

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 49
Alma 12–14
The Plan of Salvation

This is the hardest chapter in the Book of Mormon. It's the one that separates us farthest from the world. It's the [twelfth] chapter of Alma, where the gospel plan is given. We are talking about free will, Adam's fall, etc. We will start with verse 25: "Now, if it had not been for the plan of redemption, which was laid from the foundation, there could have been no resurrection of the dead." So there was a plan to bring us back again. Well, why let us leave in the first place? This is the thing the Christians can't understand—to go away and fall, and then have to go through all that routine and suffering to come back again. Well, this is the only explanation you will find of it. We have it, and it's not only perfectly logical, but we can see that the ancient Christians were firmly converted to it, too. It was laid from the foundation of the world, so it goes back to the preexistence. The whole thing was planned. The word *plan* doesn't appear in the Bible, but everybody is using it today. They never used it before, but you notice that all the TV ministers use *plan*. Even the pope uses the word *plan* now, though it had never been used before. Here it is here. The whole thing was planned ahead of time to prepare us for the long haul. If we are going to live through another phase of existence that goes on and on and on beyond imagination, there must be something big, some general shakeup, a big preparation, and something very new now. We come to it here. "If it were possible that our first parents could have gone forth and partaken of the tree of life they would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state." Remember, he [Antionah] was arguing about the tree of life being kept from us. [Alma] said yes, the tree of life was kept from us for this purpose. They would have been utterly miserable because they hadn't had a chance to prepare yet. They would have been lost forever because they had sinned, etc.

Verse 27: "But behold, it was not so; but it was appointed unto men that they must die [they must pass through that]; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end." He said that men should know these things. "Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory." Without this we would never know. The angels have to intervene; you'd never [figure] this out yourself. You see where this is going to take us. Verse 30: "And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men [there have been these contacts with angels; they don't happen all the time; they are rare, but at the great turning points they always take place] and made known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world." As we mentioned before, Origen was teaching the same thing—that we prepared to come here, just as we are preparing now to go there. That's why we have our different ratings here, as we will have there.

Now the first transgression. The Lord said to Adam, I don't want you to do this. Adam later said, but I want to do it. He had to do that to assert his will. He had a good reason to do it because he had to keep his first commandment, which was not to get away from Eve. She had been commanded to stick with him like glue. He had to do that. Eve had [partaken], so he willingly said, well, I want to do it this way. So he did it that way. Had he

sinned greatly? No, at this time we are told here that he didn't know anything about the plan. He was just doing the best he could, so to speak. After many days an angel came and explained it to him, and then Eve said, wasn't it a good thing after all? Then the Lord said to him, your transgression in the Garden of Eden has been forgiven you. We don't hold that against you at all, but you had to make that independent step. That's a very important thing, you see.

We were very strictly brought up. When I was a little kid, we would sooner be dead than go to a movie on Sunday. That was absolutely unthinkable; we were petrified. But once a year, my mother would take my brother and me, and we would go to a show on Sunday. Well, I thought the lightning would strike us. I would go in tears. It was to [make this point] perfectly clear. If we didn't, we'd be perfectly helpless. We'd be automatons; we'd get no merit for not going. Of course, the lightning didn't strike or anything like that. But it was to show us that we were free to act. We could go if we wanted; therefore, if we didn't go, we got credit for that. Otherwise, we were just paralyzed; we were just automatons. We were just acting automatically.

This is the ancient law of liberty. I don't know whether I should refer to that. What's the alternative to going through this? Well, it's that men are either damned from the beginning by the will of God or blessed from the beginning. That's predestination, and this is the basic doctrine of Catholics, Protestants, Moslems, and everybody else. [Writes *predestination* on the board.] You can leave the *n* off if you want. St. Augustine in the fifth century gave it its official form *praedestinatio ad damnationem* or *praedestinatio ad salvationem*. You are predestined to be saved or to be damned, and there is nothing you can do about it. That sounds rather rigorous, and Gottschalk of Fulda in the eighth century tried to soften it. Many attempts were made. For example, St. Augustine didn't like it. Nobody liked this doctrine of predestination. It was too hard, but there was no alternative. If they hadn't been baptized, they would be damned. If they didn't know the doctrine, they hadn't been saved. That means infant damnation, because babies haven't accepted the gospel—or been baptized is what they really mean. He tried to get around it by a very amusing doctrine that he called “a mild damnation.” Yes, he said, they will be damned and damned to hell, but with a mild damnation. That reminds me, of course, of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The ladies say if he is a lion and roars, he will scare the ladies. He says, no, I won't scare the ladies. “I will roar as gently as any sucking dove.” He would roar gently, and they are damned gently. No, you can't be, of course.

