

THE KINGDOMS, THE GOSPELS, AND THE CHURCHES

by

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PREFACE

I would like to make it clear to any who read this that the thoughts expressed here are my own and that I take full responsibility for them. I realize that there are people who will disagree with some of these ideas and that, in some cases, certain issues may be considered controversial or even offensive to some. However, it has never been my desire to offend anyone or to create contention.

It is important for the reader to understand that the purpose I write things is not necessarily to publish or even preach the doctrines, ideas, and concepts included in this or any other work I have written. I also have no interest in making any money from the things I write. I have never charged anyone more than the price it costs me to make them a copy. Often, I don't even charge them that. Chances are that if you have this work it is because you are a close friend, a relative, or because you have asked for it. That said, I would be less than honest if I didn't mention that I hope this work helps you in your personal search for truth. It would definitely please me to know that it helped you learn more about God and the truths he has revealed to us. I have no concerns if copies of this work are made and given to those who may benefit from the things I have written. My permission is hereby granted to the reader to make copies of this work for righteous purposes. My only request is that good judgment and wisdom are used before doing so.

My main motives for writing are, for the most part, purely selfish. I enjoy learning about the things of God. I enjoy trying to organize my thoughts and beliefs in such a way that I can discover how supportable they are or how well they fit in with the other things I believe. I have found that writing about my beliefs helps me to discover such things and gives me a greater understanding about them. There have been many times that I have written something about a given subject or belief, only to find that I could not support it very well or that it didn't match well with other things that I believe to be true. These are what I consider my "failures." Even though I have learned from these experiences, what I learned was that I was wrong. If you are reading this, then what follows is probably what I consider to be one of my "successes."

Another reason I write things is to see if anyone else can find fault or error in what I believe. I am not so naive as to think that if something works in my mind, it must be true. I believe a real "truth seeker" will seek out those who can teach him and correct him. He will want to hear what others have to say about his beliefs. I believe this is a very important part of learning. Often there are times when I revise or correct things in my writings because of something someone else has said to me regarding them. This is great and I welcome it.

I should also mention that I have definitely sought the inspiration of the Lord while studying and writing. This has produced some very interesting experiences for me. I believe in personal inspiration.

As you read the things that follow, I would ask you to open your mind a little bit and to think a little deeper into the subjects discussed and the ideas expressed. Most of what follows came more by asking questions and following them through than by merely taking things at face value and accepting them. I am merely trying to answer some questions I have that have become somewhat important to me. I am seeking truth, and in this there is no fault of which I am aware. If someone can show me where I am wrong, I welcome that person, for it is the truth of the matter that I am after. However, until someone does so or through my own thoughts I come up with something better, I will, at least for the time being, tend to believe the ideas and theories of which I have written. In my own mind these things fit together very well. I hope I will be able to express them as well and as clearly as I see them.

Undoubtedly some people will claim that these writings deal with theories and/or mysteries of the gospel. Before we begin, I feel it is important to note what the Lord has told us about “theories” and the “mysteries” of the gospel. Regarding theories, the Lord has said,

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand; (D&C 88:77-78, underline added. See also D&C 97:14.)

Now, depending upon your testimony, a theory can be defined as something that has not yet been fully revealed. It seems to me that if the Lord has revealed something to us, it can be removed from the realm of “theory.” Thus we see that the Lord has given us “a commandment” to teach one another in such a way that we become more familiar with those doctrines, ideas, and concepts that have not yet been fully revealed. I see nothing wrong with this so long as we appreciate the fact that not everything is “expedient” for us to understand. Sometimes it takes a little more humility than we possess to recognize when something is not expedient, either for ourselves or for someone else.

Regarding the mysteries of the gospel, the Lord has told us,

If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things--that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal. (D&C 42:61, underline added)

The Lord has also said,

But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:23, underline added)

Contrary to popular belief, of the many scriptures that talk about the mysteries of the gospel, only a few speak of them in a negative sense.¹ And these are usually talking about missionary work or preaching the gospel, which makes perfect sense.²

¹ See Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Romans 11:25; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 1 Corinthians 13:2; 1 Corinthians 14:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; Ephesians 3:3; Ephesians 3:4; Ephesians 3:9; Ephesians 5:32; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 1:26; Colossians 1:27; Colossians 2:2; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Revelation 1:20; Revelation 10:7; Revelation 17:5; Revelation 17:7; 1 Nephi 1:1; 1 Nephi 2:16; 1 Nephi 10:19; Jacob 4:8; Jacob 4:18; Mosiah 1:3; Mosiah 1:5; Mosiah 2:9; Mosiah 8:19; Alma 10:5; Alma 12:9; Alma 12:10; Alma 12:11; Alma 26:22; Alma 30:28; Alma 37:4; Alma 37:11; Alma 37:21; Alma 40:3; Helaman 16:21; D&C 6:7; D&C 6:11; D&C 8:11; D&C 10:64; D&C 11:7; D&C 19:8; D&C 19:10; D&C 28:7; D&C 35:18; D&C 38:13; D&C 42:61; D&C 42:65; D&C 43:13; D&C 63:23; D&C 64:5; D&C 71:1; D&C 76:7; D&C 76:114; D&C 77:6; D&C 84:19; D&C 90:14; D&C 97:5; D&C 107:19.

² See Alma 12:9 and D&C 19:21.

Joseph Smith has said,

I advise all to go on to perfection, and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness. (TPJS Pg. 364)

Joseph Smith also said,

It should be borne in mind that these wonderful mysteries, as they are suppose to be, are only mysteries because of the ignorance of men; and when men and women are troubled in spirit over those things which come to light through the proper channel of intelligence, they only betray their weakness, ignorance, and folly. (Millennial Star 15:825)

It seems that theories and mysteries of the gospel are not just “okay” to study, but rather, we are actually encouraged to study and learn about them. The key comes in following the inspiration of the Lord, knowing what to share or not share, and in being humble enough to change and admit the errors of our ways.

That said, there are doctrines referred to by many as “mysteries” which can often be found with great repetition among the words of the prophets, both ancient and modern. What many people refer to as a “mystery” is often only a mystery to them, because they have not taken the time to search the scriptures and the words of the prophets to see what they say about the topic. Referring to those who believe that a person should go “thus far and no farther” as far as the study of religion is concerned, Henry Drummond once said,

There is often a great deal of intellectual sin concealed in this old aphorism. When men do not wish to go farther they find it an honorable convenience sometimes to sit down on the outmost edge of the “holy ground” on the pretext of taking off their shoes. Yet, we must be certain that, making a virtue of reverence, we are not merely excusing ignorance; or under a plea of “mystery” evading a truth which has been stated in the New Testament a hundred times, in the most literal form, and with all but monotonous repetition. (Spiritual Law, pp. 89, 90. See also the Seventy’s course in Theology, Pg. v by Elder B.H. Roberts.)

I hope that this work falls into this last category. I am very much an authoritarian as far as these writings are concerned. Great effort has been made to support the doctrines found within these pages. In most cases, whenever a concept is put forth, it will be accompanied with scriptures or quotes from general authorities.

If we are to obtain the Celestial Kingdom, I feel we must always strive to be open and teachable regarding our beliefs. This is important to understand as we ponder some of the thoughts that follow.

Curtis R. Porritt

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INTRODUCTION

One of the topics that ought to be addressed during any in-depth study of the gospel is the differences between the “lower laws” of the gospel, such as those found in the law of Moses, and the “higher laws” of the gospel, or mysteries. It is clear that the Lord has chosen to give his children higher or lower laws according to their faithfulness and diligence. The prophet Alma explained this principle to us very well.

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. (Alma 12:10)

One of the difficulties the Lord has in taking this approach is that all people seem to be at various levels of faithfulness. It is difficult, for example, to give a set of scriptures to a people that will meet the needs of both the weak and the strong at the same time. If they discuss the lower doctrines, the strong do not progress. If they discuss the “mysteries,” then the weak get left behind. The same is true for sermons preached by inspired leaders. It is difficult for the Lord to inspire his prophets to preach sermons that will satisfy the needs of both the proud and the humble at the same time. Generally the Lord must choose to accomplish one or the other, but not both. This can be both confusing and discouraging to those who are trying to progress in the gospel, no matter what level they are at.

The course we will follow in this discussion is directly related to the title of the work. I believe many of the differences between the higher and the lower can be made manifest through a discussion of the respective kingdoms, gospels, and churches. As part of this discourse we will attempt to show that there is a kingdom of the Father which is different from the kingdom of the Son. Likewise there is a gospel and a church of the Father which are different from the gospel and church of Jesus Christ. Though these may be new and bold thoughts to some, I believe a serious study of the scriptures and the words of the prophets will bear these things out, providing us with a greater understanding of our own progression in the gospel.

There is an inherent danger involved with a discussion such as this. As mentioned above, there are those who will not be as prepared to receive some of the things written here. To some, this work may provide a source of great joy and fulfillment. To others, it may be quite discouraging and discomfoting. As with all such works, caution, wisdom, and inspiration should be used before sharing this information with others. We should be sure that our motives are pure and that we are trying to do the work the Lord desires of us before sharing this or any other sensitive material with others. We should be mindful of the words Alma spoke concerning the mysteries of the gospel.

And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9, underline added)

This charge applies to us today as much as it did in Alma’s time. Therefore it behooves us to only impart those things unto others which God desires that we impart. This is a “strict command” from God to us. May we be diligent in obeying the same.

THE KINGDOMS

We are told that there are three main kingdoms of glory which we may inherit according to our worthiness. They are the Telestial, the Terrestrial, and the Celestial. This seems to be clearly outlined in the revelation found in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Even with all the knowledge we have been given concerning these three kingdoms, there is still a great deal that is not understood about them. Of this fact Joseph Smith once said,

Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob's ladder — the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter. I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them. (TPJS Pg. 304, underline added)

The significance of this statement by the prophet becomes even greater when we consider that he said it over ten years after he received the revelation found in section 76. As the prophet's knowledge and understanding grew, it is reasonable to assume that the information found in section 76 became a mere "drop in the bucket" when compared to what he must have known during the Nauvoo years.

Even though the prophet never publicly circulated any other revelation about the kingdoms that was as detailed and comprehensive as was section 76, there are other scriptures and statements made which can add a great deal to our understanding of those kingdoms and the manner in which they operate.

Differences Between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

By way of introduction, we will begin this section with an interesting account taken from the Book of Mormon.

During the Savior's visit to the Nephites he chose twelve apostles. At one point He asked them what they desired of Him after He left to the Father. The account tells us that nine of the apostles chose alike and that the other three expressed a different desire.

And it came to pass when Jesus had said these words, he spake unto his disciples, one by one, saying unto them: What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?

And they all spake, save it were three, saying: We desire that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our ministry, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom.

And he said unto them: Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me; therefore, after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest. (3 Nephi 28:1-2, underline added)

Notice that the nine apostles desired to come speedily into the kingdom of the Savior. The Savior's response was that they would be blessed because of their desire and that they would indeed enter into "my" or Christ's kingdom. One would think that they were all talking about the Celestial or highest kingdom available to them. However, if we continue reading we see that this may not be the case. Notice

in the following verses that the three apostles are “more blessed” than the twelve. Notice also that the three apostles inherit the kingdom of the Father instead of the kingdom of the Son.

And when he had spoken unto them, he turned himself unto the three, and said unto them: What will ye that I should do unto you, when I am gone unto the Father?

And they sorrowed in their hearts, for they durst not speak unto him the things which they desired.

And he said unto them: Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me.

Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.

And ye shall never endure the pains of death; but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; and then shall ye be blessed in the kingdom of my Father.

And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one; (3 Nephi 28:4-8, 10, underline added)

If the kingdom of the Son is the Celestial kingdom, we must ask ourselves how the three Nephites could possibly be “more blessed” than that. We must also ask ourselves why the Savior seems to make a distinction between the his own kingdom and the kingdom of his Father. These verses seem to clearly state that there were two separate sets of blessings received by these apostles, one set being greater than the other. It also seems clear that the nine who received the lesser blessings were going to go to Christ’s kingdom, while the three who received the greater blessings were going to go to the kingdom of the Father. This provides significant evidence that there are two separate kingdoms, one associated with the Father and the other associated with the Son.

That there are differences between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as pertaining to the kingdoms of glory seems to be clearly outlined in section 76. For example, of those who inherit the Celestial Kingdom the Lord has told us,

They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things--

They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; (D&C 76:55-56, underline added)

Notice that those who enter this kingdom receive of the “fulness” of the Father. However, of those who inherit the Terrestrial Kingdom the Lord has told us,

These are they who receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father. (D&C 76:77, underline added)

And of the telestial kingdom we find that we will only enjoy the presence of the Holy Ghost.

These are they who receive not of his [Christ's] fulness in the eternal world, but of the Holy Spirit through the ministration of the terrestrial; (D&C 76:86)

Notice that it is the “fulness” of Christ that we do not receive in the telestial kingdom. Apparently those in the Terrestrial kingdom who receive the “presence” of the Son are receiving of his fulness in the same way that those who enter into the presence of the Father receive of his fulness. Receiving the presence and receiving a fulness seem to be one and the same thing.³

We should ask ourselves what the differences are between the Father and the Son that would allow for such differences in the kingdoms of glory. The only thing I can think of that makes any sense is that the glory of the Father is greater than that of the Son. And the glory of the Son is greater than that of the Holy Ghost.⁴ Joseph Smith, speaking as Christ, once said,

My Father (Elohim) worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He then will take a higher exaltation and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself. (TPJS, pp. 347-348, underline added)

Not only does this statement indicate that there are separate kingdoms for the Father and the Son, but it also indicates that the Father’s kingdom is and always will be one step higher than that of the Son. This seems to be what 3 Nephi 28 and section 76 are trying to tell us as well.

The Celestial Kingdom of the Father

It seems that the Celestial Kingdom is the kingdom of the Father. As we have already read, those who inherit this kingdom will receive of the fullness of the Father. The word “fulness” indicates that there should be nothing more to be had. All that the Father is will be before those who inherit that kingdom. Returning to section 76 we read,

And thus we saw the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things--where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever; (D&C 76:92)

³ Compare D&C 93:1 with 93:20.

