

ELDER RULON S. WELLS*Of the First Council of the Seventy*

The outstanding characteristic or difference between the religion of the Latter-day Saints and that of the various churches in the world is the fact that God has endowed this work with power from on high. In other words, divine authority is the distinguishing feature between the Church of God and the churches of men, that have been established by a great many various sects of so-called Christianity.

PLAN OF SALVATION OF DIVINE ORIGIN

The principle of authority was made manifest in the very beginning of the promulgation of God's work, and that occurred in that primeval day, before the earth was created, when God had assembled together His sons and His daughters to hear the glad tidings of great joy.

It is only a natural and obvious conclusion which everybody should concede that if there be a plan of life and salvation, that it must be one of divine origin, for only God can save His children. And we ought to recognize the fact that we are here in a state of mortality; that death has come into the world as a result of disobedience in the Garden of Eden, under very peculiar circumstances; and the purpose of this thing is that mankind might be given the privilege of choosing between good and evil, and undergoing a test or a trial, and for that purpose God created this earth and placed His children upon it, that we might receive that education and that knowledge and understanding, that education pertaining to our spiritual and temporal welfare, that we might be able to combat with the powers of evil.

How could we ever be saved, how could we ever be exalted, unless we should have the benefit of this earth life experience, and be in attendance and ready to learn in God's great school which He has established for the education and benefit and blessing of His children? It must be then conceded that the plan of life and salvation would be one that was devised by the Lord Himself, and cannot be of any human invention. That being the case, we must look to Him for that all-wise plan and for that perfect system by which we may be prepared to receive what God intends we shall receive.

MAN'S THREE ESTATES

There are three estates of man: The first estate was when we dwelt with God as His spirit children, in His holy habitation, before the world was made, as we read in our favorite hymn:

O my Father, thou that dwellest
 In the high and glorious place,
 When shall I regain thy presence
 And again behold Thy face?
 In thy holy habitation
 Did my spirit once reside?
 In my first primeval childhood
 Was I nurtured near Thy side?

That tells, in those beautiful lines of Eliza R. Snow, what occurred before the world was made, to which the Lord referred when He said unto His servant Job:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. * * *

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

That is a question that implies a great deal. It contemplates and infers that there was a time and a place where God had assembled His children together to hear a proclamation. What was the occasion? We are told there that it was a time of rejoicing, and the Lord had assembled His sons, and His daughters, too, I doubt not, to hear the glad tidings of great joy. It was the proclamation of God's plan for the salvation of His children, for the education and the improvement of the children of God. It involved the creation of this earth, and it involved the knowledge of good and evil, that we might be tried, and for this purpose was it created that we might in our second estate through obedience to His plan qualify ourselves for the third estate, namely: eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

COVENANTS MADE BY THE LORD

We read all through the scriptures, both in ancient and in modern scriptures, that the Lord has made a covenant with His people. He has always called those to whom He has given a dispensation of His providence, "His covenant people". What was that covenant? We hear a great many talk about the new and everlasting covenant, even among our own people, and we sometimes jump at the conclusion that it refers exclusively to the marriage covenant. The marriage covenant is truly a very great and important part of that everlasting covenant, but it is only a part.

The Lord made it known to the Prophet Joseph Smith, as you will find it recorded in Section 66, paragraph 2, of the Doctrine and Covenants, that the "new and everlasting covenant" is nothing more or less than the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in its fulness, as it was revealed and proclaimed in that primeval day when the great and noble ones, or the "morning stars," sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy—the day the Lord made known to them the terms of His everlasting covenant, setting forth what He expects us to do, and also informing us what He will do if we comply.

What is a covenant? Our standard dictionaries define a covenant as "an agreement entered into between two or more persons or parties." It is just such an agreement that the Lord promulgated and announced to His spirit children, that filled their hearts with joy and gladness, and whereupon the morning stars, the great and noble ones, sang together and all of the sons and daughters of God made the heavens ring with the shouts of joy and gladness over these glad tidings.

