

## **Section 138**

### **Historical Background**

Joseph Smith was responsible for a lot of scripture: the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and 135 sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. Subsequent prophets have also had revelations canonized. Brigham Young received one section of the Doctrine and Covenants (Section 135); John Taylor wrote one (Section 136); Wilford Woodruff received the revelation discussed in the Manifesto (Official Declaration 1); Lorenzo Snow received uncanonized revelations on the importance of tithing; and Joseph F. Smith received this gem-section 138.

"The first eleven verses of Doctrine and Covenants 138 record its historical setting. Joseph F. Smith, the sixth President of the Church, was eighty years old and quite ill. He had been spending considerable time meditating and considering the things of God. He explained the events surrounding this vision:

As most of you, I suppose, are aware, I have been undergoing a siege of very serious illness for the last five months. It would be impossible for me on this occasion, to occupy sufficient time to express the desires of my heart and my feelings, as I would desire to express them to you... I will not, I dare not, attempt to enter upon many things that are resting upon my mind this morning, and I shall postpone until some future time, the Lord being willing, my attempt to tell you some of the things that are in my mind, and that dwell in my heart. I have not lived alone these five months. I have dwelt in the spirit of prayer, of supplication, of faith, and of determination; and I have had my communication with the Spirit of the Lord continuously.

"Current events weighed heavily on the mind of President Smith. World War I, the supposed war to end all wars, was ending with many fatalities. An influenza epidemic was spreading throughout the world, resulting in the death of millions (over 650,000 in the U.S. alone). Perhaps the most challenging event personally for the aging prophet was the unexpected death of his son Hyrum Mack Smith, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and a close advisor. Elder Hyrum Mack Smith died unexpectedly 23 January 1918 as a result of a ruptured appendix. His death greatly affected President Smith, and he

questioned why this son needed to leave this mortal life when he was so needed here. He mourned greatly the loss of his son.

"The months following his son's death were filled with spiritual reflection and deep meditation. During these months, he had been close to the spirit world and had spoken on the postmortal experience several times. At a temple fast meeting in February 1918, he spoke of the status of children in the resurrection, declaring that children are immortal beings, spirits who continue to live beyond the grave. Reflecting the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, he taught that those who died as children will come forth out of the grave to be raised and cared for by worthy parents. Having lost eleven children in childhood, he exclaimed: 'O how I have been blessed with these children and how happy I shall be to meet them on the other side.'

"On 3 October 1918, while pondering the scriptures [President Smith received the revelation]... He dictated the vision to his son Joseph Fielding Smith. It was presented to the First Presidency, the quorum of the Twelve, and the Patriarch to the Church in a council meeting on Thursday, 31 October 1918. They accepted and endorsed it as the word of God. It was published in the 30 November 1918 edition of the *Deseret News* and the December *Improvement Era* as well as other Church publications. Included in the Pearl of Great Price in 1976, it was then placed as section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants, first printed in the 1981 edition.

"About one and a half months after receiving Doctrine and Covenants 138, President Smith contracted pleurisy, which developed into a severe case of pleuropneumonia that led to his death on 19 November 1918. Because of the influenza epidemic, no public funeral was held to honor him. Thus ended the mortal life of the last President of the Church who personally knew the Prophet Joseph Smith." (Stephen E. Robinson, H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2001] 4:300-302)

**Introduction: "President Smith declared that he had received several divine communications during the previous months"**

The saints sometimes get the mistaken impression that today's prophets don't receive as many revelations as Joseph Smith did. This is not true. Joseph Smith's revelations were foundational and therefore canonized in scripture in fulfillment of the word of the Lord, "this generation shall have my word through

you" (D&C 5:10). However, subsequent prophets received and still receive revelation regularly. One scholar attempted to gather all the lesser known revelations in order to publish them. His intent, he said, was to place "under one cover all the uncanonized revelations which were received by the Apostles and Presidents of the Church. However it was not long before I realized I had underestimated the magnitude of this project. I kept finding more and more materials; there seemed to be no end of them... there were revelations, prophecies, visions, and dreams... There were also Sermons which would not normally be placed under any of these categories, but which were so filled with the spirit of God, one would be left to exclaim 'It came from God!'" (Fred C. Collier, *Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets and Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, vol. 1 [SLC: Collier's Publishing Co., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1981] vii)

Therefore, we should not be surprised that section 138 is only one of "several divine communications" that President Joseph F. Smith had received over a period of months.

"Brigham Young said something further on this. He said, 'It pleases me a little to think how anxious this people are for new revelations.' I remember Brother Widtsoe used to tell us about being asked at a conference, 'How long has it been since the Church received a revelation?' Brother Widtsoe stroked his chin thoughtfully and he said, 'Oh, probably since last Thursday.' That startled his interrogator. However, there are many written revelations that are not in the Doctrine and Covenants. To return to what **Brigham Young** said on revelation:

It pleases me a little to think how anxious this people are for new revelation. I wish to ask you a question: Do this people know whether they have received any revelation since the death of Joseph, as a people? I can tell you that you receive them continually.

It has been observed that the people want revelation. This is a revelation; and were it written, it would then be written revelation, as truly as the revelations which are contained in the book of Doctrine and Covenants. I could give you a revelation upon the subject of paying your tithing and building a temple in the name of the Lord; for the light is in me. I could put these revelations as straight to the line of truth in writing as any revelation you ever read. I could write the mind of the Lord, and you could put it in your pockets. But before we desire more written revelation, let us

fulfil the revelations that are already written, and which we have scarcely begun to fulfil. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, pp. 38-39)"

(Brent L. Top, Larry E. Dahl, and Walter D. Bowen, *Follow the Living Prophets* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993], 215.)

## **Introduction: The Spirit World**

### **Ezra Taft Benson**

The spirit world is not far away. From the Lord's point of view, it is all one great program on both sides of the veil. Sometimes the veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. This I know! Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us.

One Church president asked, "Where is the spirit world?" and then answered his own question: "It is right here. . . . Do [spirits] go beyond the boundaries of this organized earth? No, they do not. They are brought forth upon this earth, for the express purpose of inhabiting it to all eternity." He also said, "When the spirits leave their bodies they are in the presence of our Father and God; they are prepared then to see, hear and understand spiritual things. . . . If the Lord would permit it, and it was His will that it should be done, you could see the spirits that have departed from this world, as plainly as you now see bodies with your natural eyes." (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 3:369, 368.) (*Come unto Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983], 119)

### **Heber C. Kimball**

(December 4, 1856: Sermon at the funeral service of President Jedediah M. Grant) I went to see him (President Grant) one day last week, and he reached out his hand and shook hands with me; he could not speak, but he shook hands warmly with me. I felt for him, and wanted to raise him up, and to have him stay and help us whip the devils and bring to pass righteousness. Why? Because he was valiant, and I loved him. He was a great help to us, and you would be, if you were as valiant as he was, which you can be through faithfulness and obedience.

I laid my hands upon him and blessed him, and asked God to strengthen his lungs that he might [breathe] easier, and in two or three

minutes he raised himself up and talked for about an hour as busily as he could, telling me what he had seen and what he understood, until I was afraid he would weary himself, when I arose and left him.