⁴ For a more detailed explanation of how the Son can possess all that the Father hath and still have less glory than the Father, see my other work entitled, “**The End From The Beginning, Some Thoughts On Progression.**”

It seems clear that God the Father in all his glory can be found in the Celestial kingdom. This seems to be His kingdom and He rules there personally.

The Terrestrial Kingdom of the Son

If the Celestial kingdom belongs to the Father, and the Son's kingdom is not as great as the Father's, then we must conclude that the Son's kingdom is likely the Terrestrial Kingdom. This is where we find the "presence" of the Son but not the fulness of the Father. As odd as this may seem to us, it seems to be a fairly supportable doctrine.

In addition to the evidence above, there are further indications that the Terrestrial Kingdom is Christ's kingdom, at least temporarily. For example, the apostle Paul tells us that those who are translated will go into the kingdom of the Son, Jesus Christ.

[God] Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: (Colossians 1:13, underline added)

This idea is supported further by Elder Erastus Snow.

The duties which are enjoined upon us are, first, to our own household — the household of God, those who have been baptized into Christ by being born again of the water and of the Spirit, and become the children of God by adoption. Next, to all men who have not thus been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and that love which is wrought in the Saints of God by the fire of the Holy Ghost through faith in and obedience to the Gospel, prompts all who are brought under its influence to yield obedience to its requirements and to labor for the well-being of every creature that bears the form of God. (Journal of Discourses 15:198, underline added)

With this in mind, Joseph Smith instructs us that the kingdom into which translated beings go is none other than the Terrestrial Kingdom.

Many have supposed that the doctrine of translation was a doctrine whereby men were taken immediately into the presence of God, and into an eternal fullness, but this is a mistaken idea. Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order, and a place prepared for such characters He held in reserve to be ministering angels unto many planets, and who as yet have not entered into so great a fullness as those who are resurrected from the dead. (TPJS, Pg.170, underline added)

Elder Franklin D. Richards also taught that the translated beings in the city of Enoch went to a terrestrial glory.

Then will He bring the City of Enoch that has gone away in Terrestrial glory ever since it went to the heavens. (Journal of Discourses 25:235)

Notice in these quotes that translated beings clearly go to the kingdom of the Son, rather than the kingdom of the Father. Notice also that Joseph Smith and Elder Richards boldly declare that those who have been translated go to the Terrestrial Kingdom, rather than the Celestial Kingdom.

When we think of the events surrounding the millennium, some of these doctrines seem to match very well and add more understanding. For example, the translated city of Enoch will return to earth and dwell

here during the millennium, a terrestrial world. In addition, Christ himself will rule and reign personally upon the earth during this terrestrial millennium.

By saying all of this I do not wish to imply that the Savior is a terrestrial being. The scriptures seem quite clear with regards to Christ being given all that the Father hath. It would be a far stretch to show that Christ is anything other than a Celestial being. However, this once again matches the scriptures in this regard. In section 76 we are taught that celestial beings minister unto terrestrial beings, and that terrestrial beings minister unto celestial beings.

These [telestial beings] are they who receive not of his fulness in the eternal world, but of the Holy Spirit through the ministration of the terrestrial;

And the terrestrial through the ministration of the celestial. (D&C 76:86-87, underline added)

Thus we see that it is entirely appropriate that Christ, a celestial being, is ministering unto the inhabitants of the Terrestrial Kingdom. It is His kingdom and He rules it with the fulness of His celestial presence.

The Telestial Kingdom

The Telestial Kingdom does not appear to be directly associated with either the Father or the Son. In addition, I could find no references whatsoever to a “kingdom of the Holy Ghost.”

However, as worthy members of the church have been taught, Satan believes this telestial earth⁵ to be his kingdom. He claims to be “the God of this world.” Whether this is just an imagination of his heart or not, Satan does seem to have an incredible amount of influence and power here in this telestial world. In addition, the scriptures clearly teach that there is a “kingdom of the devil” here on earth.

And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded. But it is the kingdom of the devil, which shall be built up among the children of men, which kingdom is established among them which are in the flesh--

For the time speedily shall come that all churches which are built up to get gain, and all those who are built up to get power over the flesh, and those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world, and those who seek the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world, and to do all manner of iniquity; yea, in fine, all those who belong to the kingdom of the devil are they who need fear, and tremble, and quake; they are those who must be brought low in the dust; they are those who must be consumed as stubble; and this is according to the words of the prophet. (1 Nephi 22:22-23, underline added)

Notice in these scriptures that the kingdom of the Devil is both a real kingdom and it is here on earth. It is also of significance to note that during the last days, Satan’s kingdom will have “dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.”⁶ We are reminded of the things Satan offered to Christ when he was here on earth.

⁵ Just as the earth will be in a terrestrial state during the millennium, at present it is in a telestial state. Hence, during the millennium we may liken this earth to a terrestrial kingdom. So also, prior to the millennium, this earth may be likened unto a telestial kingdom.

⁶ 1 Nephi 14:11

And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.

If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. (Luke 4:5-7, underline added. See also Matthew 4:8-9.)

Again, whether or not the kingdoms of this world were actually “delivered unto” Satan and whether or not he actually had power to give them to others, as he claims, may be debatable. However, given the fact that he will definitely have “dominion over all the earth” in the last days, it certainly seems possible that Satan had the power he claimed to have in the verses above.

It is important to realize that Christ did not correct Satan or say anything that would indicate that Satan could not offer what he said he could. In fact, we could even argue that if Satan didn't have the power to give Christ all the kingdoms of the earth, it wouldn't have been a temptation to the Savior in the first place. We should also note that while Joseph Smith made significant changes to these verses in the inspired version of the Bible, he left the portions concerning his power and dominions unchanged.

We must recognize that this earth is telestial in nature. Satan will be bound during the terrestrial millennium. Hence, we can assume that Satan has been allowed to have power and dominion within a telestial realm. If the thoughts and scriptures above don't qualify Satan to say that this is his kingdom, they at least suggest that he has greater influence and power in this telestial realm than anyone else. It is true that this influence and power have been given to him by God, but he does appear to have it.

Interestingly enough, there is very little evidence that either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven are here on earth to any great extent. The phrase “kingdom of God” is found 121 times in the scriptures. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is found 59 times. In almost all of these scriptures the kingdoms spoken of are referred to as future events, rather than a current kingdom on earth.

Because these two phrases are used so inconsistently in the scriptures, especially in the Bible, it is difficult to come to very many certain conclusions about these kingdoms here on earth. For example, there are a few scriptures which seem to indicate that the kingdom of God was here on earth during Christ's ministry.

But if I [Jesus] cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. (Matthew 12:28, underline added)

Therefore say I [Jesus] unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matthew 21:43, underline added)

Notice in this last verse that it says the kingdom of God shall be taken away from them. From this, we can assume that it was among them in the first place. If it were not, how could it be taken away? Both of these scriptures make it sound as if the kingdom of God was here on earth during the ministry of Christ. However, other scriptures seem to indicate that the kingdom of God was not here during Christ's ministry but was still a future event.

For I [Jesus] say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves:

For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. (Luke 22:16-18, underline added)

In this scripture the Lord seems to indicate that the kingdom of God is still a future event - that it wasn't present during His ministry at all. It is possible that when the Lord uses the phrase "kingdom of God" in these verses, he is referring to himself rather than the literal kingdom spoken of in other scriptures. While this helps to answer some questions, it raises others as well. For example, it provides us with multiple definitions of the kingdom of God. Thus making it more difficult to interpret certain scriptures.

To cloud the picture even more we find the Savior teaching the following doctrine as well:

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20-21, underline added)

Notice in these verses that the Savior seems to discount the idea that the kingdom of God is a substantive kingdom or even a person that is present at a particular place and time. The Pharisees were apparently asking when the literal kingdom of God would be here on the earth. Christ's explanation indicates that it is not a physical kingdom at all but rather something that only exists within us. If this is so, we must ask ourselves, "When will Christ drink of the fruit of the vine," as mentioned earlier? If this kingdom comes not with observation and if we can't say that it is either here or there, for what is Christ waiting before he drinks of the fruit of the vine? What is it that "shall come" and how will it come?

The problem of semantics, mistranslations, and interchangeable phraseology is difficult to overcome. Perhaps a linguist could look into these scriptures as they were written in the original language and learn more about what Christ actually taught. As it currently stands in English, these scriptures seem to contradict each other and confuse the situation. It is difficult to determine whether the kingdom of God was here on earth during Christ's ministry or not.

As far as the last days are concerned, it seems clear that the literal kingdom of God will be here on earth at some point prior to the second coming of Christ.

Call upon the Lord, that this kingdom [the kingdom of God] may go forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth.

Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, mayest be glorified in heaven so on earth, that thine enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power and glory, forever and ever. Amen. (D&C 65:5-6, underline added)

It seems clear from this scripture that the kingdom of God will have already been "set up on the earth" at the time of the Lord's second coming. However, as will be discussed, it is somewhat difficult to know exactly what that kingdom entails.

Regardless of which kingdoms are here on this telestial earth, it is apparent that the Telestial Kingdom may not be associated with any member of the Godhead, as are the Terrestrial and Celestial kingdoms. If anything, it seems to be mostly associated with Satan. And it seems clear that at least he believes it is his kingdom. I believe we can also say without reservation that Satan's kingdom on earth is much larger than the kingdom of God on earth. At least on this telestial earth, Satan seems to receive much more glory and have much more power over the hearts of men than does either God the Father or his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Kingdoms of Heaven and God

As we have seen it is quite difficult to define and fully understand the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. These two phrases are often used interchangeably throughout the scriptures as well as the words of our modern prophets. However, it is clear that under the strictest definitions of these kingdoms, the kingdom of God is not the same thing as the kingdom of heaven. They are two separate kingdoms. This is clear from the scripture just quoted from the Doctrine and Covenants.

Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, mayest be glorified in heaven so on earth, that thine enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power and glory, forever and ever. Amen. (D&C 65:6, underline added)

Notice in this verse that the kingdom of God seems to be somewhat of a preparatory kingdom to the kingdom of heaven. It seems to be saying that in order for the kingdom of heaven to come, the kingdom of God must first go forth. One is clearly here on earth, the other is not.

It is also important to note that the kingdom of heaven seems to be associated with Christ's second coming. There are at least two possibilities to consider. Either the kingdom of heaven referred to here is the kingdom of the millennium or Terrestrial kingdom, which will come to earth right at the beginning of the millennium. Or the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the millennium or Terrestrial kingdom, which is trying to be established in this terrestrial world as preparation for Christ's coming and the millennium. In other words, perhaps Christ is trying to set up his kingdom on earth before he comes so that it will be ready for him when he comes unto it. In this latter scenario, the kingdom of heaven would likely refer to the kingdom of the Father, which can only be established after Christ's kingdom has taken over the earth. Perhaps just as Christ has set up his church and kingdom on this telestial earth in preparation for the terrestrial millennium, God the Father will set up his church and kingdom on the terrestrial earth in preparation for the celestial earth to come after the millennium.

When all things are taken into consideration, this second scenario seems to make a great deal of sense. I feel that it is important to note the things associated with each of these kingdoms. Notice in the verses quoted above that the kingdom of God prepares people for the coming of the Son of Man, or Christ, and that Christ will meet that kingdom when he comes. Notice also that the apparent purpose of the kingdom of heaven is so that God may be glorified in heaven so on earth, and that his enemies may be subdued. This seems to be referring to God the Father rather than Christ. Hence, the kingdom of God prepares for the Son while the kingdom of heaven prepares for the Father, the kingdom of heaven coming only after the kingdom of God is firmly established.

Whatever the kingdom of God is, we have been clearly taught that the keys of this kingdom have been committed unto man in these latter days.

The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth. (D&C 65:2, underline added)

That they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine, in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth, the keys of which kingdom have been conferred upon you. (D&C 97:14, underline added)

It also seems clear that from this kingdom, or at least from the keys of this kingdom, the gospel will “roll forth unto the ends of the earth.” But what, exactly, is this kingdom of God? Most Latter-day Saints believe that the kingdom of God must be the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This would make sense if we view the church as the instrument that will spread the gospel unto the ends of the earth. However, there have been statements made which seem to directly contradict this idea. For example, President John Taylor once said,

God has established his Church, and we sometimes say his kingdom. What do we mean by “the kingdom of God?” I wish somebody would tell me what we mean by that term. There is the Church of God and the kingdom of God. The Church, of course, refers more particularly to spiritual things, and the kingdom to temporal rule and government and management and to temporal affairs. If it does not, what does it mean, I would like some one to tell me? (Journal of Discourses 20:166, underline added)

On another occasion President Taylor said,

Thy kingdom come. What kingdom? The kingdom of God, or the government of God, or the rule and dominion of God, the will of God--thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Journal of Discourses 26:351, underline added)

President George Q. Cannon seems to agree with President Taylor’s definition of the kingdom of God.

We have been taught from the beginning this important principle, that the Church of God is distinct from the kingdom of God. Joseph gave us the pattern before he died. He gave his brethren an example that has not been forgotten up to this day. He impressed it upon them, that men, not members of the Church, could be members of the kingdom that the Lord will set up when He reigns. He picked out the youngest among them, and told them to be sure and remember this. In the minds of all of us who understand this matter there is a clear distinction between the Church in its ecclesiastical capacity and that which may be termed the government of God in its political capacity..Call upon the Lord, that this kingdom may go forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth. The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth. (Collected Discourses, Vol.5, April 5, 1897, underline added)

It is clear from this quote that President Cannon not only views the kingdom of God as a political kingdom apart from the church, but that he also sees it as the same kingdom spoken of in the scriptures - the kingdom which will allow the gospel to roll forth unto the ends of the earth. In addition, he refers to

this political kingdom of God, not the church, as the stone which is cut without hands and which fills the whole earth.

