

The Coming Forth of Plain and Precious Truths

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The Book of Mormon's primary purpose is to be another witness of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ In this regard the book includes prophetic visions of Christ's birth and life in Jerusalem, the global calamity that accompanied His atoning sacrifice and crucifixion, and His ministry among the people of the Americas following His resurrection. Yet the Book of Mormon has another major purpose. The prophet Nephi records what an angel explained to him—that the coming forth of the book of Mormon in the latter days would restore “many plain and precious things” that were “taken away from the gospel of the Lamb . . . and also many covenants of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26, 28). Changes in doctrine by various sects and councils after the time of Christ and His Apostles, together with translations and retranslations of the Bible from the time of Christ to the present resulted in parts of the gospel being lost (see 1 Nephi 13:27). The angel further explains to Nephi that the lost covenants (doctrines and principles) cause many people to stumble and lose their way (see 1 Nephi 13:29). Without key doctrines, people fail

2 Elder Merrill J. Bateman

to understand the Lord's plan for His children on this earth, their spiritual heritage, the purpose of life, and their eternal potential.

With the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, these essential truths were again available and clear. Here we will examine the plain and precious truths restored with respect to the plan of salvation. These restored truths clarify one's understanding of life's purposes.

The Plan of Salvation

An important truth restored by the Book of Mormon is that the Father has a plan for His children—a plan that operated before we came to earth, a plan for this life, a plan that extends beyond the grave. The plan tells us how to live on this earth so that we will experience joy and happiness both here and hereafter. It discusses the environment in which we live and the actions we must take in order to achieve God's purposes for us. The plan, as outlined in the Book of Mormon, gives direction and order to our lives, and increases our understanding of life and the steps required to achieve the goal of eternal life.

The Bible, on the other hand, contains elements of the plan, but the elements are outlined less clearly. The plan's framework is missing, which results in confusion regarding the necessity of various elements, as will be discussed later.

The plan is known by a number of names in the Book of Mormon, but it is the same regardless of the name. It is called the "plan of salvation" (Alma 42:5), the "plan of mercy" (Alma 42:15), the "merciful plan of the great Creator" (2 Nephi 9:6), the "plan of our God" or the "great plan of the Eternal God" (2 Nephi 9:13; Alma 34:9), the "plan of redemption" (see Alma 12:25–33; 22:13), the "plan of restoration" (Alma 41:2), and the "plan of happiness" (Alma 42:16). A key part of the plan is called the doctrine of Christ or the gospel of Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:5–21; 3 Nephi 27:13–21). The plan is mentioned approximately thirty times in the Book of Mormon. The word "plan" as it relates to the plan of salvation does not appear in the King James Bible, and no phrase resembling "the plan of salvation" appears in any biblical translation.

The main elements of the plan include:

The Coming Forth of Plain and Precious Truths 3

- A **council in heaven** of premortal spirit beings who were given agency to choose whether or not they would come to earth as part of their progression (see 2 Nephi 2:17; Alma 13:3).
- The **creation of an earth** for God's children to experience mortality (see 1 Nephi 17:36; 2 Nephi 2:14; Mosiah 4:9; 3 Nephi 9:15).
- The **Fall of Adam and Eve** that opened the door for humankind to be born on earth, to grow spiritually through the use of agency, and to experience temptation and ultimately death. The Fall resulted in two types of death: physical and spiritual. Physical death occurs when the spirit and body separate at the end of our mortal lives. The spiritual death brought about by the Fall is a separation from God. When men and women enter mortality they separate from God and experience spiritual death. This is called the first spiritual death. A second spiritual death also may occur as a result of disobedience to one or more of God's laws (see 2 Nephi 2; Alma 12).
- The **Savior's Resurrection and Atonement**. The Book of Mormon teaches that the Atonement had to be infinite and eternal. Therefore, it had to be performed by an infinite and eternal being. The Lord's atoning sacrifice makes it possible to overcome all these deaths mentioned above (see Alma 34:10, 14; Mosiah 3; 3 Nephi 11; Helaman 14:17).
- The **doctrine of Christ**, which includes His teachings and the covenants and ordinances that link us to the Atonement. The doctrine of Christ is also known as the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- The **resurrection of the physical body** and its reuniting with the spirit. The resurrection makes possible exaltation and eternal life (see Mosiah 15:20–24; Alma 40:16–18).
- A final step in the plan is a **righteous judgment** and assignment to a kingdom, one of the Lord's many mansions (see John 14:2; Enos 1:27; Ether 12:32).

