

Podcast 117: True Vine, Part 2

This is Part 2 of a special series on the "True Vine" where Denver answers the question, "Why is Christ referred to as the 'True Vine' in scripture, and what can we learn from this analogy?"

DENVER: The vineyard that the Lord began the restoration in was cumbered with all sorts of strange fruit.

(I mean, I've spent a lifetime referring to it as the Jacob chapter 5. In the new Book of Mormon layouts, it's one of the very few chapters that I can actually point you to from memory. It's Jacob chapter 3 in the new layout. So, I'm becoming familiar with it.)

Talking about the condition of this vineyard in its cumbered...with all sorts of strange fruit (none of it worth harvesting, none of it work keeping, none of it worth laying up and preserving against the harvest), the allegory says:

*This is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard, for the end is nigh at hand and the season speedily cometh. And if ye labor with your mights **with** me, ye shall have joy in the fruit with which I shall lay up unto myself against the time, which will soon come. And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their mights, and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them. And they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things.*
(Jacob 3:26-27 RE, emphasis added)

Well, **that's** fairly critical! The Lord's gonna labor with you, but He's gonna expect you to obey His commandments in all things. Have you recently read the *Answer to the Prayer for Covenant*? Are you determined to obey the master of the vineyard and His commandments in all things? Maybe we ought to read that twice before we berate one another, belittle one another, argue with one another, dismiss one another. Otherwise, we're really not laboring with the Lord of the vineyard to help for the coming harvest. Instead, we're embracing a false spirit, and we're dividing one another, and we're trying... Our ambition—whether we're willing to acknowledge it or not—our ambition is to set this into the same sort of divisive factions as the Lord condemned to Joseph in 1820: They have *a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof. They teach for [commandments] the [doctrines] of men* (JSH 2:5 RE). They're **all corrupt**.

And there began to be the natural fruit again in the vineyard. And the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly, and the wild branches began to be plucked off and to be cast away (Jacob 3:27 RE).

Some of the plucking and some of the casting away is voluntarily done by those who submit to false spirits that stir them up to anger against one another, and they depart from

fellowship thinking themselves justified before God when in fact, all they're doing is being plucked and cast away.

And they did keep the root and the top thereof equal, according to the strength thereof (ibid, vs. 27). We are seeking to keep it equal. Every one of us is on the same plain. No one's getting supported by tithing money. If they are, that's done by a local fellowship that has voluntarily determined that they have one among them in need—because the tithes are gathered and used to help the poor. There's no general fund being accumulated, and there's no one who does anything that they get compensated for.

This is the only group of people whose religion requires, **incessantly**, *sacrifice*. No one gets paid. No one gets remunerated. Everything that's done is done at a price of sacrifice. If you are a person in need among a fellowship, the tithes are appropriately used because that's what they're for. They're for the poor. They're not for a leader.

You have to keep the root, and you have to keep the top equal. If you allow inequality to creep in at the beginning, the end result is lavish palaces in which some fare sumptuously, and others ask to eat the crumbs that fall from the table because they're treated so unequally. And their despair and their poverty and their need goes ignored.

Among us, it can't go ignored because the money is gathered at a fellowship level. And if there is someone in need among you, and you don't minister to their needs, you're cruel. You're...

And thus they labored with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away... (ibid, vs. 27).

If you can't tolerate equality; if you can't tolerate the top and the root being equal; if you can't tolerate peace among brethren, then go ahead and be *bad* and *cast yourself away*. If you feel moved upon to do that, well, that's the Lord of the vineyard getting rid of you.

*Even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard and the Lord had preserved unto himself, that the trees had become again the natural fruit. And they became like unto one body, and the **fruit** were equal* (ibid, vs. 27, emphasis added).

That word *equal* shows up so often in the labor that the Lord of the vineyard is trying to accomplish with the people that you ought to take note.

We ought to probably typeset it **EQUAL** in double-sized font.

We're not going to do that. So, you have to underline the word or circle the word or pay attention to it. The purpose is to go and become equal with one another. As soon as you set out to create rank and position and hierarchy...

Admittedly, within the parable, there is a top, and there is a root—admittedly. But the objective is to achieve equality. If you start out saying the one is greater or better than the other, you're never gonna arrive at the point that is the purpose of the parable, the purpose of the labor of the Lord of the vineyard: *and the fruit were equal*.

