
"PROPER ORDER": A POWERFUL PRECEPT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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As the Second Coming of Jesus Christ draws near, the world appears to be caught in an intensifying maelstrom of chaos and confusion. In contrast to the personal and societal turmoil of the latter days, the Book of Mormon teaches that order can and must be achieved through Jesus Christ and His gospel. In fact, order—and the need for order—is one of the great precepts of the Book of Mormon.

By definition, order means being in the proper relationship or arrangement.¹ In a gospel context, order is found in enjoying a harmonious relationship with God. This chapter will examine what the Book of Mormon teaches about order, how students of the Book of Mormon can order their lives, and the related doctrines of ordination and ordinances.

ORDER

The importance of the precept of order is evident in its repetition throughout the Book of Mormon and other sacred scriptures. In quoting the prophet Isaiah, Nephi taught his people that establishing order

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would be one of Jesus Christ's divine functions: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom *to order it*, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" (2 Nephi 19:6–7; emphasis added). One need only look to the manner in which the Savior interacts with mankind and with His earthly institutions to learn much about order. His truly is a "house of order" (D&C 88:119; see also D&C 109:8; 132:8, 18), and following His teachings and example will bring order to any life or organization.

King Benjamin, Book of Mormon prophet and political leader, admonished his people to "see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order" (Mosiah 4:27). A life that is out of order is certainly not a Christlike life. An ordered life is one that places the Redeemer and His gospel foremost. President Howard W. Hunter explained that although we may naturally want things the other way around, order and progression come from having Jesus Christ first in our lives: "Living members put Christ first in their lives, knowing from what source their lives and progress come. There is a tendency for man to put himself in the center of the universe and expect others to conform to his wants and needs and desires. Yet nature does not honor that erroneous assumption. The central role in life belongs to God. Instead of asking him to do our bidding, we should seek to bring ourselves into harmony with his will, and thus continue our progress as a living member."²²

One of the precious examples of order contained in the Book of Mormon is its description of nature, namely how celestial bodies follow the order established by the Creator. The abridger of the Nephite records, the prophet Mormon, addressed this astronomical order when describing the night wherein there was no darkness when the Savior was born: "And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that

night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given” (3 Nephi 1:19). The prophet Alma the Younger presented the order of heavenly bodies as evidence of God’s reality to the sign-seeking Korihor: “Even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44). Much can be learned from the planets that rotate around the sun in proper order. Modern revelation teaches that the earth will receive a celestial glory because it abides by the laws and order given to it by the Creator (see D&C 88:25–26). President James E. Faust taught that principles of order and obedience should govern the lives of men and women just as they govern celestial bodies:

Consider the earth itself. It was formed out of matter and in the beginning was empty, desolate, and dark. Then came order as God commanded that the light should be divided from the darkness. God’s command was obeyed, and the earth had its first day, followed by its first night. Then God ordered the creation of the atmosphere. He organized the sun, the moon, and the stars to shine in their appropriate times and seasons. After a series of commands and obedience to commands, the earth not only became habitable but beautiful. . . .

This earth on which we dwell is an individual planet occupying a unique place in space. But it is also part of our solar system, an orderly system with . . . planets, asteroids, comets, and other celestial bodies that orbit the sun. Just as the earth is a planet in its own right, so each of us is an individual in our own sphere of habitation. We are individuals, but we live in families and communities where order provides a system of harmony that hinges on obedience to principles. Just as order gave life and beauty to the earth when it was dark and void, so it does to us.³

Consider what the adverse effects on mankind would be if the earth were not obedient to the laws governing its motion. The Book of

Mormon peoples were examples of how order, or the lack thereof, has a profound effect on individuals and societies. The blessed state of the Nephites approximately twenty-five years after the birth of Christ is a stark contrast to the ugly, horrifying circumstances immediately preceding the Nephites' destruction. Mormon commented that many years earlier, after having gained a monumental victory over the Gadianton robbers and having returned to their own lands, the Nephites enjoyed great peace and prosperity because their lives were in order: "Thus they did establish peace in all the land. And they began again to prosper and to wax great; and the twenty and sixth and seventh years passed away, and there was great order in the land; and they had formed their laws according to equity and justice. And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression" (3 Nephi 6:3-5). Sadly, this same group of Nephites who enjoyed the blessings of an ordered life fell into pride and wickedness, and only the most righteous survived the destruction incident to the Lord's Crucifixion.