The Book of Mormon brings new insights and clarity to these key elements of the plan that the Bible lacks.

The Council in Heaven and Our Premortality

A plan of salvation was presented by our Heavenly Father to His children in a premortal council. The plan called for the creation of an earth where Heavenly Father's spirit children could obtain a physical body, experience the challenges of mortality, and be tested regarding their willingness to follow the plan. The Father's children would have agency to choose for themselves (see Alma 13:3). The plan provided for a Savior to open the way for all of God's children to return to His presence and be judged according to their faithfulness. Those who strive to follow the plan are blessed with the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Without destroying agency, the Lord through the Holy Ghost helps individuals live the commandments prescribed by the plan. The ultimate reward is to be lifted up to the Father to receive eternal life.

Premortal Existence of Jesus Christ

An important truth to come forth through the Book of Mormon is the premortal existence of Jesus Christ as a separate personage from the Father. The appearance of the Savior to the brother of Jared in Ether chapter 3 makes clear that Christ existed before His birth, that He was a person of spirit, and that He was Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament.

Although the Bible suggests that Christ was Jehovah, many people have a concept of the Trinity that does not allow for a clear understanding of who Jehovah was and is and the role He played during Old Testament times as the Son of the Father.

One biblical passage pertaining to the Savior indicating that He was Jehovah occurs in John 8:56. Christ, speaking to the Jews in the temple, says: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." The saying upset those listening and they then said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" Jesus said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:57–58). The Jews then took up stones to kill Christ because He stated that He was the Great I Am, the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Other biblical and Book of Mormon passages are plentiful, indicating that both Christ and we lived before life on earth.² In spite of these passages, many do not accept the notion that Christ

and the Father are separate personages and that we lived as spirits before coming to earth.

People Foreordained to Callings

Another of the doctrines mentioned in the Bible and the Book of Mormon regarding premortality is the foreordination of individuals to various earthly roles when they came to earth. The Bible is explicit in stating that Christ was foreordained to be the Savior of the world before He was born (see 1 Peter 1:18–20). The Bible suggests the foreordination of others as well (see Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 1:4), but the Book of Mormon is clearer on the matter. The prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon states clearly that spirits living in the antemortal world were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God” to serve in holy callings when they came to earth (Alma 13:3). Again, there is disagreement in the religious world concerning this truth.

The same Book of Mormon passage in Alma also indicates that men and women were free to choose in premortality—i.e., they were given agency to act according to their own wills. The fact that spirits have agency helps one understand the war that took place in heaven when Lucifer rebelled against the Father’s plan when it was presented in the Grand Council and Satan and the angels that followed him were cast out (see Revelation 12:7–11).

Nature of Spirits

Another clarifying doctrine of the Book of Mormon with respect to premortality is an explicit statement regarding the nature of a spirit person. Although the Bible alludes to the form and substance of a person of spirit (see Luke 24:36–39), it is not clearly addressed.

Knowing that we lived as spirits prior to earth life, we may wonder, what were we like? Adherents of many faiths confuse the spiritual force used by God to govern the earth with the spirit of a person. In many faith traditions, the word “spirit” is often defined in one of three ways—an incorporeal being, a fiery essence of breath, or a liquid substance that connects the brain and the body.³ In all three cases there is no material body or form. There are those within Christianity who believe that the resurrected Lord laid aside his physical body when he ascended to heaven and assumed an immaterial, noncorporeal existence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Consequently,

6 Elder Merrill J. Bateman

for them the spirit of man is also non-corporeal and immaterial. But what does it mean to be made in the image of God if God has no image?

The Book of Mormon clarifies misunderstandings on this matter. In Ether chapter 3, Jehovah appears to the brother of Jared on the mountain and uses his finger to give light to a set of stones. This event occurred thousands of years before Christ's birth. Upon seeing the Lord's finger, the brother of Jared exclaims, "I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood." The Lord then says to him, "Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this?" (Ether 3:8–9).

The brother of Jared says, "Nay; Lord, show thyself unto me" (Ether 3:10). The veil is then parted, and the brother of Jared sees the Lord in His fulness. The Savior then says, "Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. . . . This body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:14, 16).