The Book of Mormon has had libraries of material written, and almost every single volume in the libraries of Book of Mormon material are filled with debates between polemicists and apologists. All the literature basically debates the pro and the con. I spent decades studying the back-and-forth of polemicists and apologists.

One of the fellows that I admire greatly is Hugh Nibley; and Hugh Nibley was one of the very first serious-minded Mormons to take the Book of Mormon seriously. If you read what I wrote about the Book of Mormon history of scholarship in *Eighteen Verses*, you find that literally, it was Hugh Nibley that ultimately persuaded the First Presidency that the Book of Mormon should be studied and taken seriously.

There were stake presidents and bishops in the LDS tradition who never read the book at the time. And when Hugh Nibley mounted a defense of the Book of Mormon, then-President David O. McKay essentially said, "You talk about it like you think it's true," and Hugh Nibley defended it. At the end of the day, however, Hugh Nibley is an apologist. He's defending the faith.

The Book of Mormon itself, on the other hand, has this passage from Alma where he invites you to experiment upon the word. He says you ought to *plant* it. Now think for a moment what it means to plant something. Alma says:

*But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than **desire to believe**, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a **portion** of my words. [Just think for yourself, for a moment, how you would do that.] Now we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place [unto that seed] that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed — if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the spirit of the Lord — behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts. And when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within [yourself], It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, **for it beginneth to enlarge my soul**; yea, it beginneth to **enlighten my understanding**; yea,...it beginneth to **be delicious [unto] me**. Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, yea. (Alma 16:27-28 RE, emphasis added)*

And he goes on to describe what happens after that, and how it converts into knowledge once you've gained experience with the process.

*For ye know that the word hath swelled your souls,...ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your **understanding doth begin to be enlightened** and your **mind...begin to expand**. O then, is [this not] real? I say unto you, yea, because **it is light**; and whatsoever is light is good, because it is discernible; therefore, ye must know that it is good. And now behold, after ye have tasted this light, is your knowledge perfect? Behold, I say unto you, nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed, that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good. And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say, Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, **if ye nourish it with [great] care**, it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit. But if ye neglect the tree and take no thought for its nourishment, behold, it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root, it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out. Now this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable, but it is because **your** ground is barren and **ye** will not nourish the tree; therefore, ye cannot have the fruit thereof. And thus it is: [And] if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life. But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith, **with great diligence, and with patience**, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold, it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. And because of your **diligence, and your faith, and your patience** with the word, in nourishing it that it may take root [ye shall] by and by...pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet,...which is white above all that is white, yea,...pure above all that is pure... (ibid, vs. 29-30, emphasis added)*

...and then you thirst not, and you hunger not. Diligence, patience. Diligence, faith, patience.

We want a faith that will respond like Google. We don't want God to prepare a banquet. We want fast food and a short-order cook and someone that will slap something on our plate fast, fast, fast. And the Book of Mormon is saying, "Slow down. Diligence isn't quick. Patience isn't fast."

Planting the seed... It's like the kids in elementary school that plant the pumpkin seed in the styrofoam cup, and every day they go over and look at the styrofoam cup, and nothing seems to be happening. And before long, a third of the class has killed the seed because they've dug it up to see what's going on.

Patience. Patience and diligence—three times. Diligence and patience. Diligence and patience.

I have had spiritual breakthroughs that are so profound and so sacred that when I described them one time, I did so with only nine words. But I can tell you why it happened.

I taught the Book of Mormon in a Gospel Doctrine class for four different years on cycles while I was a Gospel Doctrine teacher—each time pushing the Book of Mormon deeper and deeper, always (for the first couple of decades) being a little reticent, being a little skeptical. I mean, I accepted the arguments of the apologists. I knew, I understood, and I had studied the arguments of the polemicists.

But Alma was asking that I do something different. Alma was saying, “Hey, why don't you just experiment with this thing and plant it **as if** you believed it. Plant it **as if** you had faith in it. So, forget about the pros and cons, accept the Book of Mormon at face value, and let the Book of Mormon define itself. Let the Book of Mormon be the source from which you evaluate whether or not it enlightens you, whether or not it appeals to your heart, to your soul, and to your mind.”

And so, I experimented on the word, and I took the Book of Mormon as if it were actually a revelation from God, translated by the gift and power of God and delivered to me through no human instrumentality. Joseph Smith may have dictated it, and Oliver Cowdery may have penned most of it, but it was translated by the gift and power of God. Therefore, the book was translated into English by the Lord.