While chronicling the cyclical nature of the Nephite civilization from righteousness and order to wickedness and chaos and back again, Mormon was eyewitness to his people's nadir. Mormon lamented the Nephite descent into self-ruin to his son, Moroni:

O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. Behold, I am but a man, and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands.

And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good; and the suffering of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed everything; yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written.

And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and

their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites. (Moroni 9:18–20)

The destruction of the Nephites provides a chilling exclamation point to a precept that is repeated often throughout the record: order brings blessings of peace and prosperity, while disorder brings misery and despair. Elder L. Tom Perry taught that happiness and order are parallel precepts: “The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches hope and opportunity. To find the happiness we are seeking and rid ourselves of fear, we must be prepared to follow the system and order the Lord has established for His children here on earth.”⁴

To bring order to our lives, President Boyd K. Packer taught that it is important to understand the origins of the word. The word *order* means a row, a rank, a series, or a regular arrangement.⁵ In context of the gospel, we are in order if we are in harmony with, aligned with, and in the proper arrangement and relationship to God. The scriptural image of the strait and narrow path vividly depicts this principle (see 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18–19; Helaman 3:29). Certainly we cannot move very far along this strait and narrow path without coming in line with the end goal—a place in our Father’s kingdom. And considering the imagery of the iron rod in Lehi’s vision (see 1 Nephi 8), one can visualize travel along the strait and narrow path taking place in single-file lines, another example of order according to the word’s definition. President Packer also taught that there are other words related to *order*, both etymologically and theologically, that help in our efforts to put our lives in order: *ordinance* and *ordination*. A study of the related principles of *ordinance* and *ordination* in prophetic teachings and how they bring order can facilitate practical, personal application of those principles.

ORDINANCES

One of the clearest descriptions of the interrelatedness of *order*, *ordinance*, and *ordination* is found in Alma’s teachings to Zeezrom and others in the land of Ammonihah. Alma taught that men were foreordained in the premortal existence to be ordained in mortality according to their faithfulness and explained to these apostates how ordination to the priesthood made possible the saving ordinances and order (see

Alma 13). Throughout Alma's teachings in Alma 13, the word *order* is used fourteen times, forms of the word *ordain* are used seven times, and *ordinance* or *ordinances* appear three times.⁶ Alma's exposition on *order*—in concert with those of other prophets, both ancient and modern—underscores the profound nature of this precept.

An ordinance is a sacred rite through which an individual makes covenants with God. Etymologically, *ordinance* means to "put in order" or "regulate."⁷ The ordinances of the gospel help individuals maintain order in their lives in several ways. One way is found in the teachings of the prophet Abinadi. Abinadi explained to King Noah and his priests that the law of Moses alone could not provide salvation but that salvation only comes through the "redemption of God" (Mosiah 13:32). Abinadi taught that the ordinances of the law of Moses served a special purpose: "Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him" (Mosiah 13:30). While referring specifically to the law of Moses, Abinadi's teaching applies to all ordinances. Ordinances, and their attendant covenants, serve to remind us of our "duty to God" after having received them (see Alma 7:22).