Then there was a great debate between Raban Maurus and Hincmar, which was decided on the side of a rigorous predestination—that you are absolutely damned. Then Luther and Melancthon issued a joint statement which was rigorous predestinationism. Zwingli tried to soften it some. He said because God has infinite power to forgive, we shouldn't worry about that. But no [they decided] that wasn't so. They held the great council at Geneva in 1552, which was called “The Consensus of Geneva.” [The conclusion of] that was very strict predestinationism. In fact, it was superlapsarianism, which means that God from all eternity, before you even existed, already damned or blessed every human being to eternity. Before you even existed, your damnation had been assured, or your salvation had been assured, and there is nothing you can do about it. That became the official doctrine of the church with the Council of Geneva in 1552. It's called “the consensus” because they did concede it.

This strictness was taken up in the Arminian controversy in Holland. It ended with the beginning of the Thirty Years War. That had something to do with its rigors because

Arminianism was very strict predestinationism. The Council of Dordrecht declared it in 1619, the second year of the Thirty Years War. That rigorous absolutely damned or absolutely saved [doctrine] has a lot to do with the Dutch temperament—the unyielding, intransigent Afrikaners, for example. They know how to be cruel and they know how to be absolute, because “righteousness is righteousness.” What they are is absolutely right [in their eyes] because of this rigorous Arminianism of the Arminian Controversy in 1619. It’s very important because it influenced all Europe. They got into the Thirty Years War right after it. It made them absolutely unyielding because God is absolutely unyielding. [According to this doctrine] he made us that way. We are absolutely damned, and there is nothing we can do about it. The Methodists and the mild John Wesley accepted it. Whitefield opposed it; he wanted to soften it some. They had some famous debates in 1741, and Whitefield came to America and preached here. It’s still going on. In the 1870s all the Protestant churches in America were rent by the Walther Predestination Controversy. So they’ve always had to accept it, but they never liked it because it is a very unpleasant and mean sort of thing. But they couldn’t think of any way to get around it, so they were stuck.

We get away from predestination this way, and we don’t find any contradictions here [in Alma] either. But notice this paradox. It looks as if we had a Catch [22] too, doesn’t it? Having first transgressed, they placed “themselves in a state to act.” That’s why he transgressed. Why can’t you act without transgressing? Well, in the presence of God are you going to sin? Are you going to misbehave yourself with God looking on? Remember when the heavenly visitors say, “We will leave you now, but we will return later on.” Then Satan steps onto the stage and says, “Now, is the great day of my power. Adam is on his own now.” It’s the same in the opening lines of the book of Moses. Remember, Moses is smitten and helpless on the ground. He can’t stir his bones for many hours, and he finally begins to move. When he is in this weakest, most helpless condition, then Satan strikes, because Moses is absolutely alone. But [Moses] can remember something of his former existence, and he begins to taunt Satan about being short on glory. He is not the real thing, and Moses recognizes him as a fake.

We had to be made independent this way with this act of defiance, didn’t we? But it wasn’t an act of defiance; Adam chose to go his way was all. He was independent, and he was willing to pay the price for it, too. He did, too—death was the price. That’s the wages he paid. Death came into the world. Remember: “In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die.” He had been told that much, so he was willing to take the chance in that case. We have to give Adam credit for that. He went out on his own, but he had to do that. He had to be cut loose that way.

Verse 32: Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death.” The price [for that] is a second death. Once you’ve known the plan, the price is the second death. Adam didn’t know the plan when he sinned, we are told here; therefore, he was eligible for redemption. He was innocent. He was not defiant; he was being independent. But, as it says in verse 32, after you’ve known the plan then it’s the second death, which is on a different level. “For on such the plan of redemption could have no power.” They sinned in ignorance the first time, but you are not sinning in ignorance this time.

Then we get the word *harden* again; every verse for the rest of the chapter has a *harden* in it. Remember [the lines from Shakespeare] about the clay: “But, whilst this muddy vesture

of decay / Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.” The muddy vesture proceeds to harden on us; that’s what we do here. Verse 33: “If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son [every verse now has mounting severity in it here; once you know the plan, you are in the game]. Therefore, whosoever repenteth and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins [it’s a law of nature]. . . . And now, my brethren, behold I say unto you, that if ye will harden your hearts ye shall not enter into the rest of the Lord. . . . He sendeth down his wrath upon you as in the first provocation . . . to the everlasting destruction of your souls.”

Well, is this too strong: “the everlasting destruction of your souls” just for this? Notice how beautifully it’s put in Jacob 6:8. This is how the Lord treats us here, which means that we deserve what we get. “Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you?” You’ve had all these chances, you see. The Lord appeals to you when he calls on you at different times. Here it is again in verse 6–7: “Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for why will ye die? For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire?” So you reject, you despise, you deny, you quench, you mock. You’ll have nothing to do with it, and it’s entirely up to you. The power of redemption, of course, can have no power upon you because you don’t want it.