And so, I took the Book of Mormon seriously. I entertained no doubts. I employed no apologetics. I just accepted the book and tried to understand it. As I did so, going through the text of the Book of Mormon, there were moments when there were glints where something leapt off the page to me as if someone had flashed the reflection of the sun off a windshield passing down the street, and it aligns with the right angle of the sun. The text itself seemed to spark to me.

As I took it seriously, I could breathe the spirit of the writers. I beheld more as I went through that text than the text will yield to the cautious and wary reader. The Book of Mormon—like the spirits I referred to earlier—the Book of Mormon also has a spirit, and that Spirit is Christ. If you want to relate to the Spirit of Christ and not a false spirit, drop all your apprehensions, lower your guard, and see if the Book of Mormon does not yield the Spirit of Christ. It was a better text than any other I had encountered in conveying the Spirit of Christ. It is, in fact, the most correct book, and a man can get closer to God by abiding its precepts than any other book.

Jacob (Nephi's brother) delivered a sermon that Nephi records in his second book. In his second book, after Jacob had read from Isaiah to teach his brethren that were interested in learning about things, he then elaborates or explains the prophecy given by Isaiah:

*And now my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord, that he has covenanted with **all** the house of Israel (2 Nephi 6:1 RE, emphasis added).*

That's important because *all the house of Israel* is greater than those that they left behind at Jerusalem. All the house of Israel is greater even than the Nephites plus those left at Jerusalem. The ten tribes had left the northern kingdom. They had migrated away years before Lehi left Jerusalem. Therefore, all the house of Israel (which includes those scattered on the isles of the sea as the Nephites were) were remembered, and Jacob wants his brethren to understand that God's plan is all-inclusive, wherever they are, in whatever scattered condition. Even if they've altogether lost their identity as members of the house of Israel, yet they are remembered in the covenants of the Lord.

*[He's] spoken unto the Jews by the mouth of his holy [prophet], even from the beginning, down from generation to generation, until the time cometh that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God, when they shall be gathered home [into] the lands of their inheritance [lands, plural, not singular] and shall be established in **all their lands** of promise. (ibid, vs. 1 RE, emphasis added)*

What Jacob is teaching to his brethren is that there are those who have received (who belong to the house of Israel) covenants that have handed to them—by covenant—**lands**, plural. This land has people upon it today who have entered into a covenant with the Lord today, that has made this land a place of their inheritance. The descendants of the Lamanites likewise descend from Fathers with whom a covenant was made that **they** inherit this land. The Jews in Israel have a promise given them. That land is theirs by divine decree—God gave it to them; it is their land. And there are **other** broken branches from the house of Israel living on lands (their descendants today) that they possess by right.

Jacob continued his sermon over a second day. And in the sermon the second day, this is the second part of Jacob's teaching concerning the covenants:

*Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are **in the flesh**, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations. Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, **shall perish**; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth. For they who are not for me are against me, saith our God. For I will fulfill my promises which I have made unto the children of men that I will do unto them **while they are in the flesh**. (2 Nephi 7:3 RE, emphasis added)*

This isn't some dreamy, distant, other-worldly event. He says He is going to establish, in the flesh, a people that will become Zion; and He will defend those people who are His Zion.

As Nephi closes his record, he explains plainly what he wants us, the Gentiles, to understand from his record:

Woe...unto him that shall say, We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough....Unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them [which] say, We have enough — shall be taken away even that which they have....I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me....There shall be many at that day when I shall proceed to do a marvelous work among them, that I...remember my covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may...remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that...shall say, A bible, a bible, [we've] got a bible,...there cannot be any more bible. But thus saith the Lord...O fools, [that] shall have a bible....O ye gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay, but [you've] cursed them, [you've] hated them, and have not sought to recover them....Thou fool that shall say, A bible, [we've] got a bible and we need no more bible. Have ye obtained a bible, save it were by the Jews? Know ye not that there are more nations than one?....I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and...I remember those [that] are upon the isles of the sea? ...I rule in the heavens above and [I rule] in the earth beneath....Wherefore murmur ye because...ye shall receive more of my word? (2 Nephi 12:6-9 RE)

That was the very objective that Abraham sought—to get more of God’s word. He **wanted** to know more; he **wanted** to receive commandments; he **wanted** to receive instructions.