The power of ordinances to remind—and, consequently, to order—is evident in the ordinance of the sacrament. President David O. McKay highlighted this principle as follows: "Order, reverence, attention to divine promises—the promise to enter into the fold of Christ, to cherish virtues mentioned in the gospel of Christ, to keep them ever in mind, to love the Lord wholeheartedly, and to labor, even at the sacrifice of self, for the brotherhood of man—these and all kindred virtues are associated with the partaking of the sacrament. It is good to meet together and especially to renew our covenants with God in that holy sacrament."⁸

Ultimately, faithfulness to ordinances helps those who have entered into such to remain close to God and worthy of His blessings. The Savior's quotation of Malachi to the Nephites gives emphasis to this principle. The Lord reminds His people that even though they have drifted from Him through unrighteous actions, He will draw close to them to the degree that they draw close to Him. "Even from the days

of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts” (3 Nephi 24:7). While some failed to see and understand the connection between being faithful to ordinances and the blessings of the Lord—“It is vain to serve God, and what doth it profit that we have kept his ordinances and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?” (3 Nephi 24:14)—the righteous recognized and remembered how maintaining order in their lives by keeping the ordinances brings the blessings of heaven and leads to exaltation: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (3 Nephi 24:16–18).

Those same promises and blessings are available to the Saints of this dispensation. Those who bring order to their lives by participating in and remaining faithful to the saving ordinances will one day return to the presence of the Father and receive a place in His kingdom. An additional result of spiritual orderliness will be peace in our Savior, a veritable “anchor to the souls of men” (Ether 12:4).

ORDINATION

Integral to the precepts of order and ordinances is the principle of ordination. In large measure, the Lord calls upon His people to assist in providing the blessings of order in individual lives, especially in relation to ordinances. God delegates His authority—the priesthood—to worthy male members of His Church and charges them with the responsibility of shepherding His children and performing the saving ordinances for them. There is no other way for ordinances—and the subsequent spiritual order—to take place without the authority of His priesthood. Elder Robert L. Simpson taught: “With all of the soberness of my soul, I declare that God’s house is a house of order. His holy purposes are not carried out by man’s whim or fancy but, rather, in this

church which bears his name, sacred ordinances can only be performed by proper authority.”⁹

The Book of Mormon plainly teaches the profound importance of priesthood ordination in God’s plan. According to Alma’s testimony to Zeezrom, those ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood are given the sacred responsibility to care for the sons and daughters of God and to help bring order to their lives. “Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end” (Alma 13:8). This same principle was taught in modern times by Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “The Melchizedek Priesthood is the highest and holiest order ever given to men on earth. It is the power and authority to do all that is necessary to save and exalt the children of men. It is the very priesthood held by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and by virtue of which he was able to gain eternal life in the kingdom of his Father.”¹⁰

The Book of Mormon outlines several examples of how those who are ordained bring order. First, as mentioned, ordination provides the power and authority to perform ordinances. For example, authority was given by the Savior and His prophets to baptize and administer the sacrament (see 3 Nephi 7:25; 18:5). Second, ordination to the priesthood can also include the opportunity to preside over God’s Church (see Mosiah 25:19; Alma 6:1). President Brigham Young taught that governing is one of the great purposes of the priesthood: “The Priesthood . . . is [the] perfect order and system of government, and this alone can deliver the human family from all the evils which now afflict its members, and insure them happiness and felicity hereafter.”¹¹

Those who preside are given keys to direct the work and ensure that ordinances are performed according to the proper order. President James E. Faust explained the function of priesthood keys in establishing order:

Priesthood is the greatest power on earth. Worlds were created by and through the priesthood. To safeguard this sacred power, all priesthood holders act under the direction of those

who hold the keys of the priesthood. These keys bring order into our lives and into the organization of the Church. For us, priesthood power is the power and authority delegated by God to act in His name for the salvation of His children. Caring for others is the very essence of priesthood responsibility. It is the power to bless, to heal, and to administer the saving ordinances of the gospel. Righteous priesthood authority is most needed within the walls of our own homes. It must be exercised in great love. This is true of all priesthood holders—deacon, teacher, priest, elder, high priest, patriarch, Seventy, and Apostle.¹²

Third, priesthood ordination gives to the ordained the responsibility and the authority to teach and preach to the members of God's Church. After having gathered those who believed in the words of Abinadi and baptized them, the prophet Alma put the Church of God in order. To accomplish that purpose, Alma, "having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Mosiah 18:18). Moroni's final instructions before concluding the Nephite record include details about the procedure and the purpose for ordaining priesthood holders to teach and preach: "In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest, (or, if he be a teacher) I ordain you to be a teacher, to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen. And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them" (Moroni 3:3-4).