We’re back here [in Alma], and he is saying the same thing. Verse 37: “And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts.” He keeps repeating that theme—don’t get hardened in your ways. That means be changeable, break the mold, get back where you should be. Alma 13:1: “And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children [this goes way back to the preexistence, the whole plan having been made there]. . . . The Lord God ordained priests . . . to teach these things unto the people. And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.” Now concerning this ordaining of priests, notice that the next verse says “in the first place.” Then it says in verse 5 again “in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren.” What is “in the first place”? Is this in the preexistent state here? These priests were ordained in the first place for that particular purpose. And what does it mean “after the order”? Notice in verse 7 it says, “This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words [we are not talking about a time sequence at all], being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared [for how long?] from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things.”

This is the timeless, ongoing plan of which the priesthood is a conductor of power or energy. But “after the order of something” is to share in its nature, to share in its basic qualities, etc. Aristotle and the *Gospel of Philip* said, a flea is after the order of a flea, a dog is after the order of a dog, a horse is after the order of a horse, etc. What is it that makes a person eternally, indivisibly, uniquely himself after the order of something? We’re all after the particular order of man, as Aristotle would say, but we are all individuals, too. What is it that makes you individual? John Eccles is the great authority on the brain, and

he gave some talks here. He said it's that great mystery, the ultimate awareness of self, the ultimate consciousness. It's the absolute mystery of consciousness. If you could share that with somebody, then there would be a real atonement. Then you would be at-one, wouldn't you? Then you would be one. To all effects and purposes, you would be one person because you would be of one mind. Well, we are told that the people in Zion are "of one heart and one mind." Well, your mind is what you are; it's all you are. If you were of one mind with somebody else, [you would be one]. You have to read 3 Nephi 19 and the Gospel of John, chapters 13–17. He devotes all those chapters just to show how the Father and Son are one, how we become one with them in time, and what it means by "becoming one." That's it. If you become of one heart and one mind, how can you become more one than that, as the Father and the Son are? You can be separate persons at the same time. He is talking about that here in verse 2: "... thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption [the priesthood represents the Son here]. And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world [eternity to eternity—this is the way it has always been] 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."

They had earned a place in the priesthood here because of something righteous they had done in the first place. That's very interesting because *sp tpy* is a very favorite expression with the Egyptians—at the time of the *p3w.t* or the *sp tpy*. It means "the first place, in the preexistence, at the time of the Great Council of the *pꜣt*. Verse 3: "... in the first place being left to choose good or evil." Notice "being left." When God leaves you, then you can choose good or evil. Leave me alone if I'm going to choose [between] good and evil. These people way back there were left to choose good or evil, and they chose good. You are the one that makes the decision. When you are pulled equally in two directions, who decides which direction you go? You receive countless impulses and impressions all day long, but you can only focus on one at a time. Which do you choose to focus on, to make all the others just side issues or something behind you? The other becomes incidental, just a framework for that. You'll concentrate on the thing that you want to. That decides what you will do. Your mind flits around with tremendous speed, like your eyes, and decides what you like to look at and what you are going to do. That's why anything like drugs [are so harmful]. That's why the Word of Wisdom is so important—that we be absolutely cold sober. That's why in the temple we have no kind of narcotics—I mean no music, no colored lights, no processions, no gorgeous costumes, no incense. John Chrysostom wrote on that in the fifth century when he opposed introducing images and big pictures into the churches, etc. He said that people in church start getting interested in the arts and so forth. It was the same thing with the *antiphon* (anthem) in the Roman mass, which was originally the mass of Aix-la-Chapelle. It was the Gallican mass of Charlemagne that was imported into Rome. But then they started the *antiphon*. That's the anthem that begins it, which means "the trying out of the voice." The tenor would try out his voice. He would go up and down [the scales], as only an Italian tenor can. People would be so fascinated by that—that was the whole meeting. People would just come to hear the tenor. Being very Italian, it became an opera, as it was in the baroque. When they started the Counter Reformation, they attracted people away from the Protestants by putting on a tremendous show. All the art work in great St. Peter's was designed by Michelangelo, but Bernini was the one who decorated it. He said, this is the *theatrum Dei*; this is God's theater. People will come here for a show. And it has been that. (I don't know how we got off onto that, but we did.)

Verse 4: “And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith [they had faith at that time], while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds.” Well, why were they hard and blind? I don’t know; ask them. It’s the mystery of iniquity. Why do we choose good or bad? You have it in yourself—you know.

