

The Great Plan of Redemption

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At our last devotional we heard a musical tribute to our friend and colleague Brother Dale Link, who passed away a few weeks ago. It was a beautiful work about American Sign Language entitled “They Carry Words in Their Hands.” I, too, would like to pay tribute to this good man, my friend, who exemplified the spirit of the Y, the spirit of optimism, unselfishness, and service.

In 1949 Fulton Oursler published a book on the life of Christ entitled *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. A few years later it was released as a movie by the same title. Truly the life of Christ is the greatest story ever told, but we know only the smallest part of it. At the end of his gospel, John tells us that he has given only a very small account of all of the things that Jesus did and said, and then says, “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

Because of the Restoration we know much more about his life: as the Holy One of Israel in ancient times, as the Mortal Messiah in the meridian of time, and as the resurrected Christ. And because of the Restoration we know more about his central role in the great plan of redemption. Doctrine and Covenants 76 and

3 Nephi are two of the greatest sources of revealed knowledge concerning the Messiah and his mission. But these sources, illuminating as they are, constitute only a small part of all that the Lord could convey to us of this “greatest story ever told.” Both accounts state that they are fragmentary—enough to produce faith and knowledge for our earthly progression but incomplete.

In 3 Nephi 26, Mormon tells us that the book of 3 Nephi, the abridgment that he has written of Christ’s ministry in America, contains only the smallest part of all that Jesus taught these early Saints. Mormon refers to it as “a lesser part of the things which he taught the people” (v. 8). He then speaks of this abridgement being delivered to us, the Gentiles of the last days, and says: “When they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them” (v. 9). We have a promise then, if we are faithful to the great truths of the Book of

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Mormon we have been given, we will someday be given more of the story.

At the end of Doctrine and Covenants 76, the Prophet Joseph Smith tells us that the account of his vision of the three degrees of glory is likewise only a small part of all that he and Sidney Rigdon saw:

This is the end of the vision which we saw, which we were commanded to write while we were yet in the Spirit.

But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpass all understanding in glory, and in might, and in dominion;

Which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for man to utter;

Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him;

To whom he grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves. [D&C 76:113–17]

It seems to me that a central message of the Atonement and the plan of redemption is the great love of the Father and the Son for each of us and the great worth to them of every soul:

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. [D&C 18:10–11]

What a wonderful thing to contemplate that the most powerful being in the universe is also magnificently kind, wise, gracious, benevolent, merciful, and loves and values each of us beyond anything we can imagine. It could have been otherwise. Imagine the gloom, darkness, and despair of living in a universe dominated by a tyrant. Or even imagine living in the

existentially empty universe portrayed by so many of the nihilistic philosophers of our time. Fortunately for them, as well as for us, they are wrong. In contrast, listen to this description the Lord gives of himself and of his stance toward us in the beginning of section 76:

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

Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.

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

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

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

For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man. [D&C 76:5–10]

He delights to bless us. He delights to pour out knowledge and wisdom upon us as we are ready to receive it. And bless us he does. All but the sons of perdition will finally obtain a kingdom of glory, as explained in verses 40 to 44:

And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—

That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;

That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him;

Who glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him.

Wherefore, he saves all except them.

A crucial part of understanding how he can save all the works of his hands is an understanding of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead, that which the Prophet Joseph Smith referred to as “this most glorious of all subjects belonging to the everlasting gospel” (D&C 128:17). This doctrine makes clear how salvation comes to all of the sons and daughters of Adam and how exaltation comes to all who will finally be valiant in the testimony of Jesus as they are permitted to learn the gospel, whether they receive it upon the earth or beyond the veil. And he further blesses us by giving each of us a part to play in this great drama of the redemption of the human family, both in earth life and also beyond the veil. It matters not whether that part be large or small, but only the devotion that we give to it. The genius of Church organization is that each of us has a calling, a part to play in carrying out the mission of the Church in our own ward. And, as I heard President Joseph Fielding Smith so eloquently state, “It matters not where we serve; it only matters how we serve.”

We all love the stories of President Thomas S. Monson. He is a master at portraying for us the heroism in the lives of ordinary Latter-day Saints. Each has a noble part to play in the redemption of the human family, as do all of those who will come unto the covenant and be faithful, whether here or in the spirit world. God does his work through the humble. The honorable, good people of the earth of ordinary station are deserving of our honor and respect. Great things await them through the Atonement of Christ.