We find safety in following the counsel of those ordained to preside and to preach, especially those sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators. A spiritually ordered life will be the result of obedience to their teachings. Elder L. Tom Perry explained, "Prophets through the ages have taught us to be obedient to the laws of the Lord, and these laws are the foundation of our existence here and will bring order out of chaos."¹³ The importance of following the counsel of the duly ordained was reiterated by Elder Henry B. Eyring: "There seems to be no end to

the Savior's desire to lead us to safety. And there is constancy in the way He shows us the path. He calls by more than one means so that it will reach those willing to accept it. And those means always include sending the message by the mouths of His prophets, whenever people have qualified to have the prophets of God among them. Those authorized servants are always charged with warning the people, telling them the way to safety."¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Jacob, one of the early Book of Mormon prophets, counseled his Nephite brethren to "reconcile [themselves] to the will of God" (2 Nephi 10:24). *Reconciliation* connotes a return to a previous position, an elimination of differences between two beings, literally "to sit again with" God.¹⁵ Reconciliation and order both have reference to an individual's position in relation to God. Jacob taught unmistakably that it is only in and through Jesus Christ that order and reconciliation are possible. He encouraged his people to "come unto the Lord, the Holy One. . . . Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate" (2 Nephi 9:41). Again, the imagery of the strait and narrow path is both beautiful and profound and adds to our understanding of order. We bring spiritual order to our lives by entering the narrow path (see 2 Nephi 31:16–21). We do so through sacred ordinances such as baptism and confirmation performed by one duly ordained. Order is increased as we continue along the path toward God by obedience, successive ordinances, and enduring well the vicissitudes of mortality. Conversely, deviations from the path result in a loss of order, or turmoil, confusion, and sorrow. Ultimately, the order that comes from being on the narrow path, or being in line or harmony with God, will result in a sweet reunion with—reconciliation with—the Father and the Son, who stand "with open arms to receive [us]!" (Mormon 6:17).

The precept of order in the Book of Mormon is one of the plain and precious truths contained therein. The Book of Mormon teaches that to successfully put our lives in order, we must do so through the proper application of gospel principles, through participation in and

faithfulness to the saving ordinances, and through the blessings of the priesthood bestowed by those who have been properly ordained. It is through these processes that we bring ourselves into harmony, in order or in line with, the will of our Heavenly Father through the Atonement of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Applying this beautiful precept will assist disciples to enjoy the blessings of peace and stability in this life and exaltation in the world to come.

NOTES

1. See Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: Larousse Kingfisher, Chambers, 1988), s.v. "order." Additionally, the words *precept* and *order* are etymologically related.
2. Howard W. Hunter, "Am I a 'Living' Member?" *Ensign*, May 1987, 17–18.
3. James E. Faust, "Obedience: The Path to Freedom," *Ensign*, May 1999, 45–46.
4. L. Tom Perry, "When Ye Are Prepared, Ye Shall Not Fear," *Ensign*, November 1981, 37.
5. See Boyd K. Packer, *Things of the Soul* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 186; see also Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 144–45; see also Barnhart, *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, s.v. "order," "ordinance," "ordain."
6. See Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 129–30.
7. Barnhart, *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, s.v. "ordinance."
8. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 147.
9. Robert L. Simpson, "The Most Vital Information," *Ensign*, November 1974, 46.
10. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Doctrine of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 1982, 33.
11. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 130.
12. James E. Faust, "Power of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 1997, 41.
13. L. Tom Perry, "Family Traditions," *Ensign*, May 1990, 20.
14. Henry B. Eyring, "Finding Safety in Counsel," *Ensign*, May 1997, 24.
15. Russell M. Nelson, "The Atonement," *Ensign*, November 1996, 34.