*Because that I have spoken one word, ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another....The Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews, and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel, and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.... My people which are of the house of Israel shall be gathered home [into] the **lands** of their [possession], and my word also shall be gathered in one....I am God, and...I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed for ever. (ibid, vs. 10 RE, emphasis added)*

That includes those portions of the family of Abraham that migrated out of the view of the scriptures we presently possess so that when they drop out of the Biblical narrative, or they drop out of the Book of Mormon narrative, God was still with them. He was still doing with them; He was still leading them and teaching them; and ultimately, He visited them. All of them kept records. Those are all to be restored.

*Ye need not suppose that the gentiles are utterly destroyed. For behold, I say unto you, as many of the gentiles as will repent **are** the covenant people of the Lord....For the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel. (ibid, vs. 11 RE, emphasis added)*

Therefore, the covenant people of the Lord (according to the Book of Mormon) who will inherit the promises of Abraham necessarily include those gentiles who are willing to

covenant with Him to allow Him to labor through them to restore things that will bring the remainder of the house of Israel back to the knowledge of their God.

Mormon interrupts his narrative summary of events by an observation he makes about the work of the Lord (inserted into his account just prior to the final round of apostasy, violence, and the great tempest that destroyed the wicked—and then, Christ’s visit to the other sheep that are covered in the Book of Mormon). This is Mormon’s insertion into the record:

Surely shall he again bring a remnant of the seed of Joseph to the knowledge of the Lord their God. And as surely as the Lord liveth [he will] gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob....He hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled, in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant [which] he hath covenanted with them....Then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (3 Nephi 2:18 RE)

In Christ’s teachings to the Nephites **after** He had been resurrected, appeared to them, had them come and be in contact and witness of His death and resurrection, He delivered to them the Sermon on the Mount in a slightly different form, the Sermon at Bountiful. And after He had taught that sermon, He commanded that they write down and preserve these teachings that He’s going to give.

Someone wrote in the margin of my book; it looks like my handwriting. So, I wanted to read that: *The remnant of their seed, who [should] be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in...* (3 Nephi 7:4 RE).

Okay, He’s now talking to the Nephite believers about the descendants of the Nephite believers, and He’s telling them, “You have to write this down.” And He tells them what they’re to write down is that eventually their descendants are gonna be scattered upon the face of the earth because of their **unbelief**, but those descendants may be brought in. The note I wrote in the margin is that even the Lamanite remnant, who are the target of the covenant, **have to be reclaimed, have to be brought in, have to know** of their inheritance in order to take advantage of it. If they’re not brought in, then they still suffer under the plague of unbelief.

Because...their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me....I [will] gather them in....I [will] fulfill the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel....In the latter day shall the truth come unto the gentiles, that the fullness of these things shall be made known unto them. (ibid, vs. 4)

In other words, He’s promising to the Nephites their descendants are going to fall away, but He promises their descendants will be gathered back in. In order to bring the descendants back in, He’s promising them that the Gentiles shall receive **this knowledge**.

The truth [shall] come unto the...[knowledge] that the fullness of these things shall be made known unto them....I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fullness of my gospel. But if the gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold, they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel. (3 Nephi 7:4-5 RE)

When the Gentiles repent, and they return, then they're numbered back—just like the descendants of the Nephites when they are awakened and repent and are taught the truth and return unto God. All become one house, one fold, one people.

Then, after Christ had introduced the sacrament and had commanded that Isaiah's words be searched because they tell of fulfilling of God's covenant, Christ then teaches:

This people will I establish in this land unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob, and it shall be a New Jerusalem. And the Powers of Heaven shall be in the midst of this people, yea, even I will be in the midst of you. (3 Nephi 9:8 RE)

Christ is reiterating to this group, in this setting, promises directly to them that He had previously given to Enoch about what would happen in the last days. When He told Enoch about it, He said that there would come a point at which righteousness and truth would spring forth; it would be upon the earth; there would be a tabernacle or a temple there; and that He, along with Enoch's people, would return and fall upon and kiss the necks of those who gather there. This is the same prophecy that was given to Enoch, one of those first Fathers in that first direct descent. This is a covenant that Christ is reiterating, but it goes back to the first Fathers. Indeed, if we had a full restoration of all that had been given, we would know that the gospel in its fullness was understood far better by the first generations, or the original Fathers, than it is understood by us today. He says to the people gathered there (this is Christ, same talk):

Ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed, the Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities — and this because ye are the children of the covenant. And after...ye were blessed, then fulfilleth the Father the covenant which he made with Abraham, saying, In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed, unto the pouring out of the holy ghost through me upon the gentiles. (ibid, vs. 8)

In genealogical research, what you find is that if you start with yourself, and you go backwards generations for about 500 years, your genealogy chart expands and expands and expands. And at about the 500-year-mark, it begins to contract and contract and contract so that the genetic spread of the blood of Abraham throughout the world is so far

and so wide that you practically can't find people anywhere on the earth that don't have some of the blood of Abraham, to whom He said,...*all the kindreds of the earth will be blessed [in thy seed]* (3 Nephi 9:8).

If they shall harden their hearts against me, I will return their iniquities upon their own heads, saith the Father. And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people, and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance. (ibid, vs. 8)

So, it should begin to emerge into your view that physical descendancy is one thing to open up an opportunity—but covenanting, remembering, repenting, returning, accepting what God has to offer is the component in the last days that distinguishes whether or not they are **redeemed**, whether or not they are to be **gathered**, whether or not they are to be **recognized** in the own due time of the Lord as **His**, to be protected and to be preserved against the harvest. It's not enough merely to have genealogical connection back to some remnant of Father Abraham.

I can trace my genealogy back to Jewish ancestry, to Native American ancestry. That doesn't mean a thing if I don't repent and return. I remain on the outside; I remain a Gentile; I remain a disbeliever, unworthy to be gathered. I suspect everyone in this room has a direct genealogical connection, probably not only to Abraham but also Joseph—and perhaps eleven out of the twelve tribes of Israel. It's just the way that descendancy works.

Christ continues:

*Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled;...then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance. When these things which I declare unto you — and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself and by the power of the holy ghost...shall be made known unto the gentiles, that they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob...it shall be a sign unto them that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel...the gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that **they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel** [means that it was always the design that the Gentiles should also be gathered in, or that what is (in all likelihood) an unsavory, bitter-fruit-producing branch of the original tree should be taken and gathered back to the original root and gather nourishment from that original root that they may come in and be numbered among the house of Israel. It's always been the intention of the Lord to restore the Gentiles and to make them the means through which the last days' work would become accomplished]. (3 Nephi 9:10-11 RE, emphasis added)*

As Mormon completed the record of Christ's visit to the Nephites, he provided this description of the Book of Mormon's purpose:

*When the Lord shall see fit in his wisdom that these sayings shall come unto the gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel concerning their restoration to the **lands** of their inheritance is already beginning to be fulfilled. And ye may know that the words of the Lord which have been spoken by the holy prophets **shall all be fulfilled**....The Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 13:7 RE, emphasis added)*

And as Moroni concluded the record, he inserted some final words of instruction for the people who would receive the Book of Mormon in the last days. These words were taught to him by his father. He says:

*Hath miracles ceased?...I say unto you, nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For...they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, shewing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill and to do the work of the **covenants** of the Father which he hath made unto the children of men, ...declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him; and by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the holy ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and this after this manner bringeth to pass the Father the **covenants** which he hath made unto the children of men. (Moroni 7:6 RE, emphasis added)*

There are numerous other passages in the Book of Mormon that speak to the same thing. The Book of Mormon is a forerunner—a harbinger—that was intended to say to the people who receive it: There are covenants that go back to the very beginning, to the original Fathers. Those covenants got renewed, they got restored, they got continued in the form of Abraham (who received all that had been there originally) coming out of apostasy and being adopted back into that line of Patriarchs. That original covenant material provoked the creation of the Book of Mormon, and it is one of the major testimonies that is given to us by the Book of Mormon about the work that God intends to do in the last days. You can believe in the Bible; you can accept Jesus as your Savior; you can be (in the words of the Evangelical community) *born again*. You can be (in the words of Latter-day Saints) someone whose *calling and election is made sure*. But the work of God at this point is not about merely individual salvation. **It is the work of fulfilling the covenants that were made with the Fathers. It is the work of restoring again that original gospel of which the law given to Moses pointed forward to but did not comprehend.**

We tend to view priesthood in institutional ways. And it's hard to be terribly critical of misunderstandings because, quite frankly, priestly authority following the success of the

Petrine branch of original Christianity and its triumph with emphasis on authority and priesthood and keys, predisposed the entire Christian world. Even the Christian world after the Protestant Reformation succeeded in finally breaking off areas in which a different form of *protest Christianity* could be practiced that was not subservient to *the Roman See* and papal decree, they still had this misapprehension about priesthood.