It is that one and only way that the Lord has ever revealed, that one and only plan, that one and only Gospel that was promulgated in that

early day. It is that which has been given to the children of men as the power of God unto salvation. It was first given to our father Adam, after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The Lord revealed that covenant to him, and explained precisely what it was and declared that it was the plan of salvation. It was continued with Enoch, and was also re-established with Noah and his sons after the deluge.

It was again given to Abraham, and with him the promises of the everlasting covenant were made as frequently as stated in the Bible, and later it was established with Moses after the delivery of the children of Israel from their long bondage in the land of Egypt but under the "lesser law," the law of carnal commandments, the rebellious and stiff-necked Israelites not being prepared for the higher law, but were given the lesser law as a school master to bring them to Christ; and when our Lord came in the meridian of time, He again set up His Church and established the same everlasting covenant, but now under the higher law.

In the light of these various dispensations, we can readily see the meaning of the words of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, which I now quote:

O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! (Luke 13:34.)

During each of these dispensations many generations have been brought into the fold by entering into the covenant through the holy waters of baptism and have gone to their reward, but let it be remembered that the Devil and his angels also came and led the children of men again into darkness and error and a general falling away from the Truth ensued, and always for the same reason as it was described by the Prophet Isaiah when he said, "because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance and broken the everlasting covenant" and thus the earth has been defiled. (Isaiah 24:5).

ABRAHAM SHOWN SOME OF THE LORD'S WORK

I have just stated that it was with Abraham that the promises were made; let me now add that it is from the writings of Abraham and those of Moses that we learn the particulars concerning the everlasting covenant as these writings are contained in the Pearl of Great Price, from which I now quote:

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones:

And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me, Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.

And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there,

and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;

And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.

That is our part in the covenant, to do all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us. All things that the Lord our God shall command us are embodied in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in its fullness, for the Lord has said that "man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God".

Then comes the Lord's part:

And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon.

Very significant language. What does that mean? It means simply this, that there shall be added to our immortal spirits these bodies of flesh and bones.

And they who keep their second estate—[that is, our present estate here after we have received these bodies of flesh and bones]—They who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever. (Pearl of Great Price. Abraham 3:22-26)

What a glorious promise! A never-ending glory that is to be added upon the heads of those who keep their second estate, by doing what the Lord commands them, obeying His glorious Gospel. That is the only plan. It is God's plan, and has been given to the inhabitants of the earth in the various dispensations of His providence.

THE COVENANT RE-ESTABLISHED BY THE SAVIOR

When the Lord our Savior came and dwelt upon the earth, the everlasting covenant was re-established among the children of men, under the higher law. Previous to the coming of Christ the lesser law ostensibly, but very imperfectly, was being administered by the various sects of that day. The children of Israel, fresh from their bondage in the land of Egypt, where they had imbibed much of the idolatry of that nation, were not prepared for the higher law, and the Lord gave unto them the lesser law as a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ.

But when the Savior came and ministered among men He established His Church and Kingdom anew, under the higher law. In the former dispensation it was the law of carnal commandments, they not being prepared for that higher law. Moses was complaining to the Lord that he was slow of speech and felt himself incompetent to lead the people, and he asked the Lord that He would give him someone in his stead. The Lord was not pleased altogether with his request, but finally it was granted, and He said unto Moses: "Take thy brother Aaron and his sons to act in the office of the priest." Then He conferred upon Aaron a part of the glory that was upon Moses—not all. The glory which was upon Moses was the glory of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The part that was given to Aaron is known to us as the Aaronic Priesthood. That was the beginning of this order of the Priesthood, and yet it is to endure forever.

The Aaronic Priesthood continued to minister in the affairs of the Church and the Lord took Moses out of their midst and with him the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, but the Aaronic Priesthood remained in the Church until the coming of John the Baptist. (Doc. & Cov. 84:25 and 26).