On another occasion President Cannon said,

Joseph Smith set the pattern; he taught the brethren who were with him better ideas; you well-informed Latter-day Saints know that there are two powers which God has restored in these the last days. One is the Church of God, the other the Kingdom of God. A man may belong to the Kingdom of God and yet not be a member of the Church of God. In the Kingdom of God, using it in a political sense, there may be heathens and Pagans and Mahommedans and Latter-day Saints and Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Catholics and men of every creed. Will they legislate for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints alone? Will the laws that they enact protect us alone and not protect others? No. Why? Because God is the Father of the Latter-day Saints as well as of every human being; God is the father of all, is the father of the Chinaman, the Hindoo, the African, the European, the American; is the Father of all the races of men and of every creed and nationality. When he establishes his kingdom it will protect all in their equal rights; I as a Latter-day Saint, will not have power to trample on my fellow-man who may not be orthodox in my opinion, because I am a Latter-day Saint; nor will my fellow-man to whom I am heterodox, have the power to trample upon me. Does not that look right? That is the kind of kingdom we have to contend for; that is the kind of kingdom we have to establish, and it is already provided for in the Constitution given unto us by God, and through the glorious labors of the fathers who aid the foundation of this government, who were inspired and raised by our Almighty Father for this express purpose. There is no liberty that a human being can desire, neither is there a right that can be exercised properly, that we do not have under the Constitution of our land. It needs no amendment about it; it is broad enough, if interpreted in its true spirit, to cover the individual, the continent, and the entire globe and furnish freedom for all. (Journal of Discourses 20:202-203, underline added)

It is important to note that even though the founding fathers of our nation and the Constitution itself are inspired and apparently significant elements of the kingdom of God, the U.S. government is not the kingdom of God itself. Again, President Taylor instructs us on the subject.

Well then, we will go a little further. By being here we become an integral part of the government of the United States, as a Territory. Very well. Here is another thing we are talking about. Is that the government of God? Not quite...We are under the United States, but the United States is not the kingdom of God. It does not profess to be under his rule, nor his government, nor his authority. (Journal of Discourses 21:68, underline added)

This seems to agree with the revelations given to us concerning the Constitution. Notice in the following verses that even though the Constitution is inspired by God and should be maintained, the Lord “suffered” it to be established.

According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles;

That every man act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgement.

Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I have raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood. (D&C 101:77-80, underline added)

It is also interesting to note that during the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland temple, the prophet was inspired to pray that the principles found in the Constitution would “be established forever.”⁷ This seems to indicate that even though the government of the United States is not the kingdom of God, the principles upon which that government is based are at least a part of the kingdom of God.

From these passages I believe we can conclude that the keys to the political kingdom of God have already been restored to the earth and work has been done to help bring it to pass. However, the actual existence of this kingdom still seems to be a future event, perhaps not fully realized until the millennium.

It is also significant to note that the stone cut without hands, as spoken of in King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, is not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁸ This can be seen not only from President Cannon’s remarks above but from the dream itself. Of this kingdom in the last days, Daniel prophesied,

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (Daniel 2:44-45)

We must remember that all of the kingdoms spoken of in the dream were political kingdoms. None of them were spiritual kingdoms. For example, it is significant to note that none of the kingdoms in the dream represented Christ’s kingdom during his ministry in the meridian of time. Surely such a significant kingdom would have been worth mentioning in the dream. Yet, it was left out. It seems reasonable to assume that this was because Christ brought a spiritual kingdom to the earth during his ministry, rather

⁷ D&C 109:54

⁸ There are those who disagree with this idea. Some believe that the kingdom in the dream and the latter-day church are the same thing. For example, Elder James Talmage taught this in chapter 20 of “Articles of Faith.”

than a political kingdom. All of the kingdoms in the dream, on the other hand, were entirely political in nature. Christ's kingdom in the meridian of time was left out because it didn't fit the pattern.

In light of the fact that all of the kingdoms spoken of in the dream are political kingdoms, it only makes sense that the last kingdom, or the stone cut without hands, is also a political kingdom. Like Christ's kingdom 2000 years ago, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is spiritual in nature, not political. Hence, the dream is likely not talking about the LDS church at all.

Notice in the verses above that the kingdom spoken of will "break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms." The wording seems to suggest a new political, not spiritual, kingdom will replace all the other political kingdoms and fill the earth in the last days. This clearly is not the charter of the church, whether past, present, or future. However, it does seem to be the charter of the kingdom of God, as explained by President Taylor, President Cannon, and others.

In addition to the arguments already presented, we should also note that the kingdom referred to in the book of Daniel "shall not be left to other people." This point has been used to show clearly that the kingdom spoken of in the dream was not referring to Christ's kingdom in the meridian of time, as many other Christian religions believe. For example, Elder B. H. Roberts once argued,

"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given unto a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matthew 21:43) There can be no mistaking the meaning of the parable or its application; and some years later we have Paul saying to the contradicting and blaspheming Jews of Antioch in Pisidia: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us." And so it came to pass that as Israel in those days rejected the Gospel of the kingdom which was first offered to them, so God also rejected them; and they have stood rejected to this day; smitten and trodden under foot of the Gentile races, a scoff, a hiss, and a byword in every land that they have inhabited: while the kingdom of God first offered to them was left to other people, to the Gentiles, who, for a season, brought forth the fruits thereof. But the fact that the kingdom then preached to the Jews was taken from them and given to another people, is proof positive that it was not the kingdom which was to fulfill the terms of Daniel's great prophecy. (History of the Church, Vol.1, Introduction, Pg.xxxix, underline added)

Using this same argument we can show that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints cannot be this kingdom either. For the scriptures clearly teach that this kingdom (the gospel and the church) will be taken away from the gentiles in the last days and given back to the house of Israel. This will happen in exactly the same manner that the kingdom was previously taken away from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. We are told that in our day the last shall be first and the first shall be last.⁹ If Elder Robert's argument is "proof positive" as it pertains to Christ's church 2000 years ago, as I believe it is, then it would seem to be equally valid for his church today.

In summary, we may glean several important doctrines from these quotes and arguments. First, we must acknowledge that the keys of the kingdom of God have already been given to men on earth. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the kingdom of God is already here on earth, only the keys. Second, we know that when Christ comes, the kingdom of God will already be set up on the earth for he

⁹ See 1 Nephi 10:14; Jacob 5:73 (61-75); 3 Nephi 16:10-12; D&C 14:10; Journal of Discourses 9:178.

will “meet” it when he comes. Third, we know that the kingdom of God, in its strictest definition, is a political kingdom. Fourth, we know that the kingdom of God is not the same thing as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. They are two separate entities, one political and the other spiritual or ecclesiastical. Fifth, we know that the kingdom of God is not the same thing as the kingdom of heaven. They are two separate kingdoms. Sixth, we know that the kingdom of God will reign on earth during the millennium with Christ at its head. Seventh, we know that it is this kingdom (the kingdom of God) that will somehow prepare the way for the kingdom of heaven yet to come. It seems to be somewhat of a prerequisite or precursor to the kingdom of heaven. Hence, the kingdom of heaven is probably not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints either. Eighth, we know that the stone cut without hands that will consume all other political kingdoms in the last days, as referred to in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, is probably not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, as many believe it to be. Rather, the kingdom referred to in this dream is more likely the political kingdom of God yet to be fully established in the last days.

THE GOSPELS

Although the fundamental gospel truths never change, there seem to be different levels of commandments or gospel truths which can change and do change. Perhaps the clearest example of this can be seen in the law of Moses. The law of Moses contains a rather low set of truths and commandments, inspired by God, which changed dramatically to a higher set of truths, also inspired by God. It is important to note that just because the higher set is true does not mean the lower set is false, and vice-versa. They are both leading people in the same direction and they are both based on the same basic principles of salvation, just at different levels.

The reason for the existence of these different levels seems clear. The Lord has told us that gospel truths are given to man according to the diligence and heed we give unto them. The more we are prepared to accept and live the higher truths, the more of them we are given. Likewise, the less we are prepared to live the higher laws, the more He takes them away from us and the more lower laws He gives to us. This principle is clearly taught in the Book of Mormon.

And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9, underline added)

And again,

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:30, underline added)

It is important to notice in this scripture that the Lord will actually take away the higher laws from his people merely because they say they “have enough.” If we do not seek the higher laws, even those we do not yet have, then even that which we do have will be taken away from us.

This section attempts to show that just as we can associate a certain level of gospel truths with the law of Moses, we can also associate other levels of gospel truths with Jesus Christ and still others with God the Father. Just as with the kingdoms, there seems to be a gospel of the Father which is different than the gospel of the Son. As will be shown, the gospel of Jesus Christ seems to contain those doctrines and commandments which are preliminary or preparatory to the gospel of the Father.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ or the Son

One of the questions often asked by Latter-day Saints is how the Book of Mormon can possibly contain the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ when there are so many doctrines not found within its pages. The Doctrine and Covenants clearly tells us that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And gave him [Joseph Smith] power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon;

Which contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also; (D&C 20:8-9, underline added. See also D&C 27:5, D&C 42:12, and D&C 135:3.)

This declaration has puzzled thoughtful members of the church for many years. It seems clear that the Book of Mormon does not contain many of the higher laws and principles given to us by the Lord in this dispensation. For example, many years after the Book of Mormon was published the prophet Joseph Smith said,

If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Pg.111)

From this statement by the prophet we can conclude that even though the church had the Book of Mormon, as well as many other revelations, they did not have all of the commandments of God. In fact, we could even conclude that they had less than half of these commandments.

Likewise, President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

Thus, the Doctrine and Covenants is a glorious book of scripture given directly to our generation. It contains the will of the Lord for us in these last days that precede the second coming of Christ. It contains many truths and doctrines not fully revealed in other scripture. (A Witness and Warning, p. 28, underline added)

Notice that President Benson goes as far as to claim that there are “many” truths and doctrines which can only be “fully” found the Doctrine and Covenants. Does this include the doctrines contained in the Book of Mormon? If the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and if the Doctrine and Covenants contains many truths and doctrines which are not fully revealed in the Book of Mormon, then it follows that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ does not include many truths and doctrines, at least not in their entirety. We can conclude that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the highest set of truths available to us.

Brigham Young has explained that the gospel of Jesus Christ is that portion of truth which provides the beginning path to a greater knowledge of the gospel.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the opening avenue--the open gate in the road or way from earth to heaven, through which direct revelation comes to the children of men in their various capacities, according to their callings and standing in the society in which they live. The Gospel of salvation is a portion of the law that pertains to the kingdom where God resides; and the ordinances pertaining to the holy Priesthood are the means by which the children of men find access to the way of life, wherein they can extend their travels until they return to the presence of their Father and God. (Journal of Discourses 8:159, underline added)

As mentioned earlier, the Book of Mormon instructs us that the Lord will first give us the “lesser portion” of his word. Then, only if we are faithful, will He grant the “greater portion” of the gospel, or in other words, the mysteries of the gospel.

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:10-11, underline added)

But what, specifically, is the “lesser portion” of the word? The prophet Mormon refers to the things he has written in the Book of Mormon as the “lesser part” of the things Christ taught to the people.

And these things have I [Mormon] written, which are a lesser part of the things which he [Christ] taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken.

And 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.

And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. (3 Nephi 26:8-10, underline added)

Notice that the lesser part, or in other words the things contained in the Book of Mormon, will come to this people first in order to try their faith. Then, if we believe the things contained in the Book of Mormon, the “greater things,” or those things which are not contained in the Book of Mormon, will be made manifest to us. Later in the Book of Mormon, Moroni explains this doctrine again.

And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. Behold, I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you. (Mormon 8:12, underline added)

Again, we know that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We also know that there are greater things to be learned than those things contained in the Book of Mormon. We are told that if we are faithful to this “lesser portion” which we have been given, we will someday be able

to enjoy the “greater portion” of the word. However, it seems clear that the Book of Mormon, or the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, does not include these “greater things” spoken of.¹⁰

One of the questions that often arises among Latter-day Saints is why we were told so little about the time of greatest righteousness among the Nephites. Right after the coming of Christ the people apparently lived many of the higher laws and lived in great righteousness for almost two centuries. Yet, this portion of the record is all but left out of the Book of Mormon. The Lord used about 300 pages to discuss over 200 years of Nephite history prior to the coming of Christ. Yet, that same amount of time after Christ’s coming is discussed in less than four pages. One would think it would be just the opposite. You would think this would be the portion of greatest interest, value, and learning to those who read the book. One would think that the period of time discussed in 4 Nephi would have been covered in great detail by the Lord. Yet, we have very few details about this period of time. Why would this be the case? One possible answer is that it was not the purpose of the Book of Mormon to reveal much concerning the higher truths lived by the Nephites at that time. The book was only intended to reveal the lower laws, as recorded in the rest of the account. This makes perfect sense if the gospel of Jesus Christ viewed as a preparatory gospel, rather than the fullness of all commandments and truths necessary to receive exaltation in the Celestial kingdom.

The Book of Mormon gives us a few hints concerning some of these “greater things” spoken of but not included within its pages. In addition to obtaining the full account of Christ’s teachings among the Nephites, as mentioned above, we are told that there are many records containing the mysteries of God which are yet to come forth. We know, for example, that we will someday receive the sealed portion of the gold plates.¹¹ We know that if we are faithful, the fullness of the record of John will someday be revealed to us.¹² The brass plates¹³ and the great vision of the brother of Jared¹⁴ can also be included in our future canon of true scripture. These and other records, and the mysteries contained in them, will come to us only after we have been tried by the current doctrines given to us. If we are not faithful to those things which we have been given thus far, we will not be allowed to fully partake of the greater things yet to come.

At this point it seems reasonable to say that the things contained in the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ make up somewhat of a “preparatory gospel” or contain the lesser things we need in order to prepare ourselves for the greater things. In other words, if we are faithful and diligent concerning the truths contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will be better prepared to receive the greater truths yet to come, even the mysteries of God. If we are not diligent concerning the lesser portion of the word, as contained in the Book of Mormon, we will not be prepared to receive the greater truths or mysteries.