In one short passage, the Book of Mormon makes clear that the spirit body has the same form as the physical body. It is made of substance, but substance so refined that the natural eye cannot see it (see D&C 131:7). Knowing the form of one's spirit gives meaning to Genesis 1:26–27, which states that men and women were created in the image of God. That is true both spiritually and physically.

The creeds of Christianity have exacted a heavy toll on the most important truths one can know. Who is God? What is He like? Who am I? What is my spirit like? What is my relationship with the Father and the Son? What does it mean to be the offspring of God, to be His son or daughter? The truths needed to answer these questions are provided in the Book of Mormon.

Why the Fall of Adam?

The Bible describes the events that constitute the Fall of Adam, but it does not explain why the Fall was necessary. In the Book of Mormon, Lehi explains to his son Jacob why the Fall was necessary for humankind to progress and how the Atonement was prepared before the foundation of the world to mitigate its effects (see 2 Nephi 2).

Lehi gives two reasons for the Fall. The first is that Adam and Eve would have had no children in the Garden of Eden, given their state of innocence. Partaking of the fruit resulted in a change in which Adam and Eve recognized their nakedness and their physical bodies became mortal subject to death. In Eden, “they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23). The Bible supports the notion of innocence and the impossibility of having children as it states that they did not recognize their nakedness until their eyes were opened after partaking of the forbidden fruit (see Genesis 3:7). The Bible indicates that Eve was deceived, but Adam partook of the fruit knowingly (see 1 Timothy 2:14). Why did Adam partake? He came to understand that in order to fulfill the greater commandment of multiplying and replenishing the earth, he needed to remain with Eve. Lehi explained that without the Fall of Adam, the rest of God’s children could not have come to earth (see 2 Nephi 2:25). Both Adam and Eve needed to partake of the fruit and enter into mortality in order to have children.

The second reason for the Fall was to provide an environment of opposites outside God’s presence where men and women could grow spiritually by exercising their agency. Lehi explains why there must be opposites in all things. “If not so,” Lehi says, “righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad.” Lehi further states that if opposites did not exist, “all things must needs be a compound in one.” This means there is “no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility” (2 Nephi 2:11). Without opposites there would be no purpose in God’s creation (see 2 Nephi 2:12–13). Spiritual growth occurs when one makes righteous choices. A person can only act for himself or herself if a choice exists (see 2 Nephi 2:16).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “The whole plan of salvation, including both immortality and eternal life for all the spirit hosts of heaven, hung on their [Adam and Eve’s] compliance with this command” to multiply and replenish the earth (see Genesis 1:28; Moses 2:28). This could only be accomplished if they partook of the fruit and fell. Elder McConkie continues, “[Adam] fell by breaking a lesser law—so that he too having transgressed, would become subject to sin and need a Redeemer and work out his

own salvation, as would be the case upon whom the effects of his fall would come.”⁴

The Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the greatest event in the history of humankind. The Atonement reconciles men and women with God by making faith, repentance, and baptism efficacious. Whereas the Fall allowed for the spirit hosts of heaven to come to earth, the Atonement makes possible their return to the Father’s presence. Through the Atonement, mortals become immortals, incorruptible—i.e., they rise from the grave and overcome physical and spiritual death through the Savior’s sacrifice and Resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:42–44).

The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus Christ experienced a literal bodily resurrection, and so will every other son and daughter of God (see Luke 24:36–39; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22). There are numerous biblical scriptures that indicate a resurrection of the physical body. Job bore testimony that “though . . . worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26). When Christ appeared to his disciples after His Resurrection, He made clear that His body was composed of “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). When the Savior appeared to the Nephites following His ascension, He invited them to come one by one “that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet” (3 Nephi 11:14). The prophet Zechariah indicates that when Christ returns for the Second Coming, people will see the wounds in His hands and feet (see Zechariah 13:6). In other words, He will come with a resurrected, physical body.

The Book of Mormon makes clear that it is flesh and bone that is resurrected and combined with the spirit that will stand before God to be judged (see 2 Nephi 2:8). Alma in speaking to his son, Corianton, indicated that there is a time between death and the resurrection in which the soul or spirit of man is taken home to God with the righteous received into a state of paradise and the wicked separated and assigned to a state of fearfulness (or spirit prison). Alma states that some have called the assignment to paradise the first resurrection. Alma then proceeds to clarify that this

is not a resurrection in the true meaning of the word. He states that the Resurrection is “the reuniting of the soul with the body” (Alma 40:11–18).