He said to me, brother Heber, I have been into the spirit world two nights in succession, and, of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worst was to have to again return to my body, through I had to do it. But O, says he, the order and government that were there! When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion. He said that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities; and when he looked at them he saw grade after grade, and all were organized and in perfect harmony. He would mention one item after another and say, "Why, it is just as brother Brigham says it is; it is just as he has told us many a time."

That is a testimony as to the truth of what brother Brigham teaches us, and I know it is true, from what little light I have.

He saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world, and there were no wicked spirits among them. He saw his wife; she was the first person that came to him. He saw many that he knew, but did not have conversation with any except his wife Caroline. She came to him, and he said that she looked beautiful and had their little child, that died on the Plains, in her arms, and said, "Mr. Grant, here is little Margaret; you know that the wolves ate her up, but it did not hurt her; here she is all right."

"To my astonishment," he said, "when I looked at families there was a deficiency in some, there was a lack, for I saw families that would not be permitted to come and dwell together, because they had not honored their calling here."

He asked his wife Caroline where Joseph and Hyrum and Father Smith and others were; she replied, "they have gone away ahead, to perform and transact business for us." The same as when brother Brigham and his brethren left Winter Quarters and came here to search out a home; they came to find a location for their brethren.

He also spoke of the buildings he saw there, remarking that the Lord gave Solomon wisdom and poured gold and silver into his hands that he might display his skill and ability, and said that the temple erected by Solomon was much inferior to the most ordinary buildings he saw in the spirit world.

In regard to gardens, says brother Grant, "I have seen good gardens on this earth, but I never saw any to compare with those that were there. I saw flowers of numerous kinds, and some with from fifty to a hundred different colored flowers growing upon one stalk." We have many kinds of flowers on the earth, and I suppose those very articles came from heaven, or they would not be here.

After mentioning the things that he had seen, he spoke of how much he disliked to return and resume his body, after having seen the beauty and glory of the spirit world, where the righteous spirits are gathered together.

...He said that after he came back he could look upon his family and see the spirit that was in them, and the darkness that was in them; and that he conversed with them about the Gospel, and what they should do, and they replied, "Well, brother Grant, perhaps it is so, and perhaps it is not," and said that was the state of this people, to a great extent, for many are full of darkness and will not believe me.

I never had a view of the righteous assembling in the spirit-world, but I have had a view of the hosts of hell, and have seen them as plainly as I see you to-day. The righteous spirits gather together to prepare and qualify themselves for a future day, and evil spirits have no power over them, though they are constantly striving for the mastery. I have seen evil spirits attempt to overcome those holding the Priesthood, and I know how they act. (*Journal of Discourses*, 4:135-137)

**DC 138:1 I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures**

**Joseph B. Wirthlin**

We are constantly reminded through the scriptures that we should give the things of God much more than usual superficial consideration. We must ponder them and reach into the very essence of what we are and what we may become. ("Pondering Strengthens the Spiritual Life," *Ensign*, May 1982, 23)

## **Marion G. Romney**

To Joseph the Prophet, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer, the Lord said: "Behold, I say unto you that you shall let your time be devoted to the studying of the scriptures. ..." (D&C 26:1.)

To the Saints in Kirtland, he said, concerning the instruction he had given them, "Hearken ye to these words. Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Treasure these things up in your hearts, and let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds." (D&C 43:34.)

As I have read the scriptures, I have been challenged by the word *ponder*, so frequently used in the Book of Mormon. The dictionary says that *ponder* means "to weigh mentally, think deeply about, deliberate, meditate." Moroni thus used the term as he closed his record:

"Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things ... that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men ... and *ponder* it in your hearts." (Moro. 10:3. Italics added.)...

Pondering is, in my feeling, a form of prayer. It has, at least, been an approach to the Spirit of the Lord on many occasions. ("Magnifying One's Calling in the Priesthood," *Ensign*, July 1973, 90)

## **Neal A. Maxwell**

Pondering, for most of us, is not something we do easily. It is much more than drifting or daydreaming, for it focuses and stirs us, not lulls us. We must set aside time, circumstances, and attitude in order to achieve it. In Alma's words, we must "give place" (Alma 32:27). The length of time involved in pondering is not as important as the intensity given to it. Reflection cannot be achieved in the midst of distraction. (*That Ye May Believe* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992], 183)

## **Gerald N. Lund**

One of the most important things you can do when you are searching to reduce inner noise in your life is to take time to ponder and reflect. Get away from the bustle of life. Find a quiet place and take time to simply sit and think, to listen to your thoughts and feelings, to open yourself to the promptings of the Spirit. Note what the following prophets said they were doing prior to receiving important revelations. Nephi: "I sat

pondering in mine heart" (1 Ne. 11:1). Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon: "While we meditated upon these things" (D&C 76:19). **Joseph F. Smith:** "I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures; and reflecting" (D&C 138:1-2). **Joseph Smith:** "My mind was called up to serious reflection. . . . I reflected . . . again and again [upon the words of James]" (JS~H 1:8, 12 ).

Sometimes we must deliberately put aside the cares of the world, put aside the rush of our daily lives, and find a quiet place and a quiet time where we can sit and ponder and reflect and meditate-and listen for that still small voice that whispers. Part of that time of pondering will be to deliberately push your wants down. You will remind yourself that it is not your place to counsel the Lord or to try and tell him what is best for you... [but to] submit your will to his. (*Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund: Gospel Scholars Series* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1999], 284)

### **DC 138:2-4 reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God**

The atonement is worth our most tender reflection, our deepest consideration, our most solemn devotion. Nothing can stretch a soul, mind, or spirit like trying to comprehend the infinite-especially the infinite atonement. **Joseph Smith** noted, "The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 137)

### **Tad R. Callister**

A person studying the Atonement is somewhat like the man who retreats to his mountain cabin to enjoy the scenery. If he looks out the window to the east, he will see the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies; but if he fails to examine the view on the west, he will miss the crimson-streaked sunset on the horizon; if he neglects the scene to the north, he will never see the shimmering emerald lake; and if he bypasses the window on the south, he will fail to witness the wild flowers in all their brilliant glory, dancing in the gentle mountain breeze. Beauty besets him in every direction. So it is with the Atonement. Regardless of our vantage point, it is glorious to behold. Every principle underlying it,



every consequence flowing from it rewards our intellect, animates our emotions, and enlivens our spirit. It is a doctrine for all seasons.

An attempt to master this doctrine requires an immersion of all our senses, all our feelings, and all our intellect. (*Infinite Atonement*, 1)

### **Richard G. Scott**

As we remember the Resurrection and the price paid and the gift given through the Atonement, let us ponder what the scriptures teach of those sacred events. Our personal witness of their reality will be strengthened. They must be more than principles we memorize. They must be woven into the very fiber of our being as a bulwark in time of need. ("To Help a Loved One in Need," *Ensign*, May 1988, 61)

### **Neal A. Maxwell**

The more we study, pray, and ponder the awesome Atonement, the more we are willing to acknowledge that we are in His and the Father's hands. Let us ponder, therefore, these final things.