I believe that all of this is part of the plan of redemption. To understand this great plan in its fullness is to understand the meaning of the lives of the “numberless concourses of people”

(1 Nephi 8:21) that Lehi described in his dream of the tree of life, to understand the plan for how the Redeemer saves every living soul with that which each is willing to receive.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “when men receive their instruction from Him that made them, they know how He will save them” (*Teachings*, p. 12). Sometimes we see the macrostructure of this great plan in the sweeping panorama of the Apocalypse, such as John the Revelator’s portrayal of the seven seals, the scenes typifying the 7,000 years of the earth’s temporal existence. Sometimes we see it in visions of major historical events before they happen, such as Nephi’s vision in chapter 11 of 1 Nephi of the tree of life in Jerusalem—the ministry of Christ among the Jews. Or his vision in chapter 12 of the tree of life in America—his visit to the children of Lehi. Or his vision in chapters 13 and 14 of the unfolding of the events of the last days, beginning with the many nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles in medieval times and culminating in the foundation of a nation of freedom in which the gospel could be restored.

Sometimes we see the plan of redemption in the very personal histories of the lives of individual Saints, such as the stories of Ruth, Esther, and Job. Or we see it in emerging communities of believers, like the story of the joy of Alma’s converts at the Waters of Mormon or the stories of the lives of individual Saints and pioneers in our time in the scenes from the new Church video called *Ensign to the Nations*.

We will spend our entire earthly lives, and perhaps well beyond, learning this great story of the redemption of the human family. Whenever we begin to discover and uncover more of the great plan our Father has for us, it is joyful and edifying. It unfolds for us throughout our earthly lives if we are diligent and continues after we pass beyond the veil.

Truly the doctrines of the Restoration are from God, and truly they are doctrines of optimism. Regardless of the ignorance, the

darkness, the oppression, the evil, and the gloomy and arrogant false philosophies we may encounter upon the earth, we can rejoice in the knowledge that Christ has overcome the world and that he “saves all the works of his hands” (D&C 76:43). No wonder the Prophet Joseph would close his discussion of the doctrines of the redemption of the dead in section 128 with the poetry of rejoicing:

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

Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together, and let all the sons of God shout for joy! And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever! And again I say, how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven, proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms, principalities, and powers! [D&C 128:19, 23]

With respect to the vision of Doctrine and Covenants 76, Joseph said:

Nothing could be more pleasing to the Saints upon the order of the Kingdom of the Lord, than the light which burst upon the world through the foregoing vision. Every law, every commandment, every promise, every truth, and every point touching the destiny of man, from Genesis to Revelation, where the purity of the Scriptures remains unsullied by the folly of men, go to show the perfection of the

theory (of different degrees of glory in the future life) and witness the fact that the document is a transcript from the records of the eternal world. The sublimity of the ideas; the purity of the language; the scope for action; the continued duration for completion, in order that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee; the rewards for faithfulness, and the punishments for sins, are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men, that every man is constrained to exclaim: “It came from God.” [Teachings, p. 11]

I have a great love for the Book of Mormon. I love to teach from its pages. It brings together so many parts of the plan that may at first seem disparate but are in fact all of one. Indeed, the phrase “the great plan of redemption” is from Amulek in the Book of Mormon (Alma 34:31). The Book of Mormon is a window on the Old Testament that clearly explains the Abrahamic covenant. Nephi’s commentary in the first two books is an illuminating tutorial in the sublime poetry of Isaiah. And in the first verse of 3 Nephi 23, the Messiah himself picks up the Isaiah commentary that Nephi began, and he commends Isaiah’s words to us: “Great are the words of Isaiah,” and “a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently.” The Book of Mormon integrates the words of the prophets of ancient Israel into the gospel plan and brings the Old Testament and New Testament together.