¹⁰ It is perhaps noteworthy at this point to mention that President Ezra Taft Benson has said “the whole Church and all the children of Zion are under condemnation because of the way we have treated the Book of Mormon.” (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.63-64, underline added; See also A Witness and a Warning, Pg. vii-viii)

¹¹ 2 Nephi 27:6-11, 20-21

¹² D&C 93:6, 18; Ether 4:16

¹³ Alma 37:3-4

¹⁴ Ether 4:1-8, 13

All of this seems to be consistent with the words of our prophets. In addition to those things already mentioned, the scriptures seem to indicate that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of repentance and baptism.

And verily, verily, I [Jesus Christ] say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me.

And this is my gospel--repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom. (D&C 39:5-6, underline added)

The scriptures go on to teach us that the gospel of repentance and baptism is referred to as the “preparatory gospel,” and that it is closely associated with the Aaronic or lesser priesthood.

And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;

Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John, whom God raised up, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb. (D&C 84:26-27, underline added)

From these verses we see that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of repentance and baptism. We also see that the “preparatory gospel” is the gospel of repentance and baptism. They are all one and the same gospel. Notice that verse 26 refers to “the” preparatory gospel, indicating that there is probably another “gospel” which is not preparatory in nature.

When the Aaronic priesthood was conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, John the Baptist said that this priesthood contained the keys of the gospel of repentance and baptism.

Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness. (D&C 13:1, underline added. See also D&C 107:20 and Joseph Smith History 1:69)

President Joseph F. Smith seems to clearly associate the gospel of Jesus Christ with the preparatory gospel spoken of in the Doctrine and Covenants. Notice that he uses the same wording found in the scriptures above.

You who hold the Priesthood have the key or the authority, the right, the power or privilege to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the gospel of repentance and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins--a mighty important thing, I tell you. (Gospel Doctrine, Pg.142, underline added)

Later in the same paragraph, President Smith tells us that this gospel of repentance and baptism is the same one which is associated with the Aaronic priesthood.

But here we ordain boys who are scarcely in their teens, some of them, to that Priesthood which holds the keys of the ministering of angels and of the gospel of repentance and

baptism by immersion for the remission of sin. (Gospel Doctrine, Pg. 142, underline added)

Notice that President Smith equates the gospel of Jesus Christ with the gospel of repentance and baptism. Then, just a few sentences later, he associates this same gospel with the Aaronic priesthood. This seems to support the idea that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a preparatory gospel and is associated with the Aaronic priesthood. As strange as this sounds to many, this is apparently what the scriptures teach.

In addition to being associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Aaronic priesthood also seems to display a connection with the Terrestrial kingdom, or kingdom of the Son as explained earlier. This priesthood holds the “keys to the ministering of angels.” Where do angels reside? They reside in the celestial kingdom and minister to those in the Terrestrial kingdom. Elder Orson Pratt once said,

But how about the terrestrials, can they come up into the celestial? No, their intelligence and knowledge have not prepared and adapted them to dwell with those who reign in celestial glory, consequently they can not even be angels in that glory. They have not obeyed the law that pertains to that glory, and hence they could not abide it. But will there be blessings administered to them by those who dwell in celestial glory? Yes, angels will be sent forth from the celestial world to minister to those who inherit the glory of the moon, bearing messages of joy and peace and of all that which is calculated to exalt, to redeem and ennoble those who have been resurrected into a terrestrial glory. They can receive the Spirit of the Lord there, and the ministration of angels there. (Journal of Discourses 15:322-323, underline added)

This brings more meaning to the verses previously quoted in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

These [telestial beings] are they who receive not of his fulness in the eternal world, but of the Holy Spirit through the ministration of the terrestrial;

And the terrestrial through the ministration of the celestial. (D&C 76:86-87, underline added)

Hence, again we see a perfect match between the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Aaronic priesthood, and the Terrestrial kingdom.

Even though the gospel of Jesus Christ contains many great and marvelous truths which are “calculated to exalt,” it should not be viewed as containing everything we need to be exalted in the Celestial kingdom of the Father. In order to inherit that kingdom we must progress beyond the truths contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It seems clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ, even in its fulness, is at least somewhat of a preparatory gospel. Its purpose is to test us and prepare us to receive the “greater things” spoken of in the scriptures.

It is also significant to note that this gospel seems to be associated with the Aaronic priesthood and, hence, the Terrestrial kingdom. We should note that even the city of Enoch with all its righteousness was lifted up to only a terrestrial state. This should give us some idea of how hard it is and how much further we have to go to enter the Celestial kingdom. Perhaps we now begin to understand with greater clarity the words of the Lord when he said “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” and “many are called, but few are chosen.”

The Gospel of the Father

Since we know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a preparatory gospel and does not contain the fulness of all spiritual truths, we must recognize that there is a set of truths, or another “gospel,” which does contain those higher truths. In the Book of Mormon, Christ indicates to us that there may be a gospel of the Father. Speaking of the last days, Christ relays the following message to us from the Father:

And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:10-12, underline added)

Notice in these verses that it is the Father who is speaking, through Christ. Hence, whenever the phrase “my gospel” is used, it is referring to the “gospel of the Father,” as opposed to the gospel of the Son.

It’s possible that the gospel of the Father contains those additional truths or doctrines not found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also possible that it contains the same truths or doctrines, but in greater detail or with greater depth. Whatever it is, it seems clear that it will be given to the Gentiles in the last days until they reject it. Then it will be taken away from the Gentiles and given back to the house of Israel.¹⁵

As already mentioned, regardless of what we call this greater gospel, it appears that a set of truths exists which is greater than that found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition, it would make perfect sense if the scriptures referred to these higher truths as “the gospel of the Father.”

But what are these doctrines of the Father and how do they differ from the doctrines of the Son? I feel the scriptures have given us a few hints in this regard. We know, for example, that one of the prerequisites for obtaining these greater doctrines is faithfulness to the lower or lesser doctrines. This is clearly explained in the Book of Mormon, as outlined earlier in this work. It is significant to note that this concept is the same one outlined in the scriptures regarding how we learn the “mysteries” of the gospel. Remember the words in Alma quoted earlier?

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. (Alma 12:10, underline added)

¹⁵ For a more in-depth explanation of this scripture please see the conclusion of my other work entitled “**Detecting the Philosophies of Men.**”

I believe that the gospel of the Father, the mysteries of Godliness, and the “greater things” spoken of in the scriptures are all referring to the same higher set of gospel truths. They are those truths for which the gospel of Jesus Christ is preparing us.

One of the great misunderstandings in the church today concerns our reaction to seeking the mysteries of God. Most people seem to think that the mysteries should be avoided or left alone. By very definition, the mysteries of the gospel are those things which are either not yet openly revealed or not yet fully revealed to man. Yet, according to the scriptures, they are of great importance and should be diligently sought after and obtained. This we do by giving strict heed to those lesser things which have been clearly revealed to all the world, such as those things contained in the Book of Mormon. The scriptures make it quite clear that the mysteries should, indeed, be sought after. They are actually a reward for righteous living, just as with the “greater things.” Joseph Smith has said,

I advise all to go on to perfection, and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness. (TPJS Pg. 364)

The scriptures almost always speak of the mysteries in a positive sense, except where missionary work is concerned.¹⁶

Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing--unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance. (Alma 26:22)

But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:23)

Notice in this last verse that the mysteries come to those who keep the commandments. It is clear that a certain set of commandments must be had and obeyed in order to receive those truths known as “the mysteries.” There is plainly some sort of “preparatory gospel” which prepares us to receive these mysteries of God. This matches perfectly with what is said about the “greater things” spoken of in the Book of Mormon. If we are faithful to this preparatory gospel of the Son, then more will be revealed to us. If, however, we are not faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, then the Lord will withhold the higher gospel from us. Again, the prophet Mormon explains the role of the Book of Mormon in this process.

And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken.

And 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.

¹⁶ See the preface to this work for more information and scriptures about the mysteries of God.

And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. (3 Nephi 26:8-10, underline added)

A similar process takes place even after these greater things or mysteries have been given to a people.

And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:9-11, underline added)

Notice that the mysteries are actually taken away from those who harden their hearts. This seems to match the teachings quoted earlier in 3 Nephi regarding the gospel of the Father.

And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:10-12, underline added)

In conjunction with all we have discussed, there is evidence that the things we learn in the temple are at least a part of the gospel of the Father. For example, President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

Everything we learn in the holy places, the temples, is based on the scriptures. These teachings are what the scriptures refer to as the “mysteries of godliness” (see I Timothy 3:16; D&C 19:10). They are to be comprehended by the power of the Holy Ghost, for the Lord has given this promise to His faithful and obedient servants: “Thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things” (D&C 42:61). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.245, underline added)

In addition, President Brigham Young taught that,

*The ordinances of the house of God are expressly for the Church of the Firstborn.
(Journal of Discourses 8:154)*

As will be discussed in the next section, the Church of the Firstborn is not the Church of Jesus Christ, it is the Church of God the Father. In the early church the temple endowment was much longer than it is today and contained much more instruction than it does now. We must wonder if this continual reduction of the “mysteries of godliness” found within the temple is a fulfillment of these scriptures in Alma and 3 Nephi. Perhaps because of the hardness of our hearts, the Father has been gradually taking his gospel away from us until we come to a point when we know “nothing concerning his mysteries.”¹⁷ This possibility should present a great concern to us.

These quotes about the temple also provide further evidence that the mysteries of the gospel, the greater things, and the gospel of the Father are all referring to the same “gospel” or set of truths. Perhaps when we see the terms “mysteries” or “greater things” in the scriptures, we could replace them with “the gospel of the Father” and come away with a greater understanding of what is being taught. Regardless of what we call it, there does seem to be a set of truths which are higher than those contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCHES

Given the differences already mentioned within in the kingdoms and gospels, we shouldn’t be surprised to find similar parallels in the churches. Many people assume that there are only two churches on earth, one of the Devil and one of Christ. This belief can be derived from the Book of Mormon. An angel seems to have clearly taught the prophet Nephi about these two churches.

And he [the angel] said unto me [Nephi]: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth. (1 Nephi 14:10, underline added)

¹⁷ Some people see the taking away of temple instruction as a black and white question of true or false. I feel this is a mistaken view. I believe the real question is an issue of “more vs. less” rather than “true vs. false.” We definitely have less information in our endowment today than the early saints had. However, I firmly believe that the information we do have comes from God and is still true. The problem is that it is less truth, rather than more truth.

As with other teachings found in the Book of Mormon, further revelation can be used to help clarify, broaden, or enhance what the angel told Nephi.¹⁸ As will be seen, further revelation seems to clearly teach that there are more churches than the two mentioned in 1 Nephi 14.

When Christ visited the Nephites in the Book of Mormon he made it clear that the church he was establishing was his church. According to the Savior, because it was His church, it had to be called by his name.

Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel. (3 Nephi 27:7-8, underline added)

Notice how Christ first tells us that his church must be called after his name. He then tells us that if it is called after another prophet's name, in this case Moses, then it must be the church of that prophet. The Savior further emphasizes this point by explaining that a church called after the name of any other man is the church of that man. It is difficult to misunderstand His teachings in this regard.

This scripture creates some interesting possibilities when viewed in light of other churches mentioned in the scriptures. For example, it follows from this explanation that some of the churches mentioned in the scriptures, whose names are called after someone other than Christ, are not referring to the Church of Christ. This is especially meaningful for some of the churches mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants.

In the Book of Mormon we find the following churches mentioned:

- The church of the Devil
- The great and abominable church
- The church of God
- The church of Christ
- The church of the Lamb of God

¹⁸ Examples of doctrines found in the Book of Mormon which are clarified by further revelation include such teachings as monogamy (Jacob 2:24-35; 3:5-6), monotheism (Mosiah 15:2-5), and the suffering of the wicked in a "lake of fire and brimstone" (2 Nephi 9:16, 19, 26; 28:23; Jacob 3:11; 6:10; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17; 14:14). Such doctrines may very well be viewed as part of the "lesser things" or "preparatory gospel" spoken of earlier.

The Doctrine and Covenants associates a church with five different names. They are:

- The church of the Devil
- The church of Christ
- The church of Enoch
- The church of God
- The church of the Firstborn

If a church must be named after Christ in order to be his church, then the very least we can say about these churches is that some of them refer to churches other than Christ's church. By reading all the scriptures which are associated with each of the churches just mentioned, we find some interesting consistencies. We find that the things associated with a given church are similar, and yet each church differs from the others in significant ways.

It seems that the Book of Mormon deals with the names of some of these churches in a slightly different manner than does the Doctrine and Covenants. Let's first discuss the churches mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

The Church of the Devil (BoM)

There is only one verse in the Book of Mormon that actually uses the phrase "church of the Devil." It is the same verse quoted at the beginning of this section.

And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth. (1 Nephi 14:10, underline added)

It is important to note that this verse is speaking of the existence of this church in the last days, not in the time of the Nephites. It is apparently a very real organization that exists in our time.

The Great and Abominable Church (BoM)

It seems quite apparent that the church of the Devil and the great and abominable church are the same church. In the verse just prior to that quoted above we see that this church is founded by the Devil.

And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look, and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil. (1 Nephi 14:9, underline added)

There are three other references in the Book of Mormon which state that the Devil is the founder of the great and abominable church.¹⁹

In all, the great and abominable church is mentioned 12 times in the Book of Mormon.²⁰ In literally all of these occurrences it is placed in a last days setting. It is spoken of only during prophecies about our day.

¹⁹ 1 Nephi 13:6; 1 Nephi 14:3, 17

²⁰ 1 Nephi 13:6, 8, 26, 28; 1 Nephi 14:3, 9, 15, 17; 1 Nephi 22:13-14; 2 Nephi 6:12; 2 Nephi 28:18

There is no mention of the church of the Devil existing during the time of the Nephites. This doesn't mean that it didn't exist among the Nephites, but it is curious that it is only mentioned as existing in our day.