When the unimaginable burden began to weigh upon Christ, it confirmed His long-held and intellectually clear understanding as to what He must now do. His working through began, and Jesus declared: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." Then, whether in spiritual soliloquy or by way of instruction to those about Him, He observed, "But for this cause came I unto this hour." (John 12:27.)

Later, in Gethsemane, the suffering Jesus began to be "sore amazed" (Mark 14:33), or, in the Greek, "awestruck" and "astonished."

Imagine, Jehovah, the Creator of this and other worlds, "astonished"! Jesus knew cognitively what He must do, but not experientially. He had never personally known the exquisite and exacting process of an atonement before. Thus, when the agony came in its fulness, it was so much, much worse than even He with his unique intellect had ever imagined! No wonder an angel appeared to strengthen him! (See Luke 22:43.)

The cumulative weight of all mortal sins-past, present, and future-pressed upon that perfect, sinless, and sensitive Soul! All our infirmities

and sicknesses were somehow, too, a part of the awful arithmetic of the Atonement. (See Alma 7:11-12; Isa. 53:3-5; Matt. 8:17.) The anguished Jesus not only pled with the Father that the hour and cup might pass from Him, but with this relevant citation. "And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me." (Mark 14:35-36.)

Had not Jesus, as Jehovah, said to Abraham, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14.) Had not His angel told a perplexed Mary, "For with God nothing shall be impossible"? (Luke 1:37; see also Matt. 19:28; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27.)

Jesus' request was not theater!

In this extremity, did He, perchance, hope for a rescuing ram in the thicket? I do not know. His suffering-as it were, enormity multiplied by infinity-evoked His later soul-cry on the cross, and it was a cry of forsakenness. (See Matt. 27:46.)

Even so, Jesus maintained this sublime submissiveness, as He had in Gethsemane: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39.) ("Willing to Submit," *Ensign*, May 1985, 72-73)

## Neal A. Maxwell

Do we ponder the other implications of Jesus' atonement? On one occasion, five members of the Quorum of the Twelve were informally discussing the Lord's impressive and revealing words about His atonement, as expressed in section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants. When asked, **President Howard W. Hunter** promptly and meekly said that the most impressive thing to him about those several verses was that suffering "Jesus gave all the glory to the Father." (*Lord, Increase Our Faith* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994], 17)

## DC 138:5 my mind reverted to the writings of the Apostle Peter

### Joseph Smith

Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles.  
(*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 301)

## DC 138:6 I opened the Bible and read the third and fourth chapters of the epistle of Peter

The third and fourth chapters of Peter's first epistle speak of suffering for righteousness sake. When we have done no wrong and are persecuted, we become like the Savior, who was perfect and yet suffered tremendously. Thereby, the just suffer for the unjust. Christ suffered for the unjust, and we too may be asked to suffer. In this respect, we may join the Savior in his mission and labor to save the unjust. It was this labor of love which prompted the Savior's visit to the world of spirits. If God's plan were to save the righteous and punish the wicked, if he enjoyed inflicting pain upon the wicked, if he really wanted the wicked to suffer in eternal burnings, there would be no reason for Christ to offer salvation to the spirits in prison. (See 1 Peter 3)

His mission is a mission of mercy. Yet, if God wants to save the wicked, he cannot do it at the expense of justice. If a man accepts the gospel in the spirit world, he cannot entirely escape responsibility for what he did in mortality. "For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." (1 Peter 4:6)

#### **DC 138:8 he went and preached unto the spirits in prison**

Imagine one of your closest friends has died. Three days later, he is resurrected and visits you. Then he spends over a month with you. At some point, somewhere along the way, wouldn't you ask him what happened when he died?

What happens when a man dies? This is one of the greatest and most universal questions. Peter, or another of the apostles, must have asked Jesus what he did between his death and resurrection. "Where did you go? What did you do?" We can imagine his response was, "I went and preached the gospel in the world of spirits, fulfilling that which was written by Isaiah: the prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited... That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that sit in darkness, Shew yourselves... For the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (see Isa 24:22; 49:9; 61:1). Had the Master answered Peter's question with the writings of Isaiah, we can easily see how Peter would have thought the Savior visited the wicked spirits in spirit prison rather than the righteous spirits who awaited the announcement of his visit.

#### **DC 138:11 I saw the hosts of the dead both small and great**

Before we get lost in President Smith's remarkable vision, let's imagine that he saw every soul who had died from the days of Adam to October of 1918. In order to see all of the hosts of the dead, he would have to see the spirit world at two separate times-just before the first resurrection-at the time of Christ-and his own day, i.e. 1918. Once resurrected, the ancient prophets would no longer be in the spirit world. In order to see them all, President Smith must see these souls in the world of spirits before they are resurrected-and this is precisely what he sees.

To perceive so many souls is unfathomable to the mortal mind. He must have experienced what Moses did who saw all the inhabitants of the earth, "and there was not a soul which he beheld not; and he discerned them by the spirit of God; and their numbers were great, even numberless as the sand upon the sea shore." (Moses 1:28)

**DC 138:12 there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just**

In the spirit world, prior to the resurrection of Christ, there was a great gulf fixed which separated the spirits of the righteous from the spirits of the wicked, "so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Lu. 16:26). The Savior's mission to the spirit world would in effect build a bridge which could allow the righteous to preach among the wicked. In seeing the spirit world at the time of Jesus' death, Joseph F. Smith describes a crowd of nothing but righteous souls. Jedediah M. Grant saw the same thing in a vision he enjoyed shortly before his death, "When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion... He saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world, and there were no wicked spirits among them." (Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:135-136)

"If the idea that righteous and wicked spirits go to the same place in the postmortal spirit world seems foreign to us, we must remember that in this life the wicked and the righteous dwell in the same place, the earth, but people of like interest and persuasions gather together in places and circumstances quite different from one another. There are places that the righteous do not want to go and places where the wicked are not allowed to go... Apparently, it is the same in the world of spirits."

(Stephen E. Robinson, H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2001] 4:304)

## Joseph Smith

The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith.

Flesh and blood cannot go there; but flesh and bones, quickened by the Spirit of God, can. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 326)

### **DC 138:13 who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God**

Again, these souls are the ancient prophets and saints. They lived under the law of sacrifice or later under the Law of Moses. Either way, they honored the atonement by animal sacrifice. It was their sacramental service, so to speak. This clearly identifies these saints as the Old Testament generation.

### **DC 138:14 these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection**

One interesting tidbit is that there is very little resurrection doctrine in the Old Testament. Job said he knew that his Redeemer would "stand at the latter day upon the earth; And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26, see also Ezek. 37). The ancients apparently understood the Resurrection much better than the meager Old Testament evidence would suggest. This principle would also apply to other doctrines, like baptism, priesthood ordinances, the atonement, etc.

President Smith's language about hope confirms a consistent scriptural doctrine-that scriptural hope is resurrection based! For instance, you can have faith in a lot of things, but the faith of the scriptures is based in Jesus Christ. Similarly, you can have hope *in* a lot of things; you can hope *for* a lot of things, but the *scriptural* hope-the *faith-hope-and-charity* hope is always tied to the Resurrection. A glorious resurrection through the atonement of Jesus Christ is the anchor to the soul (Heb. 6:19; Ether 12:4). Apparently, the ancients successfully battled the storms of life with a firm anchor-the hope of a glorious resurrection.