I have a good friend who is a rabbi as well as a psychologist. I brought him here about 10 years ago to teach summer term at BYU—a class in psychology and one on Jewish traditions. It was wonderful to have him here. He brought Susan and me a gift of the Torah, edited by Gunter Plaut, his favorite source. It was a big book with a dark blue cover, and inside the front cover was: “To Bruce and Susan from Aron and Sarah.” We went to the distribution center in Salt Lake City and found a large-print copy of the Book of Mormon, also with a dark blue cover and about the same

size, and we gave it to them: "To Aron and Sarah from Bruce and Susan." To my surprise, he immediately began reading it and showing me things I'd never seen. I remember him saying, "This is a book written by a Jew to a Jew in a very unself-conscious way." After he showed me, I could see many ways that the book assumes knowledge of Jewish tradition. It was something of a mystery to him, for, as he said, "Knowledge of Judaism was in short supply on the American frontier in 1830."

He showed me, for example, that the backdrop to the story in 1 Nephi includes the celebration of three of the fundamental feasts of the law: the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. You can read about these three feasts and their themes on pages 672–74 of the Bible dictionary, alphabetically listed under the heading "feasts." Additional information is given on pages 765–67 under the heading "sacrifices." In ancient Israel sacrifices were not just offered at random times but were an integral part of these three major feasts and involved instruction, celebration, and fellowship. They are much like our Thanksgiving but are combined with ritual and instruction. I picture them as a combination of the delight of learning and instruction that we have at general conference, but together with a wonderful Thanksgiving feast with one's family and friends in a yearly cycle. The feasts are one of the central ways our ancestors rejoiced in and taught each other about the things of God. Each feast celebrates a different aspect of the great plan of the redemption of God's people.

The instruction and ritual of these three major feasts centers upon three themes. The first feast is Passover. The theme is freedom, emancipation, the joy of deliverance from bondage, and going out from among the wicked to establish Zion in the wilderness. The second feast is the Feast of Weeks, and its theme is the joy of scripture, a celebration of receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai. The third great feast is the Feast of Tabernacles, in

October at the end of the feast season. The theme is the joy of harvest, symbolic of the harvest of souls in the end of days.

My rabbi friend saw something in the Book of Mormon that I had never noticed. Lehi and his family offer sacrifices three times in the book of 1 Nephi, and each time it fits the appropriate theme of these three major feasts of ancient Israel where sacrifices were to be offered. First, in chapter 2, they go out from among the wicked of Jerusalem to find a promised land, and they then offer sacrifice, consistent with the first theme of deliverance from bondage. Second, in chapter 5, they offer sacrifice in conjunction with their rejoicing in having received the brass plates of Laban, their Torah. Third, they offer sacrifice at the end of chapter 7 after having brought the family of Ishmael out of Jerusalem as converts to their divine mission, consistent with the theme of the harvest of souls. In chapter 17 Nephi rehearses for his brothers the story of the Exodus and how the children of Israel rebelled against Moses in the wilderness. As a family they would have celebrated and discussed this every year in connection with Passover, but it is now as if Nephi is saying to them, "Guys, pay attention here. This time we are doing it for real! We are reenacting the Exodus, going out from among the wicked to find the promised land, and you are acting just like the rebels in ancient Israel."

Alma speaks to this Passover theme in the fifth chapter of his book: "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?" (Alma 5:6). The focus of Passover is upon the deliverance from the captivity of the house of Israel in Egypt, where "the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage" (Exodus 1:13–14). Alma expands his discussion of deliverance to apply to the deliverance of his people from King Noah, a tyrant in the likeness of Pharaoh, and their deliverance from the Lamanites. He

finally expands this theme of captivity to deal with their deliverance from the bondage of sin. In verses 6 and 7 he says:

Have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?

Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word. [Alma 5:6–7]

Alma thus ties the theme of Passover to the doctrine of spiritual rebirth: “And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14). This is also the theme of going out from among the wicked to establish Zion in the wilderness. In 3 Nephi 20:41–42, in his extensive quotation of and commentary on Isaiah 52, Jesus gives these two verses from Isaiah:

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out of the midst of her [Babylon]; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.

For ye shall not go out with haste nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel shall be your rearward.

Even as freedom and the deliverance from oppression is joyous, so also is the great emancipation of the mind and soul that comes from the word of God. In 1989 I had a chance to experience the Feast of Weeks, the celebration of the Torah, in Jerusalem with Aron, my rabbi friend. We stayed up nearly the whole night reading and discussing the scriptures, as is their yearly custom. Since that time I have read 1 Nephi 5 in a different way. After the sons returned with the brass plates of Laban, we read:

And it came to pass that they did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel.