The great and abominable church of the Devil appears to be a very real organization in the last days. By reading the scriptures referenced in the footnote above, one can learn of the intentions and fate of this church. For the purposes of this work, suffice it to say that such a church does actually exist. Just as Christ has organized a church and is at the head of it, so also Satan has organized a church and is at the head of it. When we hear talk about organized satanism, an evil "new world order," or other heinous organizations which often sound too bizarre or weird to be true, we should realize that such things have been clearly prophesied about our day. I feel we should actually look for the fulfillment of such prophecies rather than shun them as impossibilities or as things of naught. As President Ezra Taft Benson has taught,

There is a conspiracy of evil. The source of it all is Satan and his hosts. He has a great power over men to "lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken" to the voice of the Lord (Moses 4:4). His evil influence may be manifest through governments; through false educational, political, economic, religious, and social philosophies; through secret societies and organizations; and through myriads of other forms. His power and influence are so great that, if possible, he would deceive the very elect (see Matthew 24:24). As the second coming of the Lord approaches, Satan's work will intensify through numerous insidious deceptions. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.404, underline added)

The Church of God (BoM)

When Alma was converted by the preaching of Abinadi, he organized the first church to be had among the Nephites. Before the time of Alma there is no indication that a church of any kind existed among them.

When this church was first organized, the followers of Alma were baptized at the waters of Mormon. At that time a name was given to this newly formed church.

And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church. (Mosiah 18:17, underline added)

This is the first occurrence of the phrase "church of God" in the Book of Mormon. It is interesting to note that this verse also states that they called themselves the "church of Christ." The reason this is so interesting is because the church Alma established is never referred to again as the church of Christ. In literally every case, this church is referred to as the "church of God" rather than the "church of Christ."²¹ It seems reasonable that such consistency is not without reason or purpose.

²¹ Mosiah 18:17; Mosiah 21:30; Mosiah 25:18, 22; Mosiah 26:38; Mosiah 27:2, 9-10, 13; Alma 1:7, 19; Alma 2:4; Alma 4:4-5, 9; Alma 5:3, 5; Alma 8:23; Alma 27:27; Alma 36:6, 9, 11; Alma 46:10, 14; Alma 62:46; Helaman 3:26, 33; Helaman 4:11; Helaman 5:35; Helaman 6:3

We should keep in mind that this church was teaching and practicing the lower laws as found in the law of Moses. It was not the same church, in organization or doctrine, that Christ established during his visit to the Nephites.

In one instance the phrase “church of God” is used in the Book of Mormon during a prophesy of our day by the prophet Moroni.

O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies--because of the praise of the world?
(Mormon 8:38, underline added)

Interestingly enough, further research into this scripture indicates that Moroni is talking about our church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.²²

The Church of Christ (BoM)

When Jesus Christ visited the Nephites after his resurrection, he established a new church among them. This new church brought with it a different organization than that of the church established by Alma. It also did away with the law of Moses and replaced it with new, higher doctrines.

Interestingly enough, we again find amazing consistency in what this church was called. In literally every reference made to this church it is called the “church of Christ.”²³ There is no mention made of any other church than this one existing among the Nephites after the time of Christ. And there is no other name given by which this church was called.

So, there were only two churches we know of during the entire history of the Nephites. The first was established by Alma and was consistently referred to as the “church of God.” The second church was established by Christ and was consistently called the “church of Christ.” Such consistency seems too uniformed to be blamed on mere chance. Whether or not this consistency has a purpose and is part of a greater message given to us by the Lord is unclear. However, it is certainly worth consideration.

The Church of the Lamb (BoM)

²² For more information about this statement please see my other work entitled “**Detecting the Philosophies of Men.**”

²³ 3 Nephi 26:21; 3 Nephi 28:23; 4 Nephi 1:1, 26, 29; Moroni 6:4

There are only three references to the church of the Lamb in the Book of Mormon.²⁴ As with the great and abominable church of the Devil, literally every occurrence of the church of the Lamb has reference to a church that exists in the last days, rather than in the time of the Nephites.

It seems clear from the scriptures that the Lamb of God is Jesus Christ. Therefore, we may conclude that the church of the Lamb of God is the church of Jesus Christ. And since this church exists in the last days, it is likely speaking of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

That said, there are some things mentioned in the Book of Mormon about this church that don't seem to fit the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as well as we would like. Notice the characteristics given to this latter-day church of the Lamb and compare them to the modern LDS church.

And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.

And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God.

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory. (1 Nephi 14:10-14, underline added)

It is curious that Nephi claims there are only two churches in the last days and that anyone who doesn't belong to the church of the Lamb must belong to the church of the Devil. This wording seems to confuse the issue somewhat. Even the proudest of Mormons would probably not claim that everyone is either a Mormon or a follower of Satan. There seem to be many good people on earth who do not fall into either organization. This seems to suggest that the church of the Lamb may include a broader definition than merely the LDS church. It seems more likely that it would include all of the true followers of Christ, whether they have been baptized into the LDS church or not.

²⁴ 1 Nephi 14:10, 12, 14

Continuing on with the verses in 1 Nephi, it is also well known that the LDS church of today has experienced great growth. In fact, it is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. I don't believe there are very many people today who would say that our numbers are "few" and that our "dominions" are small. Perhaps they were at one time, but it would be difficult to make that argument today. In fact, I believe most would say exactly the opposite. By almost anyone's standards we are a very powerful, rapidly growing church.

The idea that the church of the Lamb of God and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints may not be the same church is certainly a possibility. However, it is difficult to confirm, one way or the other. Given the arguments above, the idea that they are two separate groups, perhaps overlapping with each other, would seem to appeal more to our common sense. Hence, it may be possible that there are people outside the Mormon church who are members of the church of the Lamb of God. Likewise, there may be those who are within the LDS church who are not members of the church of the Lamb of God. We should remember that many are called, but few are actually chosen.²⁵

Now let's look at the churches mentioned in the Doctrines and Covenants.

The Church of the Devil (D&C)

Barring further information on the subject, this seems to be the same evil church spoken of in the Book of Mormon. Again, it is apparent that there is a very real organization which is called the church of the Devil. The following verse is the only verse in the Doctrine and Covenants which refers to the church of the Devil.

Contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil. (D&C 18:20)

Taken in context, this section is speaking about missionary work. This verse tells us that of all the other churches out there, we should only contend against the one called "the church of the Devil."

It seems reasonable to assume from this scripture that there are other churches with which we could contend, but which are neither the church of Christ or the church of the Devil. If this were not the case, then this scripture would make no sense. If there were only two churches, as outlined in the Book of Mormon, then this scripture could have said something like, "Contend not against the church of Christ, only contend against the church of the Devil." It seems somewhat unlikely that this is what the verse is saying. It is more likely referring to churches other than those of Christ or the Devil.

It is interesting that the latter-day church of the Devil is spoken of more in the Book of Mormon than it is in the Doctrine and Covenants. One would think that the Lord would give us more information today concerning this church than He did to the Nephites. In any case, suffice it to say that there is a church of the Devil and we seem to be allowed, if not encouraged, to contend against it.

The Church of Christ (D&C)

²⁵ See D&C 121:34-37.

The church of Jesus Christ, in one form or another, appears in the Doctrine and Covenants a total of eighteen times.²⁶ Almost half of these occurrences are found in section 20. Section 20 deals almost entirely with church organization and government. Interestingly enough, this theme follows almost every other occurrence of the “Church of Christ” throughout the entire Doctrine and Covenants. In fact, thirteen of the eighteen occurrences can be tied directly to church organization and government.²⁷ The remaining occurrences deal with such topics as obeying the “lower” commandments (similar to those of the law of Moses),²⁸ the naming of Christ’s church,²⁹ and the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.³⁰

It is interesting to note the overwhelming connection of the church of Christ with physical organization, government, and policy.³¹ I feel this must be more than a mere coincidence. The Lord must be trying to tell us something with such consistency throughout the Doctrine and Covenants.

The Church of Enoch (D&C)

The church of Enoch is mentioned only one time in the Doctrine and Covenants.³² It is associated with those beings who will inherit the Celestial Kingdom in connection with the general assembly and the church of the Firstborn.

Following the pattern given to us by the Savior, “if a church be called in Moses’ name then it be Moses’ church,” we must assume that the church which is called in Enoch’s name is Enoch’s church. In the words of the Savior, “And how be it my church save it be called in my name?” Hence, the church of Enoch must be a separate church from the church of Christ.

Whatever the church of Enoch is, it is apparently held in very high regard by the Lord. This would make sense since Enoch and his city are described as Zion and as being so righteous they were taken up into heaven.³³ It would also make sense that this would be a celestial church because, as discussed earlier, it is ministering to a terrestrial people.

²⁶ See D&C 20:1, 38, 61, 68, 71, 80, 81, 90; 21:11; 42:78; 102:1, 12; 107:59; 115:3-4; 127:12; 128:21; and 136:2.

²⁷ See D&C 20:1, 38, 61, 68, 71, 80, 81, 90; 21:11; 102:1, 12; 107:59; and 136:2.

²⁸ D&C 42:78-93

²⁹ D&C 115:3-4

³⁰ D&C 127:12; 128:21

³¹ We are reminded that the “preparatory gospel” includes such things as the law of carnal commandments, outward ordinances, and the letter of the gospel. (D&C 84:26-27; 107:14, 20)

³² D&C 76:67

³³ See D&C 38:4.

The Church of God (D&C)

The church of God appears in the Doctrine and Covenants a total of six times.³⁴ In every case this church is associated with things of a celestial nature. Such things as Zion, the law of consecration, the New Jerusalem, the higher priesthood, the Father's kingdom, and eternal life are common topics surrounding the occurrences of the "church of God." Although fairly consistent with itself, it is a completely different theme than that associated with the church of Christ.

One very interesting scripture concerning the church of God is found in section 70.

I, the Lord, have appointed them (Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, Sidney Rigdon, and William W. Phelps), and ordained them to be stewards over the revelations and commandments which I have given unto them, and which I shall hereafter give unto them;

And an account of this stewardship will I require of them in the day of judgment.

Wherefore, I have appointed unto them, and this is their business in the church of God, to manage them and the concerns thereof, yea, the benefits thereof.

Wherefore, a commandment I give unto them, that they shall not give these things unto the church, neither unto the world; (D&C 70:3-6, underline added)

This is very curious wording. First, these men are given stewardship over revelations and commandments. They are told that this stewardship is their "business in the church of God." But then they are commanded to not give these things unto "the church." From which church are these revelations being withheld? Since people from the church of God received these things in the first place and were made stewards over them, it might make more sense to assume that they were withheld from a completely different church than the church of God. Perhaps it was the church of Christ from whom these revelations were withheld. This would certainly make sense in light of our discussion thus far.

Whatever the church of God is, it is quite obviously associated with the higher things - the things of the Celestial Kingdom.

The Church of the Firstborn (D&C)

³⁴ See D&C 70:5, 10; 82:18; 84:17; 107:80; and 138:55.

The church of the Firstborn appears in the Doctrine and Covenants a total of ten times.³⁵ As with the “church of God,” literally all of the occurrences of the “church of the Firstborn” reflect a strong association with the Celestial Kingdom. Surrounding the church of the Firstborn are such issues as the 144,000 high priests,³⁶ the fulness of the priesthood,³⁷ and enjoying the communion and presence of God the Father in the Celestial Kingdom.³⁸ Also of significance is the fact that the church of the Firstborn is clearly not terrestrial or telesial in nature.³⁹ If the church of Christ is terrestrial in nature, as this work has proposed, then we can clearly differentiate it from the church of the Firstborn. In addition, as far as the Doctrine and Covenants is concerned, the church of God and the church of the Firstborn seem to be the same church, or at least very closely related to each other.

It seems quite apparent that the Church of the Firstborn and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints are two different churches, one being higher than the other. This has been taught in no uncertain terms by the leaders of this church. For example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said,

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who so devote themselves to righteousness that they receive the higher ordinances of exaltation become members of the Church of the Firstborn. Baptism is the gate to the Church itself, but celestial marriage is the gate to membership in the Church of the Firstborn, the inner circle of faithful saints who are heirs of exaltation and the fulness of the Father's kingdom. (Mormon Doctrine, Pg.139)

President Joseph Fielding Smith has made similar statements about the relationship between these two churches.

Those who gain exaltation in the celestial kingdom are those who are members of the Church of the Firstborn; in other words, those who keep all the commandments of the Lord. There will be many who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who shall never become members of the Church of the Firstborn. (Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.41)

³⁵ See D&C 76:54, 67, 71, 94, 102; 77:11; 78:21; 88:5; 93:22; and 107:19.

³⁶ D&C 77:11

³⁷ D&C 107:19

³⁸ D&C 76:54, 67, 94; 88:5; 93:22

³⁹ D&C 76:71, 102

So being ordained an elder, or a high priest, or an apostle, or even President of the Church, is not the thing that brings the exaltation, but obedience to the laws and the ordinances and the covenants required of those who desire to become members of the Church of the Firstborn, as these are administered in the house of the Lord. To become a member of the Church of the Firstborn, as I understand it, is to become one of the inner circle. We are all members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by being baptized and confirmed, and there are many who seem to be content to remain such without obtaining the privileges of exaltation. (Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.42)

Notice how Elder McConkie and President Smith associate such things as baptism and church organization with the church of Jesus Christ. This should again bring to mind the preparatory gospel of baptism, repentance, and outward ordinances. Notice also how these brethren associate temple ordinances and exaltation with the church of the Firstborn rather, than with the church of Jesus Christ. This fits perfectly with our discussion. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints seems to be a “less than celestial” organization and teaches us the gospel of Jesus Christ or the gospel of baptism and repentance. This church and the gospel it teaches are preparatory to becoming members of the church of the Firstborn, which teaches the gospel of the Father and is celestial in nature. To paraphrase President Smith, if we are content to remain in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, we will never obtain the privileges of exaltation. I believe we may be able to inherit the Terrestrial Kingdom, but if we are not valiant in our testimonies of Jesus,⁴⁰ we will not surpass this preparatory phase of our progression. Hence, we will not be allowed to enter into the church of our Father or his kingdom.

A natural question that might arise is, “Since the church of the Firstborn is so closely tied to the Father, why would it be called after the Firstborn instead of after the Father?” Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants seems to tell us that Jesus Christ is the Firstborn.

