in every man's power, . . . God forcing no man. . . . There is a godlike power of judgment in all men, making them envied by angels." The angels don't have as much liberty as we do because of their situation. I mean, in the presence of the Father before you come here, you are not going to have an impulse to commit gross sin. It's only down here that you can have a real chance to get tempted. This is the place for it. This earth is really the furnace of testing because [it makes you wonder] is anything right in it? He said that the angels envy us because we can have a chance to show just how much we can overcome and what we can be. So this is the ancient law of liberty.

A very old writing, one that has turned out to be far more valuable than anyone thought, is the *Clementine Recognitions*. Now it is very closely connected with the Dead Sea Scrolls to everybody's surprise. It goes right back to the beginnings of Christianity. It's a surprising document and very rich in lore from the early Church. It contains the famous debate between Peter and Simon Magus who thought he was a Christian. Remember, he wanted to run things. He had his own sect and thought he was greatly inspired. He had great ideas about himself and made a lot of trouble. He had this argument with Peter, and it's mentioned in Acts. Peter begins the discussion by invoking peace on the whole assembly (they are going to have a big debate) and expressing the desire that everything be peaceably and amicably discussed. This is the signal for the self-righteous Simon Magus to blow his top. He explodes with an indignant declaration that the champions of truth don't ask for peace since they are determined to "kick the stuffing" out of error. They will only call it peace when the opposition lies helpless before them. It is weakness and cowardice to ask for peace for the wrong as well as for the right side, says Simon Magus.

In reply Peter says to him, we must imagine this world as a vast plain [a *maydan* as it is in the Book of Mormon; remember, he sees the vast plain in a vision] in which two cities strive for mastery, each claiming the whole land as its own. The king of one city sends to the other proposing a peaceful solution, a discussion in which the matter might be discussed without killing anybody. He isn't weak, not at all. He has no intention of giving the other king a single blade of grass that doesn't belong to him. Now the other king can think of no other course than to take what is his by force, and that, says Peter, shows his cause is really a weak one.

Simon Magus then applies his old chestnut of the schools: Either God is vicious because he doesn't want to prevent evil, or weak because he cannot. We can't have evil, we can't tolerate evil, we can't put up with that at all, says Simon. That's his position. "Could not God have made us all good," he asks, "so that we could not be anything else but virtuous?"

That, of course, is what Augustine says, "*Misera necessitas, non posse non peccare*. O miserable necessity, not to be able not to sin." If God had only created us not able to sin, how much happier we would be. He says, "It's a miserable necessity; to be able to sin is a terrible thing." The way he puts it is even stronger, "not able not to sin." If we were not able to sin, then we could be happy. You can go around and around, but the point is the fact that we can sin is a terrible calamity [according to Augustine]. Well, it isn't a calamity at all, as Peter explains here, but Simon Magus thinks it is. And that's basic in Christian theology. That was St. Augustine I was quoting.

"Could not God have made us all good so that we could not be anything but virtuous?" That's exactly what you get here in 2 Nephi. To which Peter replies with a statement of the ancient law of liberty: "A foolish question," he says, "for if he made us unchangeably and immovably inclined to good, we would not really be good at all, since we couldn't be anything else; and it would be no merit on our part that we were good, nor could we be given credit for doing what we did by necessity of nature. How can you call any act good that is not performed intentionally? For this reason the world has existed through the ages [now here's the doctrine of pre-existence and probation—right out of the Book of Mormon again] so that the spirits destined to come here might fulfill their number, and here make their choice between the upper and the lower worlds." This is the time of probation; this is the time of proving, as we are often told in the Book of Mormon. This is the time to prepare; it is all preparation, and here is where you make your "choice between the upper and lower worlds, both of which are represented here [and they certainly are], so that when their bodies are resurrected, the blessed might go to eternal light and the unrighteous for their impure acts be wrapped in spiritual flame." That's an interesting statement, and, of course, you get the same thing in Hebrews 10.

Question: Where are you reading this from?

Answer: Well, you can go back to the *Patrologia* and get it, or you can get it from this book of mine. It's called *The World and the Prophets*, and it's on reserve. This is on pages 182–84.

Quoting again from Peter, "In this work every man is given a fair chance to show his real desires." To a question put to him in a later discussion, "Did not the Creator know that those he created would do evil?" Peter replied, "Certainly, he considered all the evil that

would be among those whom he created; but as one who knew there was no other way to achieve the purpose for which they were created, he went ahead.”