## Neal A. Maxwell

Having ultimate hope does not mean we will always be rescued from proximate problems, but we will be rescued from everlasting death! ("Brightness of Hope," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 35)

## Neal A. Maxwell

Quite clearly, therefore, ultimate hope is tied to the verifiable expectation of a resurrection and the better world to follow. Paul observed that if our hope in Christ pertained to "this life only," a resurrectionless view of Christ, we would be "of all men most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19.) In other words, proximate hope, disengaged from the reality of the resurrection (what some inconsistently espouse as a Christian existentialism), is not Christian hope at all! (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, p. 43 - 44)

**DC 138:15 I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness**

## Dallin H. Oaks

Only in Christ can our joy be full. This is why the angel proclaimed:

I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day ... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11.)

We are able to have a fulness of joy only when spirit and body are inseparably connected in the glorious resurrection to celestial glory. (See D&C 93:33; D&C 76:50-70.) That joy, of course, comes only through the mercy of the Holy Messiah, whose resurrection broke the bands of death and whose atonement unlocks the reservoir of mercy by which we can be cleansed of our sins and come into the presence of God to receive the fulness of the Father. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 74)

**DC 138:15-16 they... were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand**

How did they know the day of their deliverance was at hand? These saints and prophets knew the Savior was coming, but how? First, they certainly had enough prophets among them to have many prophecies of the coming of the Messiah to the Spirit World. Second, John the Baptist had arrived in the Spirit World approximately 2 years before Jesus did. He certainly prepared the way

in the world of spirits just as he had in Judea. This ministry was spoken of by Zacharias when he said, "he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Lu. 1:17) The "people prepared for the Lord" were not the Jews in Judea; they were the righteous who "were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world." By their righteousness they were prepared, but John got them ready to receive their Lord.

**DC 138:17 Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone**

Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:

And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel... (Ezek. 37:4-11)

**DC 138:18 While this vast multitude waited and conversed... the Son of God appeared**

For a moment, we should think about this glorious meeting from the Savior's perspective. One minute He is suffering, struggling to breath, with excruciating pain coming from all four limbs nailed to the cross. He is being taunted by the Jews, mocked as a false prophet, and derided by one of the thieves. In Gethsemane, he was alone; on Golgatha, only a small group of followers have the courage to stay and watch. But there was none to take

away the pain. Even the spiritual support of the Father was briefly withdrawn. It just couldn't get any worse.

In an instant, the pain is gone. The Master goes from the dregs of the bitter cup to a glorious welcoming party. The spirit world red carpet is ready and waiting. He is hailed as the Master! They know He is the Messiah! They know his name as Jehovah! The "hallelujahs" are spontaneous. His triumphal entry into the spirit world is truly triumphant. The crowd is huge. The number of saints at the Bountiful temple would be much less. The number of saints he would later visit among the lost tribes would pale in comparison. It is a huge gathering.

Amidst the innumerable company, there is not a wicked soul to detract from the glory, joy, and redemption. His victory is complete-almost. He must still be resurrected and so must they.

### **DC 138:18 declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful**

Most Sunday School lessons teaching the plan of salvation use the names of spirit *paradise* and spirit *prison* to describe the afterlife. These are good enough terms, but when reading Isaiah and D&C 138, they can be a source of confusion. While we might say that Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and their faithful followers certainly went to *paradise*, they felt like they were in *prison*. Why?

Having lived in mortality, they were used to having the freedom of a physical body. To live in the spirit was probably nice for a while, but it got old. All of the activities which require a physical body were just not possible. They were in a captivity of sorts; they were in prison. Without their bodies, they weren't truly free. "For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage" (v. 50). "A prison is any place you can't leave when you want to, and in the spirit world even the righteous are held captive by the chains of death." (Stephen E. Robinson, H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2001] 2:315)

Resurrection is a liberating doctrine-an idea that can't be fully appreciated as a mortal. Without our bodies, we would feel imprisoned. Hence, Isaiah spoke of the Messiah proclaiming "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isa. 61:1). This phrase applies to the souls in spirit *paradise* just as well as the souls in spirit *prison*. The language of the scriptures, in this instance, does not correlate with the common usage.



## Joseph Fielding Smith

It should be understood that all spirits, both good and bad, were in prison, for none had been liberated until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957-1966], 1: 26)

## Joseph Smith

I will say something about the spirits in prison. There has been much said by modern divines about the words of Jesus (when on the cross) to the thief, saying, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." King James' translators make it out to say *paradise*. But what is paradise? It is a modern word: it does not answer at all to the original word that Jesus made use of. Find the original of the word *paradise*. You may as easily find a needle in a haymow. Here is a chance for battle, ye learned men. There is nothing in the original word in Greek from which this was taken that signifies paradise; but it was-"This day thou shalt be with me in the world of spirits: then I will teach you all about it and answer your inquiries." And Peter says he went and preached to the world of spirits (spirits in prison, 1 Peter, 3rd chap. 19th verse), so that they who would receive it could have it answered by proxy by those who live on the earth, etc. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 309, italics added)

## Joseph Smith

I will now turn linguist... I will criticise a little further. There has been much said about the word *hell*, and the sectarian world have preached much about it, describing it to be a burning lake of fire and brimstone. But what is hell? It is another modern term, and is taken from *hades*. I'll hunt after *hades* as Pat did for the woodchuck.

*Hades*, the Greek, or *Sheol*, the Hebrew, these two significations mean a world of spirits. Hades, Sheol, paradise, spirits in prison, are all one: it is a world of spirits.

The righteous and the wicked all go to the same world of spirits until the resurrection. "I do not think so," says one. If you will go to my house any time, I will take my lexicon and prove it to you. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 310, italics added)

DC 138:20-21, 37 **But unto the wicked he did not go**

The wicked are not worthy of a visit from the Master. Those who are wicked may, at the judgment bar, stand face to face with Jesus, but they are not worthy to dwell in his presence (see also 2 Ne. 9:38). After the suffering of the cross, the Master would never again dwell with the wicked. After his resurrection, Jesus visited the Twelve, the faithful women, and the faithful 500, but he did not visit the Sanhedrin and say, "I told you so." He would not go back to Pilate and say, "Don't you wish you had listened to your wife now?" He did not visit the Roman soldiers and mock them.

The scripture states that Christ "could not go personally [unto the wicked], because of their transgression" (v. 37). Based in part upon this principle, all the wicked were killed in order for him to visit the Nephites. All the wicked had to be destroyed prior to his visit to the lost tribes. Once he had suffered; once he had ransomed us; once he had said, "it is finished," the Savior did not minister to the wicked. That is our job!

#### **DC 138:22 Where these were, darkness reigned**

The spiritual darkness among the wicked in the world of spirits is described in Alma as "outer darkness" where, "there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state... until the time of their resurrection." (Alma 40:14)

There are many names for this state: spirit prison, hell, hades, endless torment, eternal damnation, eternal punishment, endless punishment, and outer darkness (D&C 19:6-12; Alma 40:13-14).