And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn;

And all those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn. (D&C 93:21-22)

In addition, we are told that Christ,

...is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: (Colossians 1:15, underline added)

As we will see, it is also possible that God the Father is referred to as “the Firstborn” in some scriptures. I feel it is important that we understand who the Firstborn is in reference to the church of the Firstborn. In the context of “The Church of the Firstborn” it seems to be referring to God the Father. For example, in the Doctrine and Covenants we read,

This [other] Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom;

Which glory is that of the church of the Firstborn, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ his Son-- (D&C 88:4-5, underline added)

⁴⁰ D&C 76:79

We should first notice that these verses are again associating the church of the Firstborn with eternal life and the celestial kingdom. Next, we should notice that the phrase “even as” seems to equate the church of the Firstborn with the church of God, the holiest of all.⁴¹ We must ask ourselves, “Who is God, the holiest of all?” In this verse it is quite clearly the Father of Jesus Christ. This makes perfect sense when we consider all of the other scriptures which associate the church of the Firstborn with the presence of the Father.

Following this reasoning we may paraphrase these verses by saying that the glory of the church of the Firstborn, or in other words, the glory of the church of God, the holiest of all, can be achieved through Jesus Christ his son, Christ being the other Comforter spoken of.⁴² Hence, the argument is made that God the Father and the Firstborn spoken of in this verse are one and the same being. In addition, we can make another argument that the “church of the Firstborn” and the “church of God” spoken of in the Doctrine and Covenants are one and the same church. Throughout the Doctrine and Covenants these two churches are associated with basically the same types of themes (ie. the Celestial Kingdom, the higher priesthood, the presence of the Father, etc.).

Another significant piece of evidence which supports the idea of God the Father being a firstborn is given to us in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. In our modern version of the book of Alma we find the following verse:

I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name. (Alma 5:48, underline added)

However, this text was changed. It originally read as follows:

I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name. (Alma 5:48, 1830 edition, underline added)

If this were the only instance of this particular change we might be able to write it off as a mistake, perhaps made by Joseph Smith’s scribe. However, exactly the same change was made later in the Book of Mormon. Alma chapter thirteen, verse nine originally read as follows:

Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son of the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen. (Alma 13:9, 1830 edition, underline added)

⁴¹ The only other place in the Doctrine and Covenants that the phrase “holiest of all” appears is also connected with the church of the Firstborn and the Celestial Kingdom. (See D&C 76:66-67)

⁴² TPJS pp.149-150

From these scriptures in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon it seems entirely possible that God the Father was both a firstborn as well as an only Begotten of his Father. Joseph Smith taught quite clearly that God the Father had previously done the same things as his son Jesus Christ.

I wish I was in a suitable place to tell it, and that I had the trump of an archangel, so that I could tell the story in such a manner that persecution would cease for ever. What did Jesus say? (Mark it, Elder Rigdon!) The Scriptures inform us that Jesus said, As the Father hath power in Himself, even so hath the Son power — to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious — in a manner to lay down His body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. Do we believe it? If you do not believe it, you do not believe the Bible. The Scriptures say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom and all the combined powers of earth and hell together to refute it. (TPJS Pg.346, underline added)

The footnote to this passage in Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, written by Elder B. H. Roberts, reads as follows:

The argument here made by the Prophet is very much strengthened by the following passage: “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he [the Father] doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (St. John 5:19). (TPJS Notes Pg.346)

This further supports the idea that the Father had basically the same calling and mission during his mortal probation as Jesus did during his life here on earth. Hence, not only are the titles of “father” and “son” interchangeable between these two people, but also the titles of “only begotten” and “firstborn” as well. It appears that they have both filled that role.

When this earth receives its paradisiacal glory and Christ becomes the god of other worlds, who knows but what he will then refer to his celestial church as “The Church of the Firstborn” just as his Father is doing now. God, our Father, is apparently the firstborn of his Father, our eternal Grandfather. The term “firstborn” seems to be a title or office which applies to all those who fill the calling of savior in the various mortal worlds, whether past, present, or future.

I feel it is important for us to remember that we enter into the church of the Firstborn via the ordinances of the temple. Remember the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie quoted above?

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who so devote themselves to righteousness that they receive the higher ordinances of exaltation become members of the Church of the Firstborn. Baptism is the gate to the Church itself, but celestial marriage⁴³ is the gate to membership in the Church of the Firstborn, the inner circle of faithful saints who are heirs of exaltation and the fulness of the Father’s kingdom. (Mormon Doctrine, Pg.139, underline added)

Also quoted above, President Joseph Fielding Smith plainly taught that entrance into the Church of the Firstborn comes through “obedience to the laws and the ordinances and the covenants...administered in the house of the Lord.”

⁴³ It is important to note here that many people who feel they have properly entered into celestial marriage may be mistaken. For more information about this topic please see my other work entitled “**The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage.**”

President Brigham Young also made a clear connection between the ordinances of the temple and the church of the Firstborn.

All they [the sectarian world] have ever desired or anticipated they will receive, and far more; but they cannot dwell with the Father and Son, unless they go through those ordeals that are ordained for the Church of the Firstborn. The ordinances of the house of God are expressly for the Church of the Firstborn. (Journal of Discourses 8:154, underline added)

We are reminded of the words of President Ezra Taft Benson when he said,

Everything we learn in the holy places, the temples, is based on the scriptures. These teachings are what the scriptures refer to as the “mysteries of godliness” (see I Timothy 3:16; D&C 19:10). They are to be comprehended by the power of the Holy Ghost, for the Lord has given this promise to His faithful and obedient servants: “Thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things” (D&C 42:61). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.245, underline added)

We are told that these mysteries of godliness are given to us and taken away from us according to our faithfulness and diligence.

And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:9-11, underline added)

With these things in mind we should be extremely alarmed about the words of the Father given to us through Christ in the Book of Mormon. Speaking of the last days, after the restoration of the gospel, we read,

And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:10-12, underline added)

Has the fullness of the gospel of the Father, as can be found in the ordinances of the temple, been taken away from the latter-day gentile church? Have we, the Latter-day Saints of this last dispensation, rejected the fullness of the Father's gospel to the degree that these prophecies have been fulfilled or are being fulfilled? Is entrance into the church of the Firstborn still available to the general membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints? If so, how? These are questions that the reader will have to prayerfully study and answer for themselves.

It is clear that the church of the Firstborn is a celestial church, associated with the presence of the Father and the highest ordinances of the temple. It is also clear that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is a preparatory church, preparing us to entering into the church of the Firstborn. This again seems to suggest that the Church of Jesus Christ is a terrestrial church. Its purpose is to raise us up from the telestial level most of us are on to a terrestrial level. However, it seems clear that we will never gain exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom as long as we remain members of the Church of Jesus Christ only. We must progress beyond this church and the doctrines it teaches. If we are ever to become exalted and inherit the celestial Kingdom of the Father, we must first recognize just how far away from that kingdom we are and how much more we must do in order to obtain it.

WHAT IS APOSTASY?

This is a question that is much more complex than most people think. Generally, when we think of apostasy, we think in terms of either being "in" apostasy or "out of" apostasy. For example, many people tend believe that there was a specific time in history when the great apostasy occurred after the time of Christ. We often believe that we should be able to find one significant event or date when the great apostasy happened. This, however, is clearly an incorrect view. Apostasy is not an event, it is a process. If we study the apostasy that occurred after Christ was on the earth we will never be able to find a single event or date that "flipped the switch" and changed Christ's church from true to false. Rather, we find that it was slowly dismantled or corrupted over a long period of time. We find that during an apostasy, knowledge is lost in much the same way that it is gained during a restoration. That is, apostasy usually occurs line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.

With this in mind, whenever we speak of apostasy, we should always be careful how we think about it and how we choose our words. We should be cautious that we don't view it as purely a black and white issue. For example, rather than ask, "Are we in apostasy?" Perhaps, we should ask instead, "Are we in the process of apostasy?" In other words, which direction are we headed? Are we moving up the ladder towards higher truths or down the ladder towards lower truths? We should also ask, "At what level of apostasy are we?" Are we currently teaching and living the higher principles revealed by Joseph, Brigham, and others, or are we shying away from such things and becoming more and more like other Christian churches who possess and live truth on a fairly low level?

Another extremely important question regarding apostasy relates to priesthood authority. Regardless of whether we are currently living higher laws or lower laws, we should always keep in mind that whatever the Lord commands is right, no matter what it is. For example, if the Lord says, "Live plural marriage," then we should live it. However, if He says, "Don't live plural marriage," then we must not live it. As far

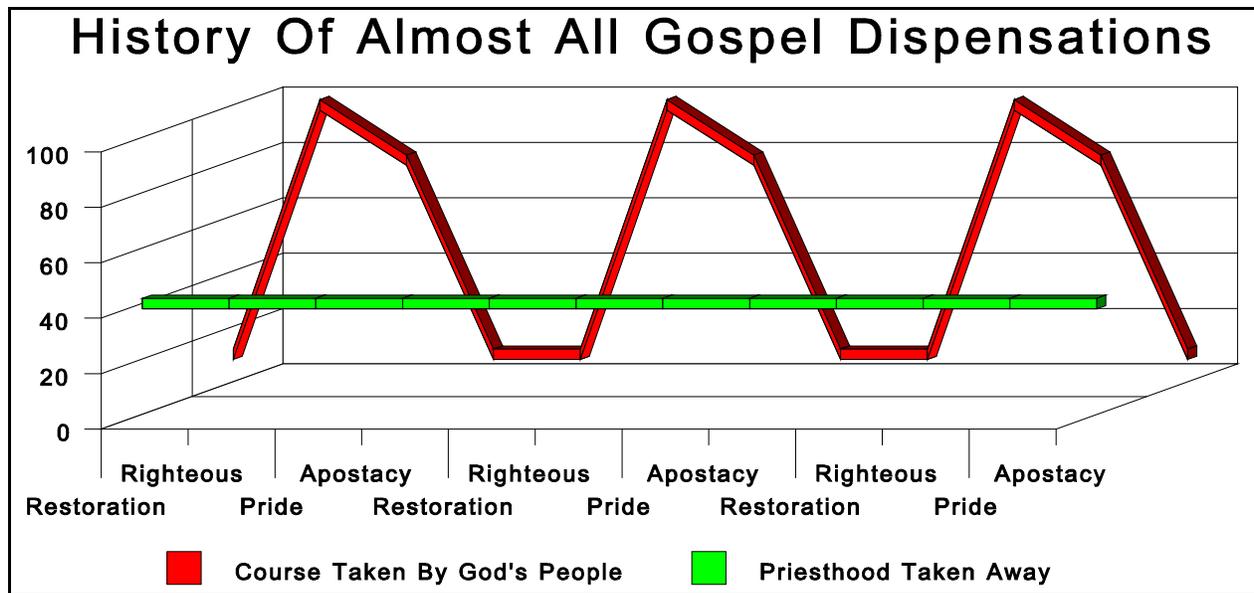
as our actions are concerned, the question is not whether or not plural marriage is a higher principle lived in the Celestial Kingdom. The question is whether or not God condones or approves of it in your particular life or at this particular time. The same is true with all principles of God, whether higher truths or lower truths. We must remember that even though the Law of Moses was a very low law, it was still a revelation from God through a true and significant prophet. The key to its truthfulness was not a matter of higher or lower laws, but rather a matter of authority and revelation. This is just so today. Even if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is currently teaching and living lower laws, this fact, by itself, is no indication that the Lord's involvement has been removed or that He is no longer at the helm.

Whenever we talk about apostasy we should always address this issue of authority and revelation. As far as "ecclesiastical apostasy" is concerned, the question of authority is a far more important question than that of teaching higher or lower truths. When discussing the possibility of apostasy within this church, the lower and less important question is, "Why isn't this church currently teaching and living the higher principles?" The higher and more important question is, "Does this church still have the proper authority and is it still receiving revelation to teach the principles and ordinances of God, whether higher or lower?" If any church or person has authority from God, then they are right in what they do and say. If they don't have this authority then they are no different than any other gentile philosopher commenting on religious issues. This is true for any person or organization, whether in the church or out.

Whenever any religious organization exists it can generally be placed somewhere along the continuum of truth and apostasy. Churches can almost always be viewed as either progressing or digressing in eternal principles. Unfortunately, most seem to be digressing. Because of this, all churches tend to fall short of the goal to one degree or another. They are all less than perfect and therefore in some form of apostasy.⁴⁴ Yet, wherever there is authority and revelation, there is truth and goodness to some degree. This is just so with this church. Are we in apostasy? Yes, we always have been to one degree or another in that we have never achieved a celestial way of life. In fact, we've seldom come close to it. The real questions are, "How far into apostasy are we, which direction are we headed, and is the Lord still in charge of this church?" By this same reasoning, we may compare well with the children of Israel in the time of Moses. Even though the Law of Moses was given by God himself, it could very accurately be viewed as an "apostate" law. This is because it is a lower law. When it is compared to a celestial way of life it falls way short of the mark. In addition, it was also a law given to Israel after the higher law was rejected by them. Yet, in spite of these things, the Law of Moses was clearly inspired, true, and authoritative for that people at that time. It was intended to take most of the people to a higher way of life than they were currently living. Yet, it must have been terribly frustrating to those who were prepared for higher principles.

Taking this perspective, a church or person may be speaking with the authority of God and still be involved heavily in the process of apostasy. If we look at the history of the earth as it pertains to the Lord's dealings with His children, we find a continual process of restoration, righteousness, pride, and apostasy. The scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, is filled with this story of apostate "peaks and valleys." This can be represented by the illustration that follows.

⁴⁴ Mormon 8:36



If we think of doctrines and ordinances as higher and lower instead of simply true or false, we may have a more accurate picture of apostasy. At what level the Lord removes authority and revelation is certainly a point of speculation and perhaps can only be determined via prayer and personal inspiration. I'm not sure that it can be discerned by study alone. However, as the scriptures indicate, it seems that God will often stoop to quite low levels in order to redeem his people. We should not be too surprised to find that He is very much involved with teaching His children at all levels, not just the highest ones. And given the state of the world today, a low level seems to clearly be necessary if we are to have any affect on most people. However, it also seems clear that the time will shortly come when the Lord will raise His level of expectation, gather the elect from the four corners of the earth, and destroy the wicked who could not even accept the lower laws given to them. As a recent proclamation from the church states:

We [the church leaders] warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets. (A Proclamation To The World by the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles. See General Relief Society Meeting, September 23, 1995.)