That is a theme of an interesting number of recently discovered early Christian documents, especially Coptic. They have been discovering them now since World War II; we are getting quite a library of them. When you find a very early Christian document has been discovered, it usually starts out with the heading “These Are the Secret Teachings of the Lord to the Apostles after the Resurrection.” Everybody claimed to have those teachings. They aren’t necessarily so, but the point is that He did give them secret teachings which are not contained in the Bible. We don’t know what he taught them. “Then their eyes were opened,” it says, “and they understood what he told them.” It claims to be that. These are teachings that were preserved. A Gnostic was a person who claimed to have that secret knowledge. It’s very well explained in Eusebius where he quotes Hegesippus, the earliest church historian. He said that as long as there was an apostle, a real eye witness authority through Christ, in that first generation, these people “lurked in dark corners” (as he put it). But as soon as the last witness died—as soon as the last apostle who could call their bluff had died—then they came out like bugs out of the woodwork. They came out everywhere and swarmed. All of sudden there were over a hundred different churches, each claiming that it had the original teaching of the Lord. That’s called the *gnosis*. It’s called *gnosis* twenty-seven times in the New Testament. That means *the knowledge*—the knowledge that you get of the gospel, a higher knowledge. These people all claimed to have it, and they are always referred to in the New Testament as Gnostics so-called (always hyphenated). They call themselves Gnostics, but that doesn’t mean they are. The point is that people knew this information existed. Anyone who claimed to have it could count on getting a following because they were looking for that when the lights went out. They were looking for that which was taken away.

This is typical. I was going to say that the Council in Heaven is quite a theme here, especially that Doctrine of the Abbatôn by Bishop Cyril of Alexandria. We won’t go into that. The accounts of the Council in Heaven are that when the creation was proposed, it was voted down because the Earth complained that she would be defiled. The people up there all decided that there would be too much suffering, too much wickedness, too much defilement in this world. There was a deadlock, and they didn’t know what to go on until one person volunteered and said, “I will pay the price; I will take the blame.” You know who that was. When he did that, the whole chorus broke out and “the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy.” That was the famous Creation Hymn. See, our word *poem* comes from *Creation Hymn*. The poem was the original Creation Hymn, the hymn that was sung in the heavens to announce the glory of the creation—all the earliest poems are. The Greek *poiēma* means *creation*. It was the Creation Hymn. The muses first sang it together with the Greeks, etc. You have many references to that. They broke out in that hymn because it was the Lord that made it possible to go on with the creation, carry this out, and allow this to happen. Even in spite of all this wickedness and corruption, he would pay the price. Only one person could clean up that mess, and he would do it.

So it says here: He considered that evil that would be among those whom he created; but as one who knew there was no other way to achieve the purpose, he did not draw back or hesitate, nor was he afraid of what would happen [paraphrased]. Evil is forced on no one, he explains, it is only there for those who want it. No one comes under its sway, “save he who of his own free will deliberately subjects himself to it.” Then an interesting thing

happens. At this time Simon Magus loses his temper, and he starts to rave and to rant and to say how great he is. Peter's good faith in this law of liberty was put to the test then because Simon lost control of himself and started raving and antagonized and scandalized everybody there because he misbehaved so. Then the people wanted to mob Simon Magus because he had made so much trouble, etc. But Peter immediately stood up and opposed them. He said, Absolutely nothing doing. What are we talking about the law of liberty for if we can't let Simon do what he wants? [paraphrased]. He said, "We must bear wicked men with patience, Brethren, knowing that God, who could easily wipe them out, suffers them to carry on to the appointed day in which the deeds of all shall be judged. Wherefore should we not then suffer whom God suffers? Why do we not bear with fortitude of spirit the wrongs they commit against us, when he who can do all things does not avenge himself for the wrongs they do to him?"

This has always been the concern of despots. Speaking of Needham's book, when the emperors took over then they made the law. Anybody who did wrong would be killed, and that was all there was to it. Wrong was what they defined as wrong. This reached its supreme point in Theodosius in A.D. 395 with the Theodosian Code. He was the first emperor who went overboard [in being] Christian. He went farther than Constantine or anybody else. He made it a capital crime to own a Hebrew Bible, for example. That was responsible for a lot of wiping out of texts, as you can imagine. To possess any literature uncomplimentary of the Christians was a capital offence. So there was a great destruction of books and records and everything else under Theodosius. He wanted to make the world good. Well, wasn't that a commendable project as far as that goes? In every age it has been their purpose to prevent and punish trespasses against God. "I don't mind about myself, but it's against God that I mind." This is the theme that is always being used—those sins which shape the very foundation of the universe, according to established dogma.