#### **DC 138:23 Redeemer and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell**

For the righteous, the resurrection meant triumph over both physical and spiritual death, from both the grave and hell (Rev. 20:13-14). While resurrection means complete victory from physical death, celestial resurrection means complete victory over spiritual death as well. Hence, "the resurrection from the dead *is* the redemption of the soul... Therefore, it (the soul) must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory." (D&C 88:16, 18, italics added)

#### **DC 138:26 there were but few who hearkened to his voice, and rejoiced in his presence**

## **Bruce R. McConkie**

Of the Jews generally John says: "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." (John 12:37-43)

Let there be no misunderstanding on this point: Some few accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but the generality of the people rejected him with a vengeance. This rejection was not the isolated act of their leaders or of a few rabble rousers. It had the sustaining support of the generality of the people and was the outgrowth of their whole religious system. As evidence that such would be the case, John quotes Isaiah's Messianic word: "Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Further, John says, "they could not believe," because as Isaiah prophesied: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979-1981], 3: 417)

## **J. Reuben Clark, Jr.**

Looking back across the nineteen hundred years that have gone, we marvel that of all of those who walked and talked with Jesus in Galilee and Judea, so few indeed understood or believed his message. And of the countless thousands who have lived and heard his message since his time, how scant the number that have really believed and walked in his way. (*Behold the Lamb of God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991], 299)

### **DC 138:27 the brief time intervening between the crucifixion and his resurrection**

How long was it between Christ's crucifixion and resurrection? That should be an easy question to answer. It is not!

**1.5 Days:** All the prophecies suggested a time period of three days. However, general consensus is that Christ was crucified in the afternoon on Friday, the day before the Sabbath (Saturday). This was the reason the thieves legs were broken, to get them down from the cross before sunset-the actual beginning of a Jewish Sabbath (John 19:31). The scriptures then describe his resurrection before sunrise on the first day of the week, or Sunday (Matt. 28:1). That means Jesus could not have been in the world of spirits much longer than 36 hours, or a day and a half. That is not very long.

How do you get three days out of that? You have to count the crucifixion day (Friday), the intervening sabbath (Saturday), and the resurrection day (Sunday).

**2.5 Days:** The chronology could have an alternate explanation. John 19:31 says, "that Sabbath day was an high day" as if that Sabbath was different than any other Sabbath day. Among the Jews, the term *Sabbath* also meant "holy day" or "holiday" and could be used to refer to a feast day associated with the Passover celebration (see footnote for John 19:31). The idea is that Jewish holidays or "holy days" could occur any day of the week. Therefore, it is possible to have two consecutive Sabbaths, one as part of the holiday celebration and the other the weekly Sabbath. If Christ were crucified the day before the holiday Sabbath and was resurrected the morning after the weekly Sabbath, then he would have been dead approximately 2.5 days.

John's chronology is different than the synoptic gospels. He says the last supper is the night *before* the traditional Passover meal and that Jesus was crucified *the day of the Passover* (John 13:1-2; John 18:28; John 19:14). The "high day" referred to in John 19:31 would then be the first of the seven celebrated days of the feast of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:4-8). So, there is the possibility that the holiday Sabbath or "high day"-the holy convocation of the first day of the feast of unleavened bread-happened to occur on a Friday. That would make the festival Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath consecutive days and Christ would have been in the spirit world for 2.5 days.

**3 Days:** Other denominations claim that Christ said he would be dead three days, therefore, the interval must be exactly 72 hours: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:38-40). "Three days and three nights" means 72 hours. This idea may be too rigid an interpretation of the Jonah figure. The scripture clearly states Christ died around the 9<sup>th</sup> hour (or 3pm, see Matt. 27:45-50) and was resurrected early in the morning (Matt. 28:1). The only way the argument can be construed to be exactly 72 hours is if he died a couple of days before the Passover and was resurrected some 14 hours before the empty tomb was noticed.

Finally, we return to the most scripturally defensible position-that Christ died around 3:00 pm in the afternoon on Friday and was resurrected just before the Sunday sunrise 1.5 days later. Whether the "Last Supper" was on the Passover or day before depends on which gospel you read. Either way, most likely, Christ's ministry in the spirit world lasted little more than 18 hours.

### **DC 138:29 I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked**

This passage clarifies the misunderstanding, suggested by Peter's epistle, that Jesus visited the wicked who lived in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:20). He did not visit them. They didn't deserve a visit. He didn't have time to teach them all they needed to know.

Isn't it interesting to think that Peter wasn't quite right about this doctrine? The biblical text which has survived to this day leaves us with the impression that Christ visited the wicked of Noah's day. In deference to the greatest of Apostles, President Smith's tone is careful not to detract from the ministry and writings of Peter, but, for the sake of clarity, the revelation is stating that Peter was wrong on that point.

In the end, there are probably many notions, whether scriptural or cultural, which will turn out to need clarification. We should not be too concerned about this possibility. Bruce R. McConkie is a doctrinal hero partly because he wasn't afraid to say it like he saw it. He may have had to retract a statement or two, but that is OK. At least he had the courage to make a statement. Paul, similarly, understood this dilemma and explained it in eloquence, "for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor 13:12).

### **DC 138:30 he organized his forces and appointed messengers**

This passage teaches an interesting but poorly understood truth. There were two groups of the righteous in the spirit world when the Savior visited them after his crucifixion. The first would soon be resurrected and appear unto the saints in Jerusalem and the Americas. The second would *not* be resurrected at that time. These were the saints who would be sent as missionaries to the wicked in spirit prison. They "stood on the right hand of God" (Moses 7:57) when Jesus visited them after his crucifixion, then they were "appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority and commissioned... to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to all them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead" (D&C 138:30). If all the righteous spirits had been resurrected at the time of the First Resurrection, then there would have been no spirits left to preach to the wicked in spirit prison.

### **DC 138:30 messengers, clothed with power and authority**

The priesthood is active on both sides of the veil. The greatest priesthood holders in the history of the world may well deserve even more honor for the work on the other side of the veil-the details of which, we know nothing about. Those who have rejected God and his servants on the earth, will have another chance. In so doing, **John Taylor** taught, "this very Priesthood that the world have despised and refused to accept, will be their deliverers." (*Journal of Discourses*, 26:108)

**DC 138:30-34 he... commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness**

### **Orson Pratt**

They could not be judged by the same law, unless it was preached to them. The same Gospel must be sounded in their ears that was sounded in the ears of the living. If they reject it in their prison houses, they will be punished by the same law you and I will be punished by, if we reject it in the flesh.

One of the powers of the Priesthood is that whatsoever you shall loose on the earth shall be loosed in the heavens. Now, if a spirit does sincerely receive a messenger in that prison-if he believes his testimony and hearkens to all things that are said-if he believes that Jesus Christ has tasted death for every man-for those who die in ignorance, as well as for those who hear the Gospel in the flesh, he will be informed that in yonder world, or in the world he came from, there is authority given for men and women to be baptized for such.