Notice the level at which this proclamation addresses us. It's simply trying to avoid abuse and keep families together. It's not even approaching the laws of exaltation or a celestial way of life. It seems to be very much a "Law of Moses" type of sermon. Yet, for many, if not most people on earth, it serves as a higher law. It is a lifestyle above that which most are currently living. This even seems to be true for those within the church itself. The proclamation also echoes scripture regarding the fate of those who will not live even the lowest of God's laws.

For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction, and this grieveth my soul. (2 Nephi 26:11)

I feel the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints should perhaps be viewed in this manner. I believe it would be difficult for anyone to support the idea that this church is still teaching and living the same

high laws and ordinances it once embraced. In fact, it could even be argued that there are few doctrines and ordinances regarding the Celestial Kingdom that we are able to even speak of in the church today without experiencing difficulties. For example, few gospel doctrine classes or sermons would dare even bring up such issues as the Church of the Firstborn, second annointings, plural marriage, the united order, or the law of consecration. Many members of the church seem to all but deny the existence of such things, let alone study or discuss them openly. Yet, to accuse this church of having no more priesthood authority or revelation seems to be making more of a leap than I am willing to take at this time, especially given the many experiences and testimonies to the contrary. How the Lord currently views this church or what the future holds for it are topics worthy of further discussion. For the Lord seems to have clearly taught that calamities will come upon this church because of its wickedness.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face.

Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.

And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord:

First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord. (D&C 112:23-26, underline added)

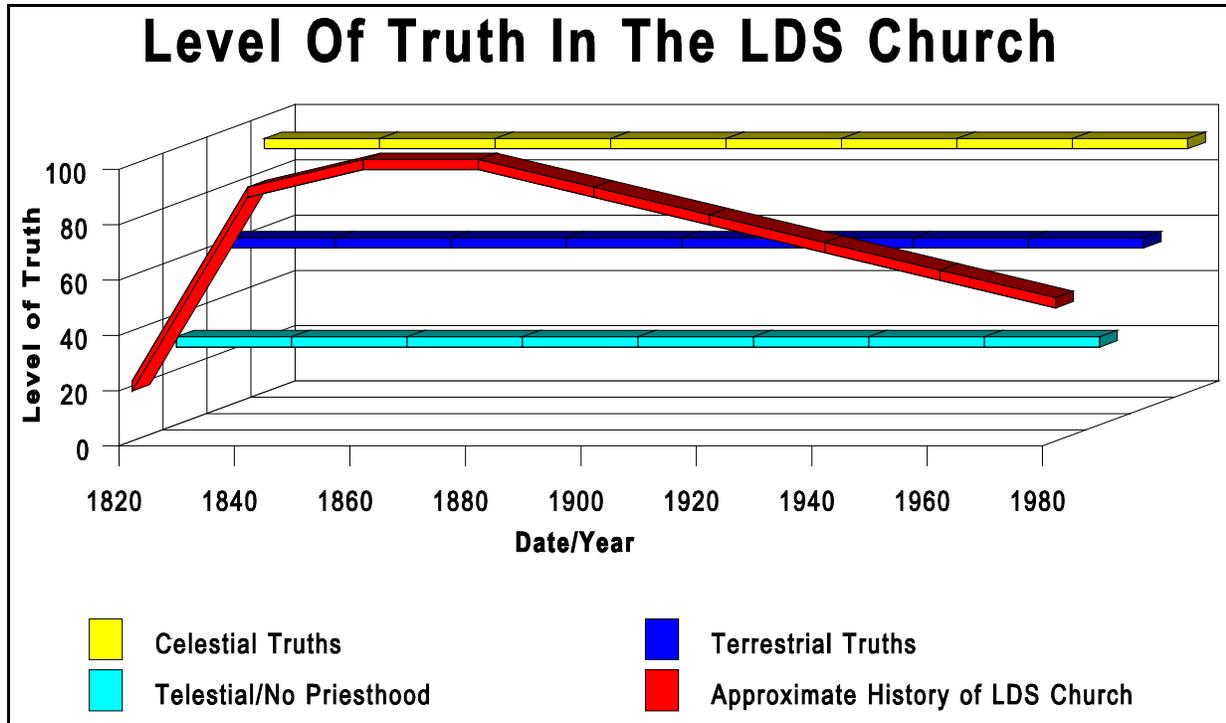
Given that apostasy is a process rather than an event, we can perhaps explain the history of the LDS church in this dispensation using the illustration that follows. Using this graph we can outline a course of the church that suggests we are following the same pattern as the Nephites and others to whom the gospel has been restored. In this graph we see an outpouring of gospel principles and ordinances through Joseph Smith and other early prophets. Then, through pride and disobedience, we seem to have begun to abandon many of the higher truths once taught and lived within the church. This process has continued over the years until we have reached the level at which we now find ourselves. As President Joseph Fielding Smith once stated,

It is a very apparent fact that we have traveled far and wide in the past 20 years. What the future will bring I do not know. But if we drift as far afield from the fundamental things in the next 20 years, what will be left of the foundation laid by the prophet Joseph Smith? It is easy for one who observes to see how the apostasy came about in the primitive church of Jesus Christ. (from his diary, December 28, 1938)

In addition, President Benson once stated,

Not only are there apostates within our midst, but there are also apostate doctrines that are sometimes taught in our classes and from our pulpits and that appear in our publications. And these apostate precepts of men cause our people to stumble. As the Book of Mormon, speaking of our day, states: "They have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men" (2 Nephi 28:14). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89-90)

Notice how President Benson associates this scripture with those who are in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He seems to interpret these verses as talking about our church, not just the other churches of the world, although that may certainly apply as well.



Elder H. Verlan Anderson, in his insightful book, “The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil,” devoted an entire chapter to the “apostasy” of the latter days. In that chapter he states,

To fail to consider the possibility that the members of the church are again “falling away” would be to ignore one of the most thoroughly documented lessons of history. Especially is this true in light of the fact that the cultural, political, and educational life of Church members has become so deeply and thoroughly involved with that of non-members that they are overwhelmingly influenced by the “ways of the world.” Through newspapers and magazines, motion pictures and television, schools and lecture halls, and a thoroughly integrated economic system, Church members come into close and continuous contact with those not of their faith.

Some may assume that a “Gentile apostasy” in these latter days cannot occur because Christ’s Church is here to stay this time. They may assume that widespread departure from gospel principles by Church members is contrary to prophecy. While the scriptures do assure us that the Church will continue to exist and be divinely led by prophets of the Lord right up until his Second Coming, they do not state that all, or even a majority of its members will follow those prophets. On the contrary, they foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles. (The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 169-170, underline added)

It should be understood that even though certain higher truths and ordinances have clearly been left behind by this church, this fact by itself is by no means an indication that priesthood authority or prophets have ceased to exist in our midst. In my opinion, the truths and ordinances still found in the church will clearly lift people above the rest of the world. Unfortunately, that's not very far when compared to the lofty goals of exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom. We should be cautious about criticizing the church or its leadership without direct revelation on the subject, lest we be as the children of Israel who perhaps accused Moses of lowering God's standards, or the Nephites in the time of Jacob when he preached against plural marriage. Although not the organization it once was, I feel more value may be found in trying to understand the church than in criticizing it. Clearly the house of the Lord needs to be "set in order."⁴⁵ But it is just as clear that the Lord will do it in his own way and through servants called specifically for this task.⁴⁶

Short of personal revelation on the subject, I dare say that we don't know with certainty which of our leaders are authoritatively inspired and which are not. Many are probably judging them unrighteously on both sides of the issue. If the leaders of this church are keeping certain truths and ordinances from the general membership, perhaps it is because that is exactly what the Lord has commanded them to do. We certainly have many precedents for such actions. It should be remembered, for example, that Joseph Smith taught different people at different levels throughout his life. Joseph himself outlined this problem well when he said,

If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Pg.111)

Those faithful enough to be within the prophet's "inner circle" were privy to many truths and ordinances that were withheld from the general membership of the church for many years. The prophet even openly renounced many of these higher principles, knowing full well that they were true and essential to exaltation. For example, it is now well known that Joseph Smith and others lived plural marriage for several years before announcing the practice publicly. During this time they even made public statements against plural marriage. This was apparently done that the weak in faith may be protected. Why do some not think it possible that our current leaders are doing exactly the same thing?

It is important that we take a "reasonable" position in these matters. Too many people view these things as simply black or white, true or false. In reality, the truth can almost always be found somewhere within the vast amount of gray area in between. I maintain that this "reasonable" position includes the fact that some leaders of this church are authoritatively inspired and others are not. There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that many of those chosen by the Lord for leadership positions will not always be faithful. For example, President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

The Lord strengthened the faith of the early Apostles by pointing out Judas as a traitor, even before this Apostle had completed his iniquitous work (see Matthew 26:23-25; Luke 13:21-26). So also in our day the Lord has told us of the tares within the wheat that will

⁴⁵ D&C 85:7

⁴⁶ D&C 85:8, D&C 86:6-7

eventually be hewn down when they are fully ripe. But until they are hewn down, they will be with us, amongst us. (See D&C 86:6-7.) (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)

President Benson has also said,

Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon left the Church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell--one even helped plot his death. A natural question that might arise would be that if the Lord knew in advance that these men would fall, as He undoubtedly did, why did He have His prophet call them to such high office? The answer is: to fill the Lord's purposes. For even the Master followed the will of the Father by selecting Judas. President George Q. Cannon suggested an explanation, too, when he stated, "Perhaps it is his own design that faults and weaknesses should appear in high places in order that his saints may learn to trust in him and not in any man or men." (Millennial Star 53:658, 1891) And this would parallel Nephi's warning, put not your "trust in the arm of flesh." (2 Nephi 4:34) (An Enemy Hath Done This, Pg. 290. See also Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)

It seems as though the tares will always be among the wheat, even within some of the highest callings of the church. We have every reason to believe that there are tares among the wheat in this church today. Perhaps they are even more numerous than the wheat. However, we should remember the teachings of Christ concerning false leaders of a true religion:

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. (Matthew 23:3, underline added)

We should learn to accept the good and reject the bad, regardless of the mouth that declares it. The burden of our salvation rests with us, not with any other man or men. If they are not all that they should be, it is an issue between them and the Lord. This is just so with us. I highly doubt that it is my calling to chasten the leaders of this church for their faults. In addition, I question my very ability to judge such matters with accuracy. As Elder J. Golden Kimball once said regarding his own faults,

Brethren and sisters, I do not think that you question my integrity and my loyalty and patriotism to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I think there are times when you have questioned very much what I say to you, and criticized me very severely sometimes, but I get a good deal of comfort out of the fact that none of the rest of you escape any better than I do. Our people and the children of men are very ready to criticize the brethren of the authorities and the local brethren who preside over the stakes and over the wards. They seem to feel that it is their right, and they certainly take advantage of it, some of them; so that I am not discouraged at all. I often wonder when you do have the Spirit of God. I used to think I had it in the Southern States, when I became excited and sensational, and my face was red, and the cords of my neck were swollen--I thought then, in my ignorance, that it was the Holy Ghost. I learned differently afterwards. I am sure that was not the Spirit of God. I have learned since that the Spirit of God gives you joy and peace and patience and long-suffering and gentleness, and you have the spirit of forgiveness and you love the souls of the children of men. I have learned that the Holy Ghost is the spirit of prophecy and the spirit of revelation. I often think,

when I reflect along this line, sometimes when I have preached and perhaps in my egotism I thought I had the Spirit of God, but after some of the brethren talked to me I was very doubtful about it. (Conference Report, October 1918, p.30)

I pray that we will be cautious in our judgements of either people or churches. Apostasy is not a black and white issue. It is a matter of degrees. What may be viewed as apostasy to some, might very well be the highest laws to which others can currently aspire.

For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish. (D&C 19:22)

As far as this church is concerned, I have not been able to solve the problem of missionary work vs. perfecting the saints. How do you preach the gospel to newcomers and perfect the saints at the same time? In other words, how do you give milk to the weak while giving meat to the faithful? It seems to me that the church is forced to choose between the two, but cannot do both at the same time. Who am I to criticize the choice that has been made?

As a final note to this section, it seems that as communication technology increases the church will experience increasing difficulty in keeping the “meat” away from those any who seek it, whether weak or strong. With such things as the internet and comprehensive LDS computer programs, almost anyone can find even the most difficult doctrines of the restoration with relative ease. The days of reading hundreds of books in order to find a few references on a single topic are over. This outpouring of information will clearly be to the condemnation of many people. Yet it appears that the church will have little or no power to control it all. It is as if the Lord has taken the burden of preaching the higher truths away from the church by creating a new vehicle for its dissemination. Before long the church will likely be faced with some very difficult situations. Mormon and non-Mormon alike have already begun writing books that challenge the testimonies of even the most faithful. Yet much of what is challenging in these books is also true. The danger is clear. Joseph Smith expressed it well.

Many men will say, “I will never forsake you, but will stand by you at all times.” But the moment you teach them some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God that are retained in the heavens and are to be revealed to the children of men when they are prepared for them, they will be the first to stone you and put you to death. It was this same principle that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, and will cause the people to kill the prophets in this generation. (History of the Church 5:424, underline added)

And again,

I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chose. (TPJS Pg.331)

Even with our great love and desire for the mysteries of God, we should be justifiably reluctant to share all we know or to criticize this church and its leaders for its apparent unwillingness to damn the souls of those who are as yet unprepared for such things. Whenever we have a desire to preach the higher principles, perhaps we should ask ourselves, “What is more important, truth or people?” When carefully considered, this is a difficult question indeed.