You get some wonderful things—Donatus, or Lucifer of Cagliari wrote some marvelous things on that, or even the great John Chrysostom. You'd be surprised how far they go in insisting that everybody be righteous or else. Because all sin is wrong, any sin against God is absolutely wrong. When anyone does any wrong, death is much too good for him. Sin is wrong; therefore, all possible means should be taken to prevent men from sinning. Isn't that logical enough? What could be more logical? From the earliest to the latest times, kings have claimed to be what the Roman emperor called himself, the *virtutum rector*, "the rector in charge of virtue." From the days of the Republic, they'd had sumptuary laws. Then they had the officials to go around and correct people's morals. He [the emperor] was the *magnus parens mundi*. He was the *great parent of the world*, who was responsible for the world's morals. You say it's usurping divine authority, "Who are you to judge and put God's law at your disposal? You can use it to give you authority for anything you want to do." The kings of old always had an answer to that. They would say, "We are God's representatives on earth and whatever we do, after all, is in the name of virtue. We want everyone to be virtuous, and it is our business to see that everybody is virtuous." I'm quoting from somebody there, as a matter of fact. In this they were quite sincere.

Remember, that was Satan's plan. He didn't want to damn anybody. He wanted to make everybody virtuous. He didn't command Cain to sacrifice to the devil or anything like that. He said, "Sacrifice to the Lord." He wanted the gospel plan to go through as long as he was in charge, you see. He told Adam and Eve to do a thing that had been done in other worlds. They were expected to eat that fruit, as a matter of fact. But he got them to obey him. That was the whole point: they were taking orders from him. That's what he

wanted. He wants to run the whole thing. He will use any guise, any trick he can. As Joseph Smith said, "He will tell a thousand truths to put over one error." Then you see how that confounds everything. The thing is he wants to be in charge. Remember how he introduces himself at the beginning of the book of Moses. He says, "I am the only begotten; worship me." He stamps on the ground and rages and rants in a "five-star tizzy" because he wants to be worshipped. He wants to run things; that's his desire. He is ambitious, and his plan is to make everybody virtuous, not vicious. He was the model and archetype of those monarchs of old who insisted on banishing all sin by edict. Time and again the panegyrists hail this or that emperor for having abolished all sin and nonconformity from the world. God was against sin; very well, the emperor would see to it that nobody sinned. Emperors, sincere and devout men who gave themselves such names as Pius and Felix (titles later adopted by the popes), sent out their *agentes in rebus* (that isn't the name I was trying to think of; the other name goes way back to the old Republican times). Their business was to spy and teach virtue and morals, especially to the Christians (everybody knew about their immoral doctrines and secret orgies!). And they met with a rebuff. Minucius Felix wrote, "What a splendid sight to God when a Christian stands up to pain, when he holds his own against threats, tortures, and torments! When he smilingly faces the multitude screaming for his death and the grim preparations of the butcher, as he asserts his liberty against kings and princes, yielding it only to God, to whom it belongs!" It is not for kings or princes to judge whether a man's course is a godly one or not; it is for God alone. (Then we talk about the Constitution and other things that have to do with that.) God does not delegate to any man or institution the functions he has reserved for himself.

So let's go back to the Book of Mormon which is talking along these lines in the second chapter of 2 Nephi. First we had, the Spirit is the same, it's open, salvation is free. Then, you are instructed, you have sufficient knowledge, etc., to carry on so you can be judged. With that law of good and bad, of course, we can make laws, but we have to make them for everything we do. If the Spirit isn't in you and you don't know what's right, all the laws in the world aren't going to help. But as I said, we are very litigious, and we use it as a means of controlling wealth. But there is the Atonement which requires the "broken heart and contrite spirit" and then the Resurrection and standing in judgment.