Those messengers sent to preach in prison will most likely interrogate the prisoners in language something like this-Will you receive our testimony? Do you believe that Jesus Christ has tasted death for every man? Do you believe that through your repentance and faith, and through the ordinance of baptism in your behalf, by those that are living in yonder world, you may have a remission of your sins? If they believe it, and actually do repent, the ordinance of baptism administered here in their behalf will benefit them there. But, says one, this being baptized for another looks rather inconsistent to me. Why does it? Suppose a man is placed in a situation that he could not be baptized for himself, must his sins be retained unto him? Must he remain in prison throughout all ages of eternity, because he has lost his body, and has not the privilege of being baptized? Does that look inconsistent with the justice of God? Then why not another person administer in his behalf? How could you

have atoned for yourselves? If it had not been for the agency of another being that acted for you and in your behalf, you must have perished eternally. You had forfeited every right and title to the blessings of the kingdom of God: all mankind were shut out from the presence of God, and became dead as to things pertaining to righteousness: the sentence of the first death was placed upon father Adam and his children, which was irrevocable, if there had been no atonement.

We would have had to lay down these bodies, never to rise from the tomb, if there had been no atonement: our spirits would have been forever subject to that being that tempted our first parents, and we could not have helped ourselves. Hence, the Son of God came forth and made an atonement, not for himself, but for and in behalf and in the name of his younger brethren, that they, through his blood, and through certain conditions of the Gospel, might receive forgiveness of their sins. One of these conditions is baptism: but spirits are placed in a condition where they cannot receive this ordinance. And now, why not somebody have authority to go and administer for them and in their behalf? Not only Jesus has acted in behalf of the children of men, but it pertains to the same Priesthood and Apostleship, wherever it is placed, to act for and in behalf of the children of men: hence, Paul says, We beseech you, not in our own name, but in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. They came forth to officiate, for the children of men, that could not help themselves without authorized ministers.

Just so, the dead could not help themselves without messengers being sent to them in their prison houses, and without persons in the flesh being authorized to receive Gospel ordinances for them and in their behalf. (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:84-85)

**DC 138:34 to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh**

### **Brigham Young**

Many inquiries are made as to what will become of that portion of the world of mankind who have died without law. When we return to build up the waste places of Zion, then will the Scripture be fulfilled-"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new

name." The servants of God will officiate for the dead in the temples of God which will be built. The Gospel is now preached to the spirits in prison, and when the time comes for the servants of God to officiate for them, the names of those who have received the Gospel in the spirit will be revealed by the angels of God and the spirits of just men made perfect; also the places of their birth, the age in which they lived, and everything regarding them that is necessary to be recorded on earth, and they will then be saved so as to find admittance into the presence of God, with their relatives who have officiated for them. The wicked will be cleansed and purified as by fire; some of them will be saved as by fire. Some will be given over to the buffeting of Satan, that their spirits may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Others will receive their bodies, but cannot be saved in the kingdoms and mansions that are in the presence of God. All the children of men will receive a glory in the mansions of God according to their capacities, and rewards according to their acts in the flesh.

Brethren and friends, do you naturally despise such a doctrine as this, or does it find a response of welcome in your bosoms? My soul says, Hallelujah, every moment I think of the ample provisions God has made for his sons and daughters. They will not welter in hell to an endless eternity. (*Journal of Discourses*, 9:317)

### **DC 138:39 our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters**

While some Christian sects teach that Adam and Eve betrayed us by partaking of the forbidden fruit and thereby causing all of us to be born in a fallen world instead of the Garden of Eden, the LDS doctrine is that Eve should be honored above all women. None deserve more praise except, perhaps Mary, the mother of Jesus. As **Bruce R. McConkie** stated, "there is no language that can do credit to our glorious mother Eve." (*LDS Women's Treasury: Insights and Inspiration for Today's Woman* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997], 452)

"Eve had a great pre-mortal identity. She also exists now, carrying redemption to the dead. President Smith related this: "Among the great and mighty ones who were assembled in this vast congregation of the righteous were Father Adam, the Ancient of Days, and father of all, and our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages and worshiped the true and living God." (D&C 138:38-39.) She is with God, there with Adam and her children. Each time any of us present a woman who is dead at the veil during an



endowment ceremony, we do so in the name of Eve. She takes us all, as the mother of all living, into the presence of Father, if we are also true and faithful." (Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist, *As Women of Faith: Talks Selected from the BYU Women's Conferences* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989], 103)

### **Barbara B. Smith**

All women are daughters of "glorious mother Eve" (D&C 138:39) who, as the "mother of all living" (Moses 4:26), left a legacy that is the inheritance of every woman. This role transcends the care of an immediate family. It describes a nature and attitude that is basic for all women. President Harold B. Lee expressed this when he addressed the women of the Church assembled in the Tabernacle: "Now you mothers over the Church...." (see *Mothers in Israel*). Every woman, whatever her family status, calling, or occupation, is involved in the roles of one who nurtures, lifts, consoles; who tenders love; and who protects and preserves families. (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1-4 vols., edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1577)

### **James E. Faust**

Indeed, Mother Eve left a lasting legacy that comes down through the ages to bless the lives of all men and women.

As daughters of God, you cannot imagine the divine potential within each of you. Surely the secret citadel of women's inner strength is spirituality. In this you equal and even surpass men, as you do in faith, morality, and commitment when truly converted to the gospel. You have "more trust in the Lord [and] more hope in his word." ["More Holiness Give Me," *Hymns*, no. 131] This inner spiritual sense seems to give you a certain resilience to cope with sorrow, trouble, and uncertainty. (*Ensign*, Nov 1999, 100)

### **DC 138:41 Abraham, the father of the faithful**

### **Brigham Young**

Abraham was ordained to be the father of the faithful-that is, he was ordained to come forth at a certain period; and when he had proved himself faithful to his God, and would resist the worship of idols, and trample them under his feet in the presence of their king, and set up the

worship of the true God, he obtained the appellation of "father of the faithful." (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:290)

**DC 138:42 that the Redeemer was anointed to... the opening of the prison to them that are bound**

The list of Prophets expands doctrinally when it gets to Isaiah. The next several prophets all had something to say about this subject. That's why President Smith discusses them in a bit more detail. Isaiah saw that the Master would open the prison to them that were bound. The righteous, imprisoned by death but not sin, would be resurrected. The wicked, imprisoned by both death and sin would have the gospel preached unto them. The gospel's good news for them was that Christ's atonement still applied to them-that the gates of the kingdom of God were not forever shut against them-that if they accepted vicarious ordinances, they might qualify for the celestial kingdom. "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead have no chance to enter the celestial kingdom? Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

**DC 138:44 the kingdom of God... never again to be destroyed nor given to other people**

**James E. Faust**

The dispensation of divine truth in which we now live, in distinction from previous dispensations, will not be destroyed by apostasy. This is in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy that "the God of heaven would set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" nor "left to other people." [Dan. 2:44; see also D&C 138:44] **President John Taylor** affirmed this also when he said: "There is one thing very certain, ... and that is, whatever men may think, and however they may plot and contrive, that this Kingdom will never be given into the hands of another people. It will grow and spread and increase, and no man living can stop its progress." [In *Journal of Discourses*, 25:348; see also 14:367] (*Ensign*, May 1996, 4)

**Ezra Taft Benson**

We may expect to see the righteousness of the Saints and the progress of the kingdom of God continue unabated, but it will not be without opposition. The Council of the Twelve proclaimed in 1845: "As this work progresses in its onward course, and becomes more and more an

object of political and religious interest ... no king, ruler, or subject, no community or individual, will stand *neutral*. All will ... be influenced by one spirit or the other; and will take sides either for or against the kingdom of God." (James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-70, 1:257.) (*Ensign*, May 1978, 32)

**DC 138:45 Elias, who was with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration**

Most scholars would say Elijah the Tishbite was the prophet who was with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration-that since *Elias* is the Greek form for the Hebrew name of *Elijah*, they are the same. One problem with this doctrine is that President Smith spells the names differently in back to back verses. One verse, 45, he speaks of Elias on the Mount; the next two speak of Elijah's mission. It is doubtful that these prophets are the same individual if listed by President Smith in this manner. For more confusion, see commentary on D&C 110:12 and Bible Dictionary, "Elias."