The Atonement also makes possible men and women overcoming the two spiritual deaths. The Book of Mormon is clear in explaining the first and second spiritual deaths. The Bible is not clear. It speaks of a second spiritual death (see Revelation 20:6), but does not mention the first or differentiate between the two. Fortunately, the Book of Mormon describes what is meant by the different spiritual deaths and their relationship to the Atonement.

Overcoming the Physical Death Associated with Adam’s Fall

The plan of salvation has a number of objectives that are accomplished through the Redeemer’s sacrifice. The first is overcoming the effects of the Fall. As a result of the Fall, men and women receive mortal bodies that decay and ultimately die. In order to achieve eternal life, a resurrection or reuniting of an immortalized physical body with the spirit is necessary. The Savior’s Atonement and Resurrection allow everyone to come forth from the grave in a newness of life. Everyone will be resurrected and overcome physical death. The Apostle John records, “all that are in the graves . . . shall come forth” (John 5:28–29), and the Apostle Paul confirms John’s statement when he says that “there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).

The First Spiritual Death

The Fall also caused a separation of Adam’s and Eve’s family from the presence of God. This is known as the first spiritual death. The prophet Samuel the Lamanite speaking of Christ’s death says, “Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual” (Helaman 14:16). The prophet Samuel’s statement makes clear that Christ’s Atonement and Resurrection not only overcome physical death for all mankind, but also overcome the spiritual death brought about by the Fall. To use the prophet Samuel’s words again, Christ’s death and Resurrection “redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death . . . and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord (Helaman 14:16–17).

10 Elder Merrill J. Bateman

As noted above, the Bible is not clear on the two spiritual deaths. It mentions the second spiritual death in the Book of Revelation and implies the first spiritual death in 1 Corinthians 15. John the Revelator speaking of the last days states, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). Although the Bible teaches that those who come forth in the first resurrection will not suffer the second spiritual death, it still leaves us asking, “What is it? What is the difference between the first and second deaths?”

The first spiritual death is implied in the Apostle Paul’s statement to the Corinthians when he links the consequences of Adam’s Fall to the effects of the Atonement. He said, “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21–22). This statement is a reference to Christ overcoming physical death for everyone plus overcoming the spiritual death brought about by Adam’s Fall—the first spiritual death. Adam’s children are not responsible for physical death or the first spiritual death. The Savior’s Atonement removes the burden of these two deaths.

Elder Tad R. Callister describes the power of the Atonement to overcome the first spiritual death in these words:

The scriptures teach that every person, saint or sinner, will return to the presence of God after the resurrection. It may be only a temporary reunion in his presence, but justice requires that all that was lost in Adam be restored in Jesus Christ. Every person will return to God’s presence, behold his face, and be judged for his own works. Then, those who have obeyed the gospel will be able to stay in his presence, while all others will have to be shut out of his presence a second time and will thus die what is called a second spiritual death.⁵

The Second Spiritual Death

Men and women are on earth with the expectation that they will learn how to make wise choices and grow spiritually. However, mistakes are made and sins are committed. The Apostle Paul told the Romans, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Nephi noted that “no unclean thing can dwell with God” (1 Nephi 10:21; 15:34). Alma taught

that men and women will suffer a “second death, which is a spiritual death” unless they become clean from their own sins (Alma 12:16).

The great plan of mercy called for the Savior to pay the price for sin, to take upon Himself the sins of all if they would exercise faith in Him and repent. The great prophet Isaiah stated that Christ would “[bear] our griefs and [carry] our sorrows,” that he would be “wounded for our transgressions, [and] bruised for our iniquities,” and that “with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4–5). Upon seeing the Savior, John the Baptist exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Overcoming the first spiritual death is a free gift. Triumph over the second is conditional. Lehi explained to his son Jacob that Christ “offered himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:7). The Apostle Paul explained to the Hebrews that Christ “became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). The prophet Nephi explained to his people, “we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). In order for people to overcome the second death, they have a part to play. A later section of this paper discusses the process by which one overcomes the second spiritual death through Christ’s Atonement.

The Infinite and Eternal Atonement

An important truth clarified by the Book of Mormon concerns the type of sacrifice that must be made and the nature of the person required to perform it. In Amulek’s sermon to the poor Zoramites, he describes the dimensions of the sacrifice required thus: “For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10). He then goes on to say, “And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14).