It’s like the New England farmer. The government agent came around and said, “I can teach you how to farm twice as well as you are doing now.” He said, “Shucks, I’m farming half as well as I could right now.” That’s true. If you want to know why somebody is greater than you are—why we’re so small and God is so great—you don’t have to ask any questions. You know why—you don’t make half an effort. I mean I have no right complaining about anything. I want to see people run circles around me, in my field or anywhere else. It gives me a thrill to know it can be done. But you know why you are not greater at this or that than you are. An athlete [should] try to excel himself, nobody else. There will always be somebody who is faster than you are. At the beginning of the great Panathenaic oration by Isocrates, given to all the Greeks met together, he said if every man in Greece could run twice as fast as he does, or lift twice as much, or jump twice as high, or throw twice as far, we would be no better off. Animals do those things better than we do anyway. But if just one man could think twice as well as anybody else, the whole world would be blessed forever after [paraphrased]. That’s where it really counts, and that’s where the Lord comes in. Remember the marvelous testimony that Oliver Cowdery gave. He said when that angel came, that electrifying intelligence just wiped everything else out. He never knew there was anything like that before. Men are just fools, and he saw what they are. Should we read it? Well, that’s what Alma is talking about anyway, so this is relevant, believe me. [He looks for the testimony.] I believe it’s right at the end of the Pearl of Great Price. They put it in different places. It’s such an impressive thing he says. It’s right after Joseph Smith’s history. There it is! It is the last thing in the book [except the Articles of Faith]. Look at the size of the print—it’s invisible! [See Oliver Cowdery’s description in the note to Joseph Smith–History 1:71.]

Oliver Cowdery said, “The Lord, who is rich in mercy, and ever willing to answer the consistent prayer of the humble, after we had called upon Him in a fervent manner, aside from the abodes of men, condescended to manifest to us His will.” Remember, the return of the gospel in every dispensation has always come as a surprise because men have been so far off. There has been a great cultural shock. The angel always has to say, “Don’t be afraid—this is all right. I’ve come to give a message.” It’s a great culture shock; they were not used to anything like this. This is what Joseph Smith went through, and Oliver Cowdery had a taste of it here where he said, “On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the veil was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the Gospel of repentance. What joy! what wonder! what amazement! While the world was racked and distracted—while millions were groping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a general mass, our eyes beheld, our ears heard, as in the ‘blaze of day’; yes, more—above the glitter of the May sunbeam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature! Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, ‘I am thy fellow-servant,’ dispelled every fear [there’s always that, you see]. We listened, we gazed, we admired! ‘Twas the voice of an angel from glory, ‘twas a message from the Most High! And as we heard we rejoiced, while His love enkindled upon our souls, and we were wrapped in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt? Nowhere; uncertainty had fled, doubt had sunk no more to rise, while

fiction and deception had fled forever! [He apostatized later, but he came back and always testified to this.]

“But, dear brother, think, further think for a moment, what joy filled our hearts, and with what surprise we must have bowed, (for who would not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hand the Holy Priesthood as he said, ‘Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!’

“I shall not attempt to paint to you the feelings of this heart, nor the majestic beauty and glory which surrounded us on this occasion; but you will believe me when I say, that earth, nor men, with the eloquence of time, cannot begin to clothe language in as interesting and sublime a manner as this holy personage [notice that he calls it ‘interesting:’ the angel had something interesting to say; that’s refreshing, isn’t it?]. No; nor has this earth power to give the joy, to bestow the peace, or comprehend the wisdom which was contained in each sentence as they were delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit! Man may deceive his fellow-men, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have power to seduce the foolish and untaught, till naught but fiction feeds the many, and the fruit of falsehood carries in its current the giddy to the grave; but one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world or one word from the mouth of the Savior, from the bosom of eternity, strikes it all into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind. The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel, the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Savior’s goodness with wonder and thanksgiving while I am permitted to tarry; and in those mansions where perfection dwells and sin never comes, I hope to adore in that day which shall never cease.” This is the way it hits you. He is introducing us to something very strange that the Christian world finds very difficult to accept. It gets around predestination very nicely. Christians and Moslems have never been able to shake off predestination, because for some reason we are just made this way.

Now he’s going to tell about Melchizedek here. Alma 13:10: “. . . they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish.” You must make this choice, you see. So they were “washed white through the blood of the Lamb [that’s the Atonement we were talking about]. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence.”