And "there must needs be an opposition in all things." Otherwise, if this wasn't so, "all things must have vanished away." That's the *heat death*. Entropy or the *heat death* is referred to in 2 Nephi 9:7: "Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement." How is it going to cover everything? Because of that good old second law—the law of entropy or the *heat death*—everything runs down. Heat can only move from a hotter to a cooler body, that's all. When it finally has distributed itself evenly, then there's nothing. Things must have vanished away, etc. It's the same thing here. The more complex materials always break down to the more simple. Well, by theory then, the more complex shouldn't have existed by now. They should have vanished long ago, but they haven't. This is a great puzzle to scientists today; they talk a lot about it. "Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration." And this is what happened. He says, when you die you are dead—that's the normal thing. What is happening here is that a mind far greater than inert matter has intervened and is running things. But it has to take the intervention of something because in the normal situation of things this is what happened: "And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more." Well, that's entropy, that's real. It rots, it crumbles, it falls and reaches a dead level, and that's the end. Nothing rises anymore. But there is something that has interfered with the whole process. There are minds; there is

something greater than chance and inert matter. This is an important thing; it is quite an issue among scientists today. There's a new book out by a woman, Caroline Merchant, called *The Death of Nature*. It's a very interesting book. She's a biologist at Harvard.

We have something much better than that, of course, in the Atonement. So we go on, and this part is very nice. I like this an awful lot. Verse 15: "It must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter. Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself." And you are enticed by the one or the other, and you are enticed equally in either direction, as we are told in chapter 7 of Moroni. He says that, remember. The devil enticeth and inviteth in one direction. At the same time God inviteth and enticeth in the other, and you are pulled between orbits. Which way you go depends on you; you will decide which one you will follow. Neither one is overpowering or irresistible because if that was so then you wouldn't be responsible. You'd say, "It's stronger than I and I have to yield." But that's not so. But Satan here, this old rascal, is seeking the misery of all mankind. Well, somebody is doing an awfully good job [of that].

Verse 21: "And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh." That's good, that gives me another day—hooray, hooray! I'll need it. We must repent, you see. This is very important. After all, if we are so completely involved in the things of this world, as we necessarily are, we are never clear unless we make our first step and repent and decide we prefer to move in another direction. Repentance is a file of intention to change your way, but you have to keep repenting. Remember, we talked about repentance before. And it's a state of probation. You always have a chance to repent; it's not too late. And "their time was lengthened" to give them more time to repent. This is the greatest thing you can have. Remember, as Irenaeus said, the angels don't have the capacity to repent. They don't have the choice. That makes us envied of the angels because we can always do better. We can repent and make the resolve. "For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents."

Of course, with the Fall we are lost—that isn't just a myth. Everybody who has ever thought about the human race has come to that conclusion. Oh, the human race! Kitty Gaigai is a cat that reflects upon the foolishness and wickedness of men. Kitty Gaigai is always right. He sits on the roof and says, "The human race is nothing but a mess." Or, as the *Koran* says, "This world is just lost." It's nothing. We just mentioned that second law of thermodynamics. Everything is going to run down. We are fighting it all the time, and it beats us. You can't beat gravity. Look at me. I'm sagging at all points now because gravity is going to take over. That's what you do. Isn't it nice that there is something that intervenes? There's more to come, and that's what we have here. Verse 22: "And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end [see, there was no entropy at all there; they must have remained whatever they were]. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good for they knew no sin." Just as we read from Irenaeus and from Peter.

So is passing the test enough? No, it isn't. We must repent continually. You never pay the full price because, of course, you can't—even from day to day. Atonement is absolutely necessary; repentance once is not enough. Just what is the mechanism of repentance? How is it done? How does atonement work? This is the thing that escapes

everybody. Let's see if it escapes us. Then we have the most famous passage in the Book of Mormon in verse 25: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy." This is the bottom line, "that they might have joy." How do you define *joy*? Well, you can't define anything that is really important, can you? You have to be redeemed from the fall. "And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves [they can move in all directions]. . . . Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments [we have to have Him]. . . . And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein [the will of the flesh and the laws of nature and running down, entropy], which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell." Well, what about the spirit? It doesn't run down. Yes, but what is it? It is subject to the devil after that. This would be a terrible thing to have happen.

So that second chapter is a very hard one, actually. The third one is a genealogical chapter, which is an interesting one too. I see we are not going very fast, but I find out that other people aren't going much faster. So that is good. There's enough nourishment here. There's enough meat to keep us guessing.