SUMMARY

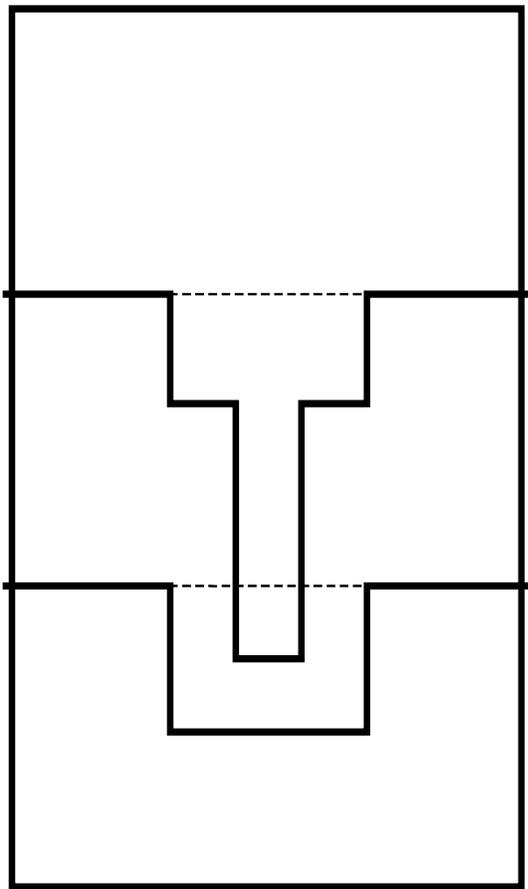
Perhaps the best way to illustrate the arguments presented in this work is with the following illustration. We know that there are three main kingdoms of glory. Worthy members of the church also know that there are certain laws and principles associated with each kingdom.

This paper proposes that among other differences, each kingdom has its own gospel, church, and reigning leader or deity. It also suggests that each kingdom “dips down” into kingdoms below it in an effort to redeem the inhabitants of that kingdom. This is done by raising them to the next highest kingdom. Although a person may learn about and even live celestial laws while here on earth, this only seems to occur via the terrestrial laws. In other words, one cannot “jump” from telestial to celestial. The purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ seems to be to take people from a telestial lifestyle to a terrestrial lifestyle. Then, only when this is accomplished, the Church of the Firstborn takes them from a terrestrial way of life to a celestial way of life. A major problem can exist when telestial people begin to learn about celestial doctrines.

This is not to say that Jesus Christ is a terrestrial being. Rather, His gospel, church, and kingdom are terrestrial. I believe the Savior himself is celestial. The fact that He is celestial allows Him to be in charge of a terrestrial kingdom. For it is the celestial that ministers unto the terrestrial and the terrestrial that ministers unto the telestial.⁴⁷ Hence, Christ can visit a terrestrial realm or person but cannot visit a telestial realm or person. The Holy Ghost, on the other hand, provides the most common form of spiritual communication in the telestial world, the Holy Ghost being most likely of a terrestrial nature in one way or another.

I assume that there are those who will read this work and begin to criticize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, as well as its leaders because of the issue of higher and lower laws. In addition, there are many who are already well entrenched in such criticism. They will allow pride to enter their hearts and tend to believe that they are “above” the low teachings of this church, that they want and deserve more than this church has to offer, and that the leaders of this church have not given them the whole story or have purposely misled them in some way. I will be the first to admit that not all leaders of this church are as perfect as we would like them to be. Many may not even be aware of some of these higher doctrines themselves. However, I would strongly advise us to be cautious in our judgements of this church or its leaders.

⁴⁷ D&C 76:86-87



Celestial

Gospel of the Father
 Church of the Firstborn
 Kingdom of the Father

Terrestrial

Gospel of Jesus Christ
 Church of Jesus Christ
 Kingdom of Jesus Christ

Telestial

Doctrines of the Devil
 Church of the Devil
 Kingdom of the Devil

If nothing else is gained from this work, we should recognize that the Lord definitely does not give all things to all people. This is by design. In fact, a strong argument could be made to show that relatively few people on earth have ever received as much knowledge from God as have the Latter-day Saints. God purposely hides and takes away the mysteries from his children if they are not ready to receive them. Although this is not the situation some may deserve, it is clearly for our own benefit and necessary under the circumstances.

Even though the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has its problems and seems to be teaching doctrines on a rather low level these days, perhaps this is just what the Lord has called upon his prophets to do for this people at this time, or for this world at this time. Perhaps, just as in the times of Moses, the Lord gave us more than we could handle at first. Just as Moses was instructed by the Lord to take away the higher laws and give the lower laws to the children of Israel, perhaps our leaders have also been instructed by the Lord to take away the higher laws and give us the lower laws, we having rejected the higher laws offered to us earlier in this dispensation. To say that our leaders are uninspired or that this church is “in apostasy,” merely because we are preaching and living the lower laws instead of the higher ones, seems to be more of a reflection on the members of the church rather than its leaders. Perhaps criticizing some of our leaders for not preaching the higher doctrines would be similar to criticizing Moses for throwing away the higher law and preaching the lower one to the children of Israel. Although there are certainly other things to be considered, this argument against our leaders seems to be shallow and largely insupportable in my mind, brought about mainly by people who know a lot about the gospel, but who perhaps have slightly more pride or self-interest than wisdom or love for those weak in faith. It seems that the only way to really determine whether or not someone else has authority or is receiving

revelation is by receiving some sort of personal revelation ourselves. Barring this personal witness, I believe the argument is reduced to little more than speculation and opinion. There is certainly seems to be a precedent for most of what the current leaders of the church are doing and teaching.

This is not to say that they are all they propose to be. Many leaders of this church have openly declared that there are problems within the church, both in doctrine and leadership. This is nothing new. The fact is, there always have been such problems in Christ's church. The same is true today. All is clearly not well in Zion. However, it has always been and is now a question of degrees and directions rather than contrasting opposites or black and white issues. It is still a question of process rather than event.

We must remember that it is only through Jesus Christ, his kingdom, gospel, and church, that we are able to approach the Father, along with his kingdom, gospel, and church. If any doctrine is clearly taught in the scriptures, it is this one. For now, Jesus Christ is everything to us teletial beings. Perhaps He always will be as we continue to progress from one kingdom to the next.⁴⁸ He is the avenue we all must take on our journey towards perfection. Most Latter-day Saints seem to believe that they will somehow leap from this teletial realm straight to a celestial kingdom, without ever having to perfect themselves on a terrestrial level. It is important for us to understand that we must receive a "fullness" of the terrestrial glory before we can hope to receive a fullness of the celestial glory.⁴⁹ This can only be done by living in and enduring the kingdom, gospel, and church of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. To think we can bypass this step in our progression is both foolish and arrogant on our part.

In addition, we must realize that any attempt to establish the church of the Firstborn will likely show great respect and understanding towards the church of Jesus Christ. These two organizations will not be enemies to each other, they will complement each other. Remember the words of the Lord regarding contention quoted earlier?

Contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil. (D&C 18:20)

Even if this church is on the road to apostasy, I really doubt that too many people would go as far as to say that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is the church of the Devil. If the priesthood of God is not found within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, then where can it be found? Certainly God can give authority to any individual or group at any time He so pleases. Perhaps there are other organizations out there who are both living the higher laws and who are well known to the leaders of this church. Yet, these groups are kept secret from the general population of the church because of wickedness on our part. Even Joseph Smith wasn't aware of all the righteous groups living on the earth.⁵⁰ In my opinion, faithful, knowledgeable latter-day saints must somehow be able to learn about, prepare for, and build up the kingdom of our Father without destroying the kingdom of his Son in the process.

⁴⁸ TPJS p. 347-348

⁴⁹ D&C 88:28-32

⁵⁰ D&C 49:8

We must be able to become terrestrial beings who seek things of a celestial nature, while at the same time righteously ministering unto telestial beings who are not yet prepared for the higher laws. The Apostle Paul once explained the necessity of preaching “milk” to those who need it while pursuing the “meat” of the gospel ourselves. With the help of Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Bible, we see that it is both possible and appropriate to move on to perfection without leaving the principles of Christ behind.

Therefore not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2, JST)

Notice how Paul once again associates the first principles and ordinances of the gospel with the “doctrine of Christ.”⁵¹ By reading the whole message Paul is trying to convey, I believe we can glean that those who are of “full age” in the gospel of Christ must progress beyond these first principles rather than digress to where they have already been. However, they must somehow continue to progress in the “meat” without leaving the “milk” behind, for some still “have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”⁵² This is our charge as well - to go on unto the perfection of the Father while, at the same time, not leaving the doctrine of Christ behind. We must learn to reach for the stars with one hand, while extending the other hand towards those who do not yet even see the stars we desire so desperately. By extending both hands in one direction or the other we thwart God’s plan of progression for his children. We either stop progressing ourselves or we leave others behind in an effort to save ourselves. Again we ask the question, “What is more important, truth or people?” I believe the only adequate answer is that they are equally important. One is of no value without the other. We must therefore become able to deal with both on different levels. If our love of one ever outweighs our love for the other, then we are on the downward path toward spiritual failure.

President Brigham Young has given us sound advice regarding the knowledge and mysteries God reveals to us.

You often hear people desiring more of the knowledge of God, more of the wisdom of God, more of the power of God. They want more revelation, to know more about the kingdom of heaven, in heaven and on the earth, and they wish to learn and increase.

There is one principle that I wish the people would understand and lay to heart. Just as fast as you will prove before your God that you are worthy to receive the mysteries, if you please to call them so, of the kingdom of heaven--that you are full of confidence in God--that you will never betray a thing that God tells you--that you will never reveal to your

⁵¹ See the fourth article of faith.

⁵² See Hebrews 5:12 through Hebrews 6:10. To understand these verse fully, I feel it is important to read the Joseph Smith translations as well as the Greek explanations found in the footnotes.

neighbour that which ought not to be revealed, as quick as you prepare to be entrusted with the things of God, there is an eternity of them to bestow upon you. Instead of pleading with the Lord to bestow more upon you, plead with yourselves to have confidence in yourselves, to have integrity in yourselves, and know when to speak and what to speak, what to reveal, and how to carry yourselves and walk before the Lord. And just as fast as you prove to Him that you will preserve everything secret that ought to be--that you will deal out to your neighbours all which you ought, and no more, and learn how to dispense your knowledge to your families, friends, neighbours, and brethren, the Lord will bestow upon you, and give to you, and bestow upon you, until finally he will say to you, "You shall never fall; your salvation is sealed unto you; you are sealed up unto eternal life and salvation, through your integrity."

Let every person be the friend of God, that whatever He reveals to you, you can wisely handle without asking Him whether you shall tell your wife of it or not. You can recollect the backhanded blow I gave to some of the brethren last winter. They were in pain, because they knew something which they could not tell to their wives. I would not trust such men out of sight of my dinner. God will not trust the least thing to such persons. Sisters, if you are in pain, because you cannot tell your husbands everything, you had better take a little catnip tea, and get over it, if you can. What will God reveal to such persons? Just enough to keep them from the gulf of despair, and lead them along until they get a little sense. I say this that you may learn to reveal that which you ought, and to keep the rest to yourselves. By so doing you prove to God that you are His friends, and will keep His secrets.

The world may howl around you and plead for the secrets of the Lord which he has given you, but they will not get them. When the Lord has proved His children true to what He has given into their charge, and that they will do His bidding, He will tell such persons anything that they should know. A great many desire just enough of knowledge to damn them and it does damn a great many. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.4, Pg.371, underline added)

It is often very difficult for a person who truly loves gospel truth to learn something new and still keep it inside of them. I believe the natural inclination is to share this knowledge with others. Yet it is clear that this is not what we or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is intended to do. The assignment given to us by the Savior is a difficult task indeed. It is frustrating to learn about and desire the higher laws while being forced to talk about and live the lower ones. However, soon the time will come when the earth will be cleansed from all wickedness because of the way in which we have treated the word of God. Soon we will see the higher doctrines openly taught and lived by the people of this earth. What joy it will bring to those who are faithful followers of righteousness. Likewise, what misery and sorrow it will bring to those who have knowingly or unknowingly fought against the church of the Lamb of God in these last days,⁵³ even if this church was teaching and practicing milk instead of meat.⁵⁴ We should be cautious that we "judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment"⁵⁵ and that we know whereof we speak before we do so. It is the Lord's burden to decide when and how to set his house in order by separating the wheat from the tares, not ours. Our task is to learn truth for ourselves and to bless others with that truth in the best possible manner given their particular situation and capacities.

⁵³ 1 Nephi 14:13

⁵⁴ D&C 19:22

⁵⁵ John 7:24

It is my testimony that if we do the very best we can in learning about and living the truths of the Lord according to his will and wisdom, he will continually bless us and provide for us the knowledge and progression we desire. We must learn to love God, truth, and others more than we love ourselves. For it is only by obeying God and seeking the welfare of others that we can ever have hope for ourselves. Often, this means preaching things that will hurt or injure another because it is more than they are prepared to hear.⁵⁶ Other times it means preaching things that will cause yourself pain because you know there is more that could be said but it is not appropriate to do so under the circumstances. I believe this is a large part of what being a servant of God is all about.

We shall close with the inspiring words of President Wilford Woodruff.

What joy, consolation and satisfaction it will be to the Apostles, Elders and Saints of God, of this day, who remain true and faithful to the end, having become members of the Church of the Firstborn, and been valiant in the testimony of Jesus, when they meet Father Adam, Enoch, Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus and the Apostles, how great their joy will be! They labored in their day for the work of God, and their toils are over; we are having our day and our labor. By and by we shall meet and mingle in the eternal world. (Journal of Discourses 13:169)

May we continually hunger and thirst after the highest principles God has to offer, while at the same time being willing to submit to all things which the Lord sees fit to inflict upon us in this telestial world.⁵⁷

May we climb the ladder of the kingdoms, the gospels, and the churches that the Lord has prescribed for us and do so in humility, faith, and obedience that we may find this joy spoken of by President Woodruff. This is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our intermediary, amen.

⁵⁶ Jacob 2:8-9; Helaman 13:26 (24-28); Moses 6:37; Matthew 10:34-36

⁵⁷ Mosiah 3:19