[The Lord said], “I shall place enmity between thee and the serpent.” Of course, at the sight of a serpent you jump, and you jump high, because you don’t know how deadly it is going to be. But that enmity is your first line of defense. You can overcome it, of course. You can yield to it [temptation], and then get in deeper and deeper. That enmity hits you in the solar plexus. It hits you directly. You don’t have to argue about it. You are walking along, and there’s a big bull snake. You jump like that, you see. But really, the snake is rather nice. There was a rattler with which I used to commune on one of the trails up here. We’d get together all the time; he was always there. There was another one with which I used to go swimming down in Hurricane. In one of those washes in Hurricane, there’s a nice clean pool. Rattlesnakes love water. I would go swimming, and they would go swimming. They were just as nice as they could be in the hot sun, etc. You don’t play around with them, grab them by the tail, or anything like that. But they are pretty nice if

you can get along with them. The first line of defense is that it's dangerous. Don't fool around; you don't do that sort of thing. Like this man who had been bitten 148 times, up in Salt Lake City. Now he has been bitten 149 times, and he is recovering from the bite of an African viper. Wow! Don't try it.

This is what you must do, he says in verse 14: "Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek." Then he tells about Melchizedek and his people. These people were as bad as they could be, yet they were saved. What this shows us is that it is possible, making all eligible for judgment. If it is possible for the most wicked to become righteous, as Jeremiah says, then we are all responsible for not becoming righteous. Don't say you "have stepped in too far, that wade no more would be as tedious as go o'er."

Verse 17: "And his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness; But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent." Notice that this world doesn't have to be an evil place. It certainly is that, but it doesn't have to be. We are capable of much better things, all of us all the time. It took Abraham and Melchizedek to get the world off dead center, because once you get in your habits, once you get rooted in, these things become institutionalized, etc. What can shake them? They had to make the first move though, and then God spoke to them. Remember, there must be a stirring below before there can be a stirring above. Abraham prayed for a long time, as we read in [Abraham 2:12], "Thy servant has sought thee diligently; now I have found thee." You seek before you find, you knock before it is opened, and you ask before you receive. But you make the first move; the miracle of Abraham was that he did. Melchizedek did the same thing. One person makes a difference. That's a very strong theme in the Book of Mormon—the lone man against the system—whether it's Alma, or Lehi, or Nephi, or the brother of Jared, or Ammon. It's all what one man can do.

Verse 19: "Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater." That's an interesting thing. Isn't that rather a vague term? What do they mean by *great*? Who are the people who are called *great*? It's a very interesting thing that the title is never bestowed officially. It's never bestowed by any rank, with any office, or anything like that. It doesn't go with [an office]. It is bestowed historically by popular consent. It is associated with people who combine certain qualities in rare combinations. You think of people like Alfred the Great, Alexander the Great, Peter the Great, and Charlemagne—meaning "Charles the Great." They all had certain things in common. We have Asser's life of Alfred, for example. We have very good [biographies] of Charlemagne and the rest of them. We have Arrian's life of Alexander. In every case these men recognized their human weakness and recognized that other people were human, too—as great men didn't in those days. They were very human and actually very humble. They were very humane; they always played fair. Very few men did, so these men became "the great." The second thing about them is that they were always of a passionate nature. I was thinking of a different case. The Koran says of Ali that when he smote, he smote; when he loved, he loved; what he did, he did. "Man do your thing." Whatever you do, do it all the way. They did that. That stretched themselves out, exhausted themselves, did all the work, etc. These men worked themselves to death just for the people, and they had these high ideals for everybody else—Charlemagne, Peter, Alfred, and the rest did. They had this obligation to act. Success is not the test. They were generous, liberal, and noble characters. Yet they were able to accomplish great things that other people weren't able to [accomplish] because they wouldn't make the concessions.

He [Mormon] talks about this greatness. There were none greater than Melchizedek. What did he do? He saved his people; he worked his head off for them. He preached repentance and they repented. With the wickedest people on earth, he must have done an awfully good job. It was the same thing with Enoch. The Lord told Enoch that there is no end to the workmanship of His hands; He has created worlds without end. “And among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren (Moses 7:36).” This is the wickedest world that ever came out of the mill, and you can see that’s so today. There’s only a glimmer of decency anywhere anymore. Of course, there are people that mean well, etc., but as far as the world as a whole goes, “darkness covereth the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people” (D&C 112:23).

Verse 20: “Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction.” It can be done, just as it can be done with the Constitution or anything else—you can wrest them. How can you avoid that natural tendency to wrest them in your own interest? Of course, take them in their full context and with prayer. Prayer doesn’t give me a franchise to give my personal interpretation and impose it on anybody else. As Karl Popper said, it has to be the method of discussion. We have to discuss these things among ourselves.

Verse 22: “Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy.” Well, that is what the angels declare in Luke 2:10. This is a case of biblical parallelism; this is not taken out of the New Testament. Biblical parallelism requires that you reinforce every verb. The Arabs must do it with a *maṣḍar*; it’s a rule. You wouldn’t say, “He rejoiced greatly.” You would say, “He rejoiced a great rejoicing.” You wouldn’t say, “He brought very joyful tidings.” You would say, “He brought tidings of great joy.” This is in form, as I said. He is not lifting anything from Luke. “Yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us [the Book of Mormon is not provincial, you notice]. And they are made known unto us in plain terms [this gospel he has been talking about is not so difficult], that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this because of our being wanderers in a strange land.” After five hundred years are they still wanderers in a strange land, as Jacob said, “a lonesome and a solemn people”? They could still be nomads. The two civilizations mix all the time; they are both nomadic. They have their flocks, and we will read a lot about flocks pretty soon.

“Therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard. For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land.” They are preparing the people for his [the Savior’s] coming. You see that angels are always for special events. Alma refers often to angels because he has seen them and conversed with them. “And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels [only just men who can be trusted], at the time of his coming. . . . I wish from the inmost part of my heart . . . that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance.” Of course, it’s important that you never procrastinate when you are given a commandment. Should Nephi have waited before going back to Jerusalem? He might have said, well, I’ll wait until things calm down and the coast is clear. Then it will be safer to go back to Jerusalem. No, he said, if the Lord commanded me to do that, he will give me a way of doing it, so I’ll do it—and he did it. That’s the way we should do. We must not procrastinate keeping the

commandments, whether they are the covenants we have made or anything else. St. Augustine did that with the law of chastity. He said in the *Confessions* when he was seventy years old, he used to pray, “God give me chastity and continence, but not yet.” We say the same thing. Yes, I’ll observe that when the time is right or there’s a more fit condition. And expect to get a reward for that. No, don’t expect it.

Verse 28: “. . . becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering.” Here are these traits again that we regard as so wimpish. Is that the way you claw your way to the top? No, you don’t. “Having faith on the Lord” and hope and love. Notice he uses *love* in the place of *charity* here, which is the way they now translate it in the New Testament. In the new Revised Translation they say, “faith, hope and *caritas*, which is love. He has it here as “faith, hope, and love,” showing the words can be used interchangeably. (We finally got to the end of chapter 13; I thought it would take us the rest of the year.) Then he talks about being “bound down by the chains of hell” and suffering the second death. This is the ultimate condition of being immobilized, petrified, mummified, hardened, institutionalized, and all those things. That’s the alternative.

Then he told them to search the scriptures, and many of them began to search the scriptures because that’s where they would find the word of the Lord. When the prophet speaks what does he say? He says, “Read the Book of Mormon; it will convey the truth to you.” Now that is a very important thing. In the last part of Luke 24, the Lord appears. Certain people had come to the tomb, and he rebuked them and said, “O fools [*anoētoi* means ‘fools, empty headed, unconsidering ignoramuses’], and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken [about Christ] . . . And beginning at Moses and all the prophets,” he explained all the scriptures to them from the beginning, wherever they concerned him. Now here is the Lord himself coming in person. But what is he doing? He is giving his message from the scriptures. Why doesn’t he say, forget the Bible, I dictated all that. I’ll give it to you straight now. [We might say], we have a prophet; we don’t need to study the scriptures anymore. No [that’s not true]; the Lord himself was there. After he left them, the brethren were conversing later and said, “Did not our heart burn within us? They finally recognized it, and then their eyes were opened for the first time after he explained from the scriptures what would happen to him. They said to each other after he had left, “Did not our heart [singular] burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). The scriptures made their hearts burn.

Oliver Cowdery [in Doctrine and Covenants, section 9] wanted to see the plates and wanted to engage in translation. That’s what he had been asking for. In sections 6, 7, and 8, Oliver Cowdery insisted on getting in on the act of translating; it rather excited him. The Lord told him he had made a mistake—you think that all you have to do is ask me and I will give it to you. The Lord said that’s wrong. You must think it out in your own mind. You must have your own theory and your own conclusion and then ask Him if it is right. If it is right you will have a burning in your bosom. The apostles said, did we not have a burning in our bosom as the Lord explained the scriptures to us? So the Lord told Oliver Cowdery, when you read the scriptures ask me if it is right. First you make up your own mind about it and ask me if it is right. Then if it is right, you will have this burning. If it isn’t, you will have a dullness of spirit, and it will be wiped out. That’s the control we have. Here we have the word of the Lord. When the prophet speaks to us today, we say, “All right, what am I going to have for breakfast, prophet?” It’s not that way at all. His word is “read the Book of Mormon.” There you will find it all. The Lord refers them to the

scriptures. Repeatedly, the Lord, who was there personally, says, “Ye err not knowing the scriptures.” Search the scriptures if you want an answer. Remember where he said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” Well, you think you have eternal life. We just leave it there, which shows we haven’t searched the scriptures at all. He says there is one that testifies, and the scriptures testify, too. He says if you don’t believe in the Spirit, the best thing you can do is search the scriptures because *you say* they have the words of eternal life. It’s your opinion—you, yourself, say they have the words of eternal life, so if you want to find out about me read them. They testify of me, he says—you’ll learn of me from there. So the scriptures testify of the Lord, but you have to read them. You have to search them first. He tells them that. Of course, we slide over that because we are puzzled by that “you think you have.” Do you just think you have? Are you mistaken? That’s not it at all. You claim to have eternal life in the scriptures, so search them. You’ll find my [the Savior’s] story there. The scriptures are very important [as it indicates] here.