**DC 138:47 plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to their fathers**

Almost exclusively, since the Restoration, quotations of Malachi's prophecy speak only of one half of the equation. Here as well, we have only half of the prophecy. This is only half of the story: the children realize the promises made to the fathers. This is our responsibility-to do the temple work for our kindred dead.

The other half of the prophecy deals with the hearts of the fathers turning to the children, signifying the great missionary work done in the world of spirits. If you think about it, the fathers have had their hearts turned to the children for a long time. Vicarious temple work was done by the meridian saints (1 Cor. 15:29). For almost 2000 years, millions of the dead have been waiting for the promises to be fulfilled.

**DC 138:50 the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage**

"The peace that the righteous experience in the spirit world is not the ultimate state of happiness most of Christianity think of as heaven. It is only when the spirit and body are 'inseparably connected' that mankind can 'receive a fulness of joy. And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.' (See D&C 93:33-34.) In this context, all spirits between

death and resurrection are in confinement." (H. Donl Peterson, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Apr. 1986, 37)

## **Sterling W. Sill**

We do not like to think about our spirits and bodies being even temporarily separated at death. But in the resurrection what will be the joy of the faithful when the spirit and the body will be inseparably joined together in celestial glory. Next to the human spirit, the human body is the greatest of all God's creations, without which we could never have a fullness of joy. Our spirits were begotten of God in heaven, and one of the most important purposes of our mortal lives is to be "added upon" with a body of flesh and bones.

This was also one of the important purposes of the earth life of Jesus. It has always been something of a mystery to me why some people are so insistent in depriving God, the greatest of all, of his body. This is especially hard to understand when we know that it was a part of the punishment for Lucifer's sin that he could never progress beyond the status of a spirit. If a body of flesh and bones were not necessary, it never would have been created in the first place. If it were not necessary for eternity, the resurrection never would have been instituted. If a body were not necessary for God the Father, then there would have been no point in God the Son being resurrected. Certainly a glorious resurrection day will be one of our most thrilling days. (*Conference Report*, April 1964, First Day-Morning Meeting 13)

### **DC 138:51 These the Lord taught, and gave them power to come forth... to enter into his Father's kingdom**

Not *all* of the righteous saints would be resurrected at this time. If they were, there would be no one to take the gospel to the wicked. Certainly, many of the righteous were resurrected according to the scripture. We know for sure that Abraham was one of them (D&C 132:29). The others were spoken of in scripture:

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,  
And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. (Matt. 27:52-53)

Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so?

And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled.

And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them?

And it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written.

And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded. (3 Ne. 23:9-13)

Both of these scriptures say *many* but not *all* of the saints arose. Now we know why *all* of them were not resurrected. Some of them had to remain in the world of spirits for another 2000 years or more. Consider what that would mean for them! If the saints in the spirit world had looked upon the separation of their spirit from their bodies as a bondage, then they must have been excited to be resurrected. Resurrection meant exaltation, entering the Father's kingdom, the ultimate reward of the faithful. Some, however, would not be resurrected. They would wait. Instead, they would continue to preach the gospel. They would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Why would anyone want to do that instead of being resurrected?

While we don't know whether the Lord commanded them to stay, or whether they were given the option. It's preferable to think that they made the choice. Perhaps the conversation was similar to that which occurred between Christ and the Nephite Twelve. Perhaps 75% wanted to be resurrected so they could enter to their father's kingdom. Perhaps 25%, like the three Nephites, wanted to remain to bring more souls unto Christ, to tarry until Christ comes in his glory, to prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people (3 Ne. 26; D&C 7). Jesus had power to make both wishes come true and declare to both parties, "ye shall both have according to your desires, for ye both joy in that which ye have desired" (D&C 7:8).

### **DC 138:53 The Prophet Joseph Smith, and my father, Hyrum Smith...**

Before proceeding, we must mark this verse as a transition point. From verse 12 to 52, President Smith has been describing the scene in the spirit world at the time of Christ's death. As if in a time machine, President Smith's vision is

advanced almost 1900 years. He is now seeing the spirit world in the present, i.e. 1918. This time transition is important because many readers, as they read the next few verses, believe that President Smith was seeing the premortal foreordination of the latter-day prophets. President Smith is not viewing the premortal world but the postmortal world. He is looking through the veil at the world he will soon enter. He is seeing that world in the present. While viewing this scene, he understands that his father, his uncle, and the rest were busy working in the postmortal world according to their premortal foreordinations (see v. 55).

### **Wilford Woodruff**

I think, many times, that we, as Elders of Israel and as Latter-day Saints, come far short of realizing our position before the Lord. The work required at our hands is great and mighty; it is the work of Almighty God. We are held responsible for presenting the Gospel of Christ to all the nations of the earth, to warn the Gentiles, to prepare for the return of the lost ten tribes of Israel, and for carrying the Gospel to the whole tribes of Israel. We are held responsible for all this, and for building Temples to the Most High, wherein we can enter and attend to ordinances for the salvation of our dead. There are fifty thousand million spirits shut up in the spirit world who never saw the face of a Prophet, Apostle or inspired man in their lives. No man having the authority of God ever declared the words of life and salvation unto them, and without authority their ministrations are useless, for this is what the Priesthood is for. The God of heaven has ordained this from eternity to eternity. These persons in the spirit world died in the flesh without the law, without the Gospel, and they are shut up in prison. Joseph Smith is preaching to them, and so are thousands of the Elders of Israel who have died and gone to the other side of the veil. (*Journal of Discourses*, 18:114)

### **Wilford Woodruff**

I used to have peculiar feelings about [the Prophet's] death and the way in which his life was taken. I felt that if... Joseph could have had his desire, he would have pioneered the way to the Rocky Mountains. But since then I have been fully reconciled to the fact that it was according to the program, that it was required of him, as the head of this dispensation, that he should seal his testimony with his blood, and go hence to the spirit world, holding the keys of this dispensation, to open

up the mission that is now being performed by way of preaching the Gospel to the "spirits in prison." (*Journal of Discourses*, 24:54)

**DC 138:57 the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel**

"The insight that Christ did not personally visit the disobedient is a doctrinal matter introduced to the Church for the first time in this vision, broadening our scope of understanding of the work within that sphere. However, this clarification confirmed what had been taught by Joseph Smith: the faithful in this life continue to teach and labor in the world of spirits in behalf of those who know not God. (See D&C 138:57.) As recorded in George Laub's journal under date of 12 May 1844, the **Prophet Joseph** declared: 'Now all those die in the faith goe to the prison of Spirits to preach to the ded in body, but they are alive in the Spirit & those Spirits preach to the Spirits that they may live according to god in the Spirit and men do minister for them in the flesh.' Joseph F. Smith had taught this doctrine on a number of occasions; here he became an eyewitness of it." (Robert L. Millet, "Beyond the Veil: Two Latter-day Revelations," *Ensign*, Oct. 1985, 13)

"[At the time] current events weighed heavily on the mind of President Smith... [But] perhaps the most challenging event personally for the aging prophet was the unexpected death of his son Hyrum Mack Smith, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and a close advisor. Elder Hyrum Mack Smith died unexpectedly 23 January 1918 as a result of a ruptured appendix. His death greatly affected President Smith, and he questioned why this son needed to leave this mortal life when he was so needed here. He mourned greatly the loss of his son." (Stephen E. Robinson, H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2001] 4:300-301)

The answer came as a resplendent revelation, comfort to a mourning father, a blessing to a faithful servant—one of the Lord's great and tender mercies.