And after they had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning. [1 Nephi 5:9–10]

For the next six verses there is a rehearsal of the marvelous things that Lehi found in the brass plates, and then it says:

And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—

That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed. [vv. 17–18]

In the Bible dictionary it tells us that the third feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, is the greatest, the most joyous of all. It involves, among other things, the illumination of the temple courts by four golden candelabra and the drawing of water from the pool Siloam and its libation (pouring out) upon the altar: “Of this it was said that he who has not seen the joy of the drawing of water at the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what joy is” (Bible dictionary, p. 673). These thematic elements of light and water are dealt with by the Messiah himself in the seventh and eighth chapters of the Gospel of John. The libation of water represents the Spirit of God being poured out upon the nations, particularly at the great harvest in the end of days. In John 7:37–41 we read:

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost

was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.

Others said, This is the Christ.

The illumination of the four golden candelabra represent the Light and Life of the World: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Just before this final feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, in October at the end of the feast season, there is a fast day—the Day of Atonement—the most solemn and holy of all of the days of ancient Israel. The Day of Atonement is actually the culmination of the 10 high holy days (from the first to the 10th days of the seventh month), during which time the people of Israel were to put their lives in order in preparation for their fasting on the Day of Atonement—the one day in the year when the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to offer atonement for the sins of the people, obviously symbolizing the great Atonement of the Son of God. During these 10 days the people would turn inward to make themselves right with God, and then on the 15th day of the seventh month, the Feast of Tabernacles would begin and they would turn outward to other men.

We live in the great harvesttime, this time when we turn outward, when the gospel is to go to all the world. When we speak of the threefold mission of the Church, two of these—“proclaim the gospel” and “redeem the dead”—have to do with harvest: the first the harvest of souls upon the earth, and the second the harvest of souls beyond the veil. Abinadi spoke of our time when he said, “And now I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Mosiah 15:28). In this same discourse to Noah and his priests, he quoted from Isaiah 52: “How

beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace” (Isaiah 52:7). He spoke of how this refers to the missionaries in every dispensation of the world who preach the word and of how these messengers all go forth in the likeness of Christ: “For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people” (Mosiah 15:18). It is joyous to serve as a missionary and it is joyous to be one of those who hears the message of redemption and comes out from Babylon.

There is great joy in doing our part as a missionary and great joy in doing our part in the redemption of the dead, turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. We should not think of these twin charges to every member of the Church as an onerous burden. They are two of the greatest blessings in earth life, to have a part to play in the work of the Father in bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. I travel quite a bit, and I have made it a habit to always take a Book of Mormon with me to read on the airplane and to give to the person I happen to sit by. Last month, on the way back from Washington, D.C., I sat by a young woman from Detroit. She asked if I were a Mormon, and she told me about a wonderful man who works with her who is LDS. She said that she wanted to know more about the Church but that because they both work for the government he was not able to share literature about the Church with her. I asked her if she would like a Book of Mormon, and she said that she would and that she would read it. Because she seemed interested, I showed her many of my favorite passages in the book.

A few weeks ago I took my six-year-old granddaughter for a walk over at the new Timpanogos Hospital while we were waiting for her new little brother to be born. In the hospital entry there was a crisp, bright new

American flag. She touched some of the gold tassels hanging from it and asked me, “Which is more important, freedom or family?” I really didn’t have an answer, but I thought about her question for a while. Family is central to the great plan of redemption. So is freedom, emancipation from bondage—the great theme of Passover.

In the last three chapters of 1 Nephi, Nephi quotes two chapters from Isaiah concerning the redemption of the house of Israel and finally of the whole world. First, in chapter 20 (Isaiah 48), he speaks of the redemption of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and how the noble Cyrus, king of the Medes and the Persians, will be the instrument in the hand of the Lord in delivering his people. I love verses 15 to 17, where the Lord explains that even though Cyrus was the visible means of deliverance, in reality it was the hand of the Lord that had delivered them.

I the Lord, yea, I have spoken; yea, I have called him to declare, I have brought him. . . .

And thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I have sent him, the Lord thy God who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way thou shouldst go, hath done it. [1 Nephi 20:15, 17]

It is my testimony to you that he is the one who brings about these marvelous events in the history of the world, who delivers us from bondage.