Some of them began to search the scriptures, but, of course, the more part of them didn’t like Alma at all. That’s not what they were looking for—not in the least. They said he “had reviled against their lawyers and judges. And they were also angry with Alma and Amulek; and because they had testified so plainly against their wickedness, they sought to put them away privily”—with as little trouble as possible. That’s the stock solution, without any fuss—just get rid of them privily, you see. So they took them before the chief judge and said they “had reviled against the law,” etc. They said what he [Alma] had been teaching: “that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them.” They misunderstood, but Zeezrom knew what was going on. He had already had the discussion, and he knew how the brethren were being framed here. Verse 6: “And he also knew concerning the blindness of the minds, which he had caused among the people by his lying words; and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt.” He said, “Behold, I am guilty, and these men are spotless before God [as Judas did]. And he began to plead for them from that time forth; but they reviled him, saying: Art thou also possessed with the devil?” If they admit he was wrong, they would admit they were wrong because he was their leader. They were following him all the way. So they stoned him, and he got out of the place.

Now we have the most painful episode from the Book of Mormon. You think this is painful, inhuman, and unnatural. Well, look at it! Verse 8: “And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed . . . in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire.” They had a typical auto-da-fé. That’s happened a hundred times in history. Our enlightened race has done that sort of thing. This reads like some of the events of the Conquistadors when they would pile them all together in the fire. That’s what happened to the Waldenses. They [the persecutors] would get the whole town—men, women, and children—especially the women and children. (The men were out fighting in the hills; they were the Vaudois.) They would burn them all with all their scriptures and everything else, because you weren’t supposed to read the Bible.

And Richelieu said during the seige of a place when he ordered the burning of all the people in the town, “Get them together and burn them. God will know his own.”

They said, “But most of them are Catholics anyway.”

He said, “Don’t worry, God will know his own, so go ahead and burn them.”

They were doing a thing that has been done all the time. What about Auschwitz and Belsen? I was in Dachau just the week after it was liberated. They had pretty well cleaned it up, but it was awfully sickening. The mayor of Pforzheim told me that in a town of 80,000 people, 30,000 burned to death in the last air raid. So it goes. Coventry was the same way.

The vast extent of child abuse in our society today has stunned everybody now—the utter indifference to the children. Remember, the Lord said that’s the worst. “And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.” We are offending the little ones everywhere now, and it’s pretty awful. It [this kind of behavior] is disturbing. Verse 10: “How can we witness this awful scene? [is this as disturbing as the killing of Laban?] Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames. But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand.” How could he see such a thing? Remember, Nephi shrank from beheading Laban; he didn’t want to do it. The Lord had to argue with him for half an hour before he finally did. He didn’t want to; it was not in his nature. Alma could have saved them, and he wanted to, but he said, Don’t do it, “for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing . . . according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just.”

I went on a mission quite shortly after World War I, of all times, in German towns, and everybody had the same story. Nobody would believe anything. They wouldn’t accept religion because God would not allow that [the atrocities of war] to happen. Their sons were in the war. Where I stayed first, Mrs. Bauer had a seventeen-year-old boy who was killed in the war. She said, “Why? What was he guilty of? Why should God [punish him]?” They said, “There is no God; he would never allow that sort of thing.” Would he allow the holocaust? Would he allow the fire raids and things like that of World War II? Well, it is not God who is being tested here. It is men who are being tested here. We say he has failed to pass our test. We are not giving tests to him. That’s after we have refused again and again all his pleas. He has pleaded with us to do this, but we wouldn’t have anything to do with it. Now we say, “Look, he is bad—he has done what’s wrong.” But we must be left alone on our own. (I could read this passage from Irenaeus; I like it very much.) He [Alma] should not save them, but he is certainly wrestling here.

God has always permitted the great religious persecutions. Religion has been the main cause of persecution. Well, look what they are doing in Iran now; they just wipe them out. It’s even more ferocious in Iraq. In these persecutions why does God allow the innocent to suffer like this? That’s the old theme that we get from that. He lets our nature go all the way against each other and everything. He intervenes at times. He [isn’t] going to intervene here. But he explains why this is. Verse 11: But Alma said unto him [this is why] . . . and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.” If it had been their intention to do that and they hadn’t been able to carry it out, it would have been the same thing. Then they put them [Alma and Amulek] in jail.