MANY DISPENSATIONS GIVEN TO GOD'S CHILDREN

From what I have said and from the inspired writings of the prophets, which I have copiously quoted, it will be obvious that there have been many dispensations of God's providence in every one of which prophets have been raised up duly commissioned of God to act in His name, for as the Prophet Amos has declared it: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets:" (Amos 3:7).

It will also be apparent that the everlasting covenant, or in other words "the Gospel of Jesus Christ" has been the very essence of God's dealings with mankind, even from the days of Adam until now—yes, and even antedating the creation of this earth to that primeval day "when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

It will also be noted that after each and every one of the various dispensations there has been a falling away and darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people, as prophesied by Isaiah the prophet. (Isaiah 60:2).

Even the glorious Messianic dispensation when Jesus ministered among men and set in His Church firstly Apostles and secondly prophets, etc., for the work of the ministry, that we be not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, was no exception to the rule for it, too, was soon followed by a universal apostasy; and, indeed, heresies were creeping into the Church while the Apostles were still living, (see I Cor. 11:18, 19) but after the Apostles "fell asleep" and the prophetic spirit disappeared, they fell into the deepest gloom of darkness and superstition and paganistic ceremonials and mysticisms which were entirely foreign to the simple ordinances of the Gospel as they were taught and practiced in the primitive Church by the Savior and His Apostles. For a full discussion of this subject let me refer you to the series of radio addresses delivered by the late President B. H. Roberts over Radio Station KSL, which has been published in book form under the title of "The Falling Away".

THE LAST DISPENSATION

Now, however, came the promise of another dispensation, even "The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times". This dispensation has already been ushered in through the visitation of heavenly beings and the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, by whom the Lord has again set up His Church and Kingdom and established His everlasting covenant restoring the fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its primitive purity. This is the Church and Kingdom which the Lord has

set up never again to be thrown down nor given to another people, but it shall stand forever, as foretold by the Prophet Daniel. (See Daniel II).

And now again as on all previous occasions, He has endowed His Church with power from on high, the all important and outstanding feature which has always distinguished His Church from the man-made churches of the world.

May we ever have an abiding testimony of the Truth and may our faith ever manifest itself in the works of obedience. May we hearken to the counsels of our leaders, upholding and sustaining them in their high office, for they are God's servants zealously laboring in building up His Church and Kingdom upon the earth, I pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

PRESIDENT J. REUBEN CLARK, JR.

We have a number of released Mission presidents. We hope to hear from as many of them as possible. In order, however, that we may hear as many as possible, we shall ask them to be good enough to confine themselves to five minutes time. Anything under five minutes is five minutes. Five minutes is not six or seven or ten.

Our first speaker will be President Joseph Jacobs, of the Palestine-Syrian Mission.

ELDER JOSEPH JACOBS

Former President of the Palestine-Syrian Mission

My dear brothers and sisters, I bring you greetings from the Saints in the Palestine-Syrian Mission. It was my privilege and blessing to be called to preside over that historic and interesting Mission in 1937. Although in numbers the Saints in that Mission are relatively few, yet in faith and works they are a great people. While there and since returning home, their reports show that over ninety per cent of those who should pay tithing, do so. In the payment of Fast offerings, in the attendance of their meetings, and other Church activities they compare favorably with the highest group in the Church.

About three weeks ago I received a report from that Mission field about the condition of the Saints. The report states that they are all firm in the faith, are continuing their meetings, tithing is being paid regularly, and an entire family has applied for baptism.

Incidentally, the report was mailed the latter part of May but just arrived here.

Being literally located at the cross-roads of the world, from time immemorial wars have been numerous in that part of the world. And because of its geographical position it is dangerous to remain in that land whenever war breaks out in any of the nearby nations. Because of these conditions, that Mission has been closed four times since it opened in 1890. Intervals of closing range from two to thirteen years. But every time the Mission opened, the new Mission president has been able to find many of the Saints and has discovered to his surprise that they were still in the faith and carrying on.