Then, in chapter 21 (Isaiah 49), Isaiah speaks of the Gentiles carrying the children of Israel on their shoulders. In Nephi’s commentary on this chapter in chapter 22, he says that this symbolizes the gospel coming from the Gentiles unto the house of Israel—carrying them on their shoulders and ultimately blessing all of the families of the earth: “It meaneth that the time cometh . . . that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land” (v. 7). He

is speaking of the establishment of this free land of America. He then says:

The Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.

And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. [vv. 8–9]

This is obviously talking about our time, the last days, when the Lord will gather together all things in one and the gospel will be preached in all the world. Then, in the next two verses, Nephi quotes from Isaiah 52:10 to say something very interesting:

And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless he shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations.

Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel. [1 Nephi 22:10–11]

What does it mean for the Lord God to make bare his arm? And why is it necessary for him to do so in order for the families of the earth to be blessed by Abraham’s seed? In the case of Cyrus returning the Jews to their homeland, it was indeed the arm of the Lord that had done it, but not obviously so. But in preparation for the gospel to go to all the world in the end of days, the Lord will reveal himself in a way that is obvious to all. This has been a century of much evil and much suffering, and many have been held captive by oppressive and tyrannical governments. For the gospel to come to them, for them to be blessed by

Abraham's seed, there must be a deliverance. And for many there has now been a deliverance.

I believe this is speaking of miracles like the one we have witnessed in the past 10 years in the opening of the nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to the preaching of the gospel. What a wonderful surprise it was for the people of the earth when the Berlin Wall came down. Who would have supposed that it could happen? Who but the Lord could have brought it about? One of my favorite movies at the BYU International Cinema is entitled *The Promise*. It deals with the despair of those caught behind the Iron Curtain but ends with the contrast of the pulling down of the Berlin Wall in 1989, with people from the east side and the west side wandering about, mixing with one another in wonder, amazement, and joy at this great gift from the Holy One of Israel, this deliverance from bondage.

I am an optimist. I believe there will yet be many such wonderful surprises from the Lord. It helps my optimism to remember that the greatest, most powerful being in the universe is also the kindest and most loving Father of us all. I remember years ago hearing my friend and colleague Richard Draper give a lecture on the revelation of Saint John and the message of that book—that Satan is limited. The clear implication of the book is that God is in charge, that beasts and dragons can have power for a time, but only as it is allowed by God to fulfill his purposes. Regardless of the evil we see in the world, it is liberating to know that it is limited—ultimately under God's control and therefore not to be feared.

Both David and Jonathan in ancient Israel understood that great truth: It matters not whether there be few or many, "for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47). That knowledge gave Jonathan and David great courage. The destruction of the kingdom of evil in the last days in preparation for the millennial reign is also a part of the story of the redemption of the world.

It is interesting to see the preparation of the great prophets of our time. As I was looking through some of my old issues of *BYU Studies*, I found a poem about the tragedy of Berlin by President Spencer W. Kimball. The heading to the poem, an entry from his journal, reads:

Friday, August 26, 1955: I arose very early as was my custom. No one was around. I strolled out across the street, around the block, for several blocks and wept at the sight of the devastation. I plunged into a reverie and fell into the mood to write it down and returned to the typewriter.

President Kimball's poem is two and a half pages long, but I will quote just a few lines:

Ten years now since the world war tragedy!

High fences

Rusty fences

Proud, haughty fences around the former grand estates leveled in humiliation

Windblown gates unkept now hang and creak on rusty hinges

Ghosts of yesterday

Ghost houses, ghost yards

Broken swimming pools remind of luxury of the forgotten rich

Proud estates, spectre houses, all so still

No playful shouts, no children laugh

Silent walls, silent houses, silent death

Empty mailboxes—no letters ever more for them

Buildings leveled, pride leveled, innocence suffering

[Spencer W. Kimball, "Berlin," *BYU Studies* 25, no. 1 (winter 1985), pp. 54–56]