So, when Joseph Smith began to talk about priesthood and to begin the process of restoring it, he gave a new kind of vocabulary, but possession of a vocabulary does not mean possession of the thing.

When Abraham talks about becoming a rightful heir and becoming a high priest, it would be best if you threw out everything that you have heard or learned or understood about the concept of priesthood. Priesthood includes the prerogative, the right, the obligation, or the duty to go out and perform ordinances that are effective that God will recognize, to be sure, and that's part of it; and it's a true principle.

However, priesthood in the original sense was something far more vast. It included an understanding of things that relate back all the way to the beginning, or before the world was, and goes forward through all periods of time until the end. It includes a basis of knowledge. So, when you read Abraham's description of what it was he looked for, and he mentions priesthood, you have to merge that into the entirety of what he's talking about: knowledge, understanding, commandments, instructions, having the capacity to see things in their correctly-ordered fashion (similarly to how God originally intended that it be ordered) so that you are no longer out of sync with this creation and doing your best to *reign with blood and horror* by subduing nature with the iron plow and gunpowder and lead. But instead, you find yourself situated in a place that Eden itself can be renewed, and harmony can be achieved between man and the earth.

The Book of Mormon is talking about something vast, but it continually points back to Abraham. And I do not care what arguments can be made or what a pitiful effort has been put together to defend the book of Abraham that Joseph Smith provided us. It was essential to the Restoration that the book of Abraham be given to us because without it, we would not understand a great deal about the Restoration and what the final objective of the Restoration was to achieve.

If you're going to please God, you don't please Him by having your *born again* experience or having your *calling and election made sure* experience if the result of that is to make you proud, conceited, self-assured, and arrogant, and to disconnect you from the Restoration process that was begun through Joseph Smith and has **yet** a greater work to be done than was achieved at the time of Joseph Smith. Go off and be saved, but you will not fulfill the work of the covenants that God intends to achieve. He has committed Himself to that end.

Those who will labor alongside Him, whether they be Gentile or Lamanite or Jew, it does not matter. If they will repent and accept the process of the Restoration as it began through Joseph Smith (not only to **say** it correctly but to **do** what it tells us needs to be done), then

you will be numbered among those people that God has covenanted to gather against the coming harvest.

But if you want to be the lone guru whose commentaries fill pages of blogging and hours of pontification, but you're going to labor at odds... I read you the warning: All that fight against Zion are going to perish. So, you can shout your hallelujahs in the spirit world, and you can proclaim your calling and election guarantees you something—but quite frankly, practically everyone's calling and election can be made sure. You get to continue progress; you get to continue to repent. God's not gonna terminate you at the end of this cycle of creation, but you're gonna be allowed to go on and upward if you'll continue to repent.

You will always be free to choose, but the work of the covenants that the Book of Mormon foretell are to be accomplished through the reclaiming by repentance and returning to Him of Gentiles that will ultimately reach out to and include restoring the Lamanites/restoring the Jews to a knowledge of the works of the Father. **That—that** is what is on the mind of God today. **That** is the purpose of the covenant that was given unto us in Boise just a few years ago—two years ago. **That** is what fulfilling the covenant ultimately requires that we labor to achieve.

That effort began in earnest with the reclaiming of the scriptures and the presenting of those to the Lord for His acceptance and the marvelous news that God accepted them as adequate for His purpose for us and the commitment that He would labor with us to go forward.

Anyone can join the party. Anyone can come into this work. Anyone can remain a Catholic or a Presbyterian, a Catholic or a Latter-day Saint. It doesn't matter. Those things are more like civic clubs. I don't care if you're a Rotarian or a Kiwanis Club member—means about the same thing as belonging to any of those organizations. Associate with whoever you like to associate with.

But you **must** accept baptism. You **must** accept the Book of Mormon. It **is** a covenant. The covenant must be accepted, and you **must** help labor alongside those who seek to return Zion.

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The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's lecture entitled "Signs Follow Faith" given in Centerville, Utah on March 3, 2019.
- Denver's conference talk entitled "The Book of Mormon Holds the Covenant Pattern for the Full Restoration" given in Boise, Idaho on September 22, 2019.