I'm going to read a short passage from Irenaeus who was the bishop of Lyons in the year A.D. 170, which is quite early. He lived in Asia Minor and he knew people who had known the apostles. He was one of the last true lights in the church. He has a writing on what he called "The Ancient Law of Liberty." In his refutation of the Gnostics, Irenaeus in the middle of the second century set forth what he called the "Ancient Law of Liberty."

He said, the law is illustrated by the scripture "How often would I have gathered thy children together, . . . and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). The Lord wanted to save Jerusalem. He wanted to gather them together often, but they wouldn't so he wasn't going to force them. This was where they were mourning, and he said, you are not going to see one stone upon another before long. The whole thing is going to fall. Irenaeus said, "For 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. . . . Now if God made some men good and some bad [which is the essence of predestination] 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. Irenaeus further explains, "God wants me to do good, but even the Gospel allows anyone who does not 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"—because they can't sin.

As Beatrice says to Dante, "God made me this way. That's why you're in heaven and other people are in hell. I can't do anything about it. God just made me that way." That's predestinationism, but it doesn't work in the early church. This is way back, and we go even earlier further on here. "The ancient law of liberty is that God trusts men while on this earth to make their own choices, while they trust him alone to judge whether those choices have been good or bad."

The second aspect of the law is that God alone shall judge. I've mentioned before this argument between Peter and Simon Magus: Peter begins the discussion by invoking peace on the whole assembly and expressing the desire that everything be peaceably and amicably discussed. This signal for the self-righteous Simon Magus to explode with the indignant declaration that champions of truth don't ask for peace, since they are determined to "kick the stuffing" out of error and will only call it peace when the opposition lies helpless before them. It is weakness and cowardice in Peter, he says, to ask for peace for the wrong as well as for the right side. In reply Peter says we must imagine this world as a vast plain in which two cities strive for mastery (that's the doctrine of the *maidan*), each claiming the whole land as its own. The king of one city sends to the other proposing a peaceful discussion in which the matter might be decided without killing anybody. In this he is not weak; he has no intention of giving the other king a single blade of grass that does not 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 that his cause is really a weak one. Simon Magus then applies his argument against Peter to Peter's God, bringing out the favorite old chestnut of the schools (this is the one they always talk about): either God is vicious because he does not want to prevent evil or weak because he cannot.

“Could not God have made us all good,” he asks, “so that we could not be anything else but virtuous?”

This is exactly what Augustine asked, “Oh miserable necessity, not to be able not to sin. If God had made us only so we couldn’t sin, we would be so much happier,” he said. The miserable necessity is being able to sin. Well, that is just the opposite. You would miss the whole point, according to Alma.

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 [we would be programmed for just one act]; 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?”

Now he is giving the plan of the gospel. This is given way back there. This is from the *Clementine Recognitions*, the earliest Christian writing known after the New Testament. It is very closely related, to everyone’s surprise, to the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is very early Christian doctrine. “For this reason the world has existed through the ages, so that the spirits destined to come here might fulfill their number, and here make their choice between the upper and the lower worlds, both of which are represented here, so that when their bodies are resurrected the blessed might go to eternal light and the unrighteous for their impure acts be wrapped in a spiritual flame.” In this work, says Peter, “every man is given a fair chance to show his real desires.”

To the 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. He did not draw back or hesitate, nor was he afraid of what would happen.” Evil is forced on no one, he explains, it is only there for those who want it (there’s a Book of Mormon teaching again). No one comes under its sway “save he who of his own free will deliberately subjects himself to it.” You must deliberately of your own free will subject yourself to Satan, or he will have no power over you.

This is the ancient doctrine that we have here. It is not so mysterious or baffling or contradictory that we have to accept predestination or the philosopher’s argument. Here it is again:

O thou that do with pitfall and with gin
Beset the way I was to wander in
Wilt thou then with predestination round
Enmesh me and impute my fall to sin?

God lays traps for us. It is our nature to sin [according to the poet]. When we fall into the trap, he says, “Hah, you sinned.” You can’t do anything else; he set the trap for you. So no wonder the man is cynical about that. What is another verse to the same effect? Oh yes,

O thou who didst man of baser metal make
And who with Eden didst create the snake.

For all the sin wherewith the face of man is blackened,
Man's forgiveness give and take.

He [the poet] says contemptuously that God created Eden and the serpent and then blamed us for what happened. This is the dilemma. This is a very pious Moslem who wrote the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. He was one of the *sufis*. They are teaching the same predestinationism, and it makes them very cynical, you see. You [God] created the garden and the snake and surrounded us with predestination by our very natures. When we sin we are damned, and that's not fair. Well, that's not what the early Christians taught, and its not what the Book of Mormon teaches. It's strange that the world has never been able to break loose from it.