In the spring of 1974 our family lived in the Orem 32nd Ward. Elder Rulon G. Craven, who later became a member of the Quorum of the Seventy, was our home teacher. At the time he was serving as secretary to the Quorum of the Twelve and as a regional representative of the Twelve. One Sunday evening, following a

fireside in our ward, he told us about a wonderful experience. He had been present when President Kimball addressed the mission presidents of the Church in April of 1974. He said that it was one of the most powerful and stirring addresses he had ever heard, that he felt as if he were sitting at the feet of Moses. I will never forget what he said and the impact it had on us. Later, in November of 1974, this talk was published in the *Ensign*. It is the one we all know so well and that we have quoted for so many years, where President Kimball told us to lengthen our stride and that the day would come that there would be missionaries in Moscow. He told us we need many more missionaries—worthy missionaries—and that each young man should prepare and anticipate his mission with great joy. He also asked us to pray to the Lord that he would touch the hearts of the leaders of nations that the nations of the earth would be opened to missionary work. For 20 years we prayed in our families for these things, and then, in 1989, the miracles happened.

For many years now I have owned the *Journal of Discourses*, and I had read the first volume, but it was not until after the Berlin Wall came down in the fall of 1989 that I noticed a remarkable discourse by Elder Parley P. Pratt, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve at the beginning of this dispensation. He was speaking at a patriotic service in Salt Lake City on July 4 of 1853, just a few years after the Saints arrived here in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains. He expanded our view of July 4 as not just a celebration of the freedom of America but as a celebration of the emancipation of the whole world. He said that freedom would spread outward from this nation until it fills the whole world. These are his words:

When we contemplate the designs of [America], and its influence, we contemplate not merely our own liberty, happiness, and progress, nationally and individually, but we contemplate the emancipation

of the world, the flowing of the nations to this fountain, . . . blending together in one common brotherhood. They will thus seek deliverance from oppression, not in the style of revolution, but by voluntarily emerging into freedom. . . . I do not view it as do many, who suppose a revolution should take place in France, in Austria, in Germany, and the other nations, and that one revolution following another, would gradually emancipate mankind in every nation. . . . But Providence opens the way whereby they may liberate themselves. [JD 1:141–42]

It was as though Elder Pratt had seen the events of the past 20 years. He spoke of how communication would increase in the earth until people in every nation would begin to know of the affairs of people in other nations, and those who had been held captive by the tyrants of Europe would voluntarily walk into the light of freedom. How else could one explain what happened? He said that “to two hundred millions of people on the American continent, dignified by the principles of American freedom, Europe must bow, by the indirect influence which must necessarily be exercised on those despotic nations” (JD 1:143). Clearly, he was talking about our time—hundreds of millions of Americans living under the institutions of freedom.

Elder Pratt spoke of the beginnings of this “emancipation of the world” in the inspired voyage of Columbus, then of the coming of many others to America seeking freedom, the founding of this mighty nation, and how all of this would finally culminate in the great millennium:

Hence we contemplate that small beginning made by the American pioneers, by Columbus as the first pioneer, and by our fathers the pioneers of religion and liberty; we contemplate how that influence has spread and increased in the earth, influencing the feelings of individuals as well as national institutions. . . .

. . . We can only borrow the language of the Prophets, which is also insufficient to convey the idea properly, that is, The earth shall be full of knowledge, light, liberty, brotherly kindness and friendship; none will have need to teach his neighbor to know the Lord, but all will know Him from the least to the greatest; darkness will flee away, oppression will be known no more, and men will employ blacksmiths to beat up their old weapons of war into ploughshares and pruninghooks. Their occupation will be to develop the inexhaustible resources of nature, improve the intellect, and lay hold of the Spirit of the Lord, and live by it. The world will be renovated both politically and religiously.

These are but partial ideas. To view the subject in its true light, would lead the mind to contemplate all the practical truths in the universe, that are within the grasp of mortal man; indeed it may reach into immortality. We will acknowledge the hand of

God in the movements of men, and in the development of minds, the result of which will be the fulfillment of what the Prophet has spoken—the renovation of our race, and the establishment of a universal Kingdom of God, in which His will will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. [JD 1:143]

Let me close with my testimony to you that the prophets and seers see, that they know the great plan of redemption. I am grateful for the Prophet Joseph Smith, this great prophet who said he intended to revolutionize the world with friendship. I am grateful for our wonderful prophet of energy, optimism, and enthusiasm: President Gordon B. Hinckley. It is my testimony to you that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the World; that in him shall every good thing come; and that the great plan of redemption is true, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.