**Boyd K. Packer**

A few days ago I had my last visit with our beloved Brother McConkie. He was resting on the bed, dressed, alert, patient. We expressed our deep love for one another and said our good-byes.

President Lee told me on one occasion how the passing of one certain member of the Twelve had affected him more deeply than had any other. Now I understand. I cannot express the loneliness and the deep, personal loss I feel.

Brother McConkie and I shared a witness that, I have come to believe, few men share. I could, and I did, speak more openly to him of sacred things than to any other man. We had talked in recent months of his coming graduation from mortality. On those occasions, despite his great regret at leaving his family and his brethren, he spoke in terms of anticipation. He was absolutely devoid of any fear.

As we said our good-byes I inquired whether I could do anything else for him. He asked for a blessing...

We did learn much from that final blessing we gave Brother McConkie. In it I quoted from verses in section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants. That section is one of the revelations added to the scripture as part of recent editions. It is a revelation given to Amelia's grandfather, President Joseph F. Smith, on 3 October 1918 and is referred to as "The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead."

The heading of that section (which, incidentally, Bruce wrote) says this:

In his opening address at the eighty-ninth Semi-annual General Conference of the Church, on October 4, 1918, President Smith declared that he had received several divine communications during the previous months. One of these, concerning the Savior's visit to the spirits of the dead while his body was in the tomb, he had received the previous day.

President Smith had been reading and pondering certain verses from First Peter in the New Testament, including this one: (quotes 1 Peter 4:6).

The following verses were the ones from which I quoted in that blessing:

And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and my understanding quickened, and I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them;  
But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces



and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead (D&C 138:29-30).

One more verse:

I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead (D&C 138:57).

Following the blessing, Brother McConkie wept and said, "It is now all in the hands of the Lord." He affirmed his willingness to do as the Lord should wish.

After we left his home that day, for the first time he took off his clothes and went to bed.

Last Thursday as the Brethren met in the temple, the message came from him and from his Amelia that he was ready now to go. Would we ask the Lord? At the altar that was done. The following day at Amelia's invitation his family knelt around the bed for a final family prayer. His son Joseph was voice. At last they were willing to let him go, and at the very moment they asked the Lord, his passing came. It was a tender and sweet experience for the family.

Where is Bruce McConkie now? He is with his Lord. When the refining process is complete, I know something of how he will appear. He will be glorious! What will he do? Whatever the Lord wills him to do. I believe he shall be, as the revelation describes them, "a chosen messenger, clothed with power and authority to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness" (see D&C 138:30-31). (*Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled*, 259-266)

**DC 138:58 The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God**

We learn a lot from this verse. Apparently, you can repent in the spirit world. LDS teaching is that it is much more difficult to repent in spirit than during

mortality, but it can be done. **Elder Hartman Rector, Jr.** said, "Oh yes, it is possible to repent in the spirit world, although we are given to understand that it is much more difficult to repent there because we will not have our physical bodies to help us. Also an integral part of repentance is that we must make restitution. This means that if you have stolen five dollars, you have to return five dollars to the person whom you have robbed. This may be very difficult to do in the spirit world." (*Conference Report*, October 1970, Afternoon Meeting 74) This is why the dead live according to the spirit but are judged according to the flesh (1 Peter 4:6)

Secondly, the redemption spoken of occurs through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God. This redemption is a celestial redemption. All of the temple ordinances are pointed to the celestial kingdom. Baptism is the most basic, and it is the key to entrance into the celestial kingdom. As in mortality so in the world of spirits, the celestial kingdom is the goal. While we commonly think of those who died before they had the chance to receive the gospel—that these good souls need ordinance work for them so they can go to the celestial kingdom, what about those who were not righteous in mortality? What will be the judgment for a man who was wicked in mortality but responds to the gospel message and repents? Is it possible for him to enter the celestial kingdom? If not, why are we doing temple work?

### **Joseph F. Smith**

It stands to reason that, while the Gospel may be preached unto all, the good and the bad, or rather those who would repent and those who would not repent in the spirit world, the same as it is here, redemption will only come to those who repent and obey. There is, no doubt, great leniency given to people who are anxious to do the work for their dead; and, in some instances, very unworthy people may have the work done for them; it does not follow, however, that they will receive any benefit therefrom, and the correct thing is to do the work only for those of whom we have the testimony that they will receive it. However, we are disposed to give the benefit of the doubt to the dead, as it is better to do the work for many who are unworthy than to neglect one who is worthy. Now, we know in part, and see in part, but we steadfastly look forward to the time when that which is perfect will come. (*Improvement Era*, 1901, Vol. V. December, 1901. No. 2)

### **Orson Pratt**

So in relation to our dead-if we officiate for them, we have done our duty; if they will not repent in the spirit world, and obey the principles that God has ordained for their exaltation, their condemnation will rest upon their own heads, and not upon ours. But if we do not do our duty in relation to the fathers, they will testify against us in the judgment day, saying-"Lord, you sent an angel from heaven; you communicated the everlasting Gospel after I was dead; you gave the Apostleship, by sending Peter, James and John, and your servants went forth armed with authority and power to preach the Gospel to the nations of the earth, and many received it. You did not give me the privilege, Lord, of hearing and obeying the Gospel when I was upon the earth." Then the Lord might reply-"But I gave the privilege to the people on the earth to be baptized for their dead, and I gave you the privilege of availing yourself of their administrations, the same as the antediluvians had." Then you see, if we have attended to the duties devolving upon us in their behalf, the condemnation falls upon them. (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886], 16: 299 - 300)

## **Brigham Young**

To accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple but thousands of them, and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 394)

**DC 138:59 after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean... are heirs of salvation**

It is possible to be saved in the celestial kingdom and not be exalted-to be an heir of salvation but not an heir of exaltation. Such is the state for the two lower divisions within the celestial kingdom. This is the reward, it would seem, of which this scripture is speaking (see also D&C 132:26). This may be the reward of those born in the covenant but rebellious in mortality.

## **Orson F. Whitney**

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared-and he never taught more comforting doctrine-that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though

some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God. (Harold C. Brown, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Mar. 1993, 54)