The Atonement must be infinite—that is, without end. Its effects must go on into the eternities. It covers all sin, all sorrow, all grief, all death. It must be timeless—that is, it must cover all those who lived before Christ came to earth as well as everyone thereafter. Alma, speaking to his son

12 Elder Merrill J. Bateman

Corianton, states that the souls who lived before Christ's earthly sojourn are as precious to the Lord as those who lived during and after His time (see Alma 39:16–19). Since man had agency in the antemortal world, the Atonement must reach back to a time before the foundations of this world were laid (see Alma 13:3). It also reaches forward into the spirit world where Christ directed the preaching of the gospel to the spirits in prison during the three days His body was in the tomb (see 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6). There would be no reason for the Savior to preach to the spirits in prison who lived on earth during the time of Noah if they could not repent and receive the blessings of the Atonement. The great and last sacrifice must encompass all of God's children, both before the time of Christ and after, both before the mortal life and after.

Infinite in Power

The Atonement must be infinite in power because of the coverage, reach and change required to qualify human beings for salvation. The Atonement covers every man, woman, and child who has lived, now lives, or will live on the earth. The Atonement brings forth all of God's creations from the grave. The apostle Paul taught that the Savior's sacrifice covers the resurrection of animals, beasts, fish, and birds (see 1 Corinthians 15:37–44; D&C 29:23–25).⁶ Modern-day revelation teaches that God's creations cannot be numbered: "And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works" (Moses 1:37–38). Moreover, the inhabitants of those other worlds are "begotten sons and daughters unto God," i.e., the Atonement covers them as well (D&C 76:23–24). A poetic version of section 76 states the infinite reach and power of the Atonement:

And I heard a great voice, bearing record from heav'n,
"He's the Savior, and only begotten of God—
By him, of him, and through him, the worlds were all made,
Even all that careen in the heavens so broad.

"Whose inhabitants too, from the first to the last,
Are sav'd by the very same Saviour of ours;
And, of course, are begotten God's daughters and sons,
By the very same truths and the very same pow'rs."⁷

No wonder Amulek stated that the Atonement had to be infinite.

Infinite in Love

There are numerous Book of Mormon passages that speak of the Father's and the Son's love. One of the most poetic, symbolic stories occurs in Nephi's and Lehi's dreams of the tree of life. In Nephi's dream, an angel shows Nephi a tree whose beauty is beyond description, whose "whiteness . . . did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow" (1 Nephi 11:8). Nephi wants to know the meaning of the tree. He is shown a man descending out of the heavens and is told to bear record that the person is the Son of God (see 1 Nephi 11:7). He is then shown a virgin in the city of Nazareth with a baby in her arms. The angel explains to Nephi that this baby is "the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father" (1 Nephi 11:21). Eventually, Nephi is shown the crucifixion. Nephi explains, "I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I . . . saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:32–33). Helping Nephi to interpret the images he has seen, the angel asks: "Knowest thou the meaning of the tree?" Nephi's response: "Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things" (1 Nephi 11:22). The tree is a symbol of God's love, and the greatest manifestation of that love is that He sent His Only Begotten Son, to suffer, die, and atone for the sins of all humankind (see 1 Nephi 11:13–33; John 3:16).

Lehi, in his dream, partakes of the tree's fruit and discovers its sweetness and wants his family to partake. The fruit represents the gifts of the Atonement—forgiveness, mercy, patience, kindness, love, hope, faith, temperance, immortality, glory, and eternal life (see 2 Peter 1:3–8). When one understands the depth and breadth of the Atonement, one comes to understand the infinite love and power that constitute its foundation.

A Witness of God's Eternal Power

Notice that Amulek also indicated that the Atonement had to be eternal in nature, meaning not only that it is without end, but that it is godlike power. Not only is the physical body raised from the grave, but the flesh is changed from a corruptible to an incorruptible state, from a natural to a spiritual body, never to die again (see 1 Corinthians 15:42; Romans 6:9).

In this same context, one should note that a "spiritual" body is not a "spirit" body. Christ made that clear when He explained to His disciples

14 Elder Merrill J. Bateman

following His resurrection that “the spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). Amulek, in the Book of Mormon, teaches what a “spiritual” body is. He said, “The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame” (Alma 11:43; see also v. 44). Thus, the “spiritual” body mentioned by Paul is a resurrected body of flesh and bones that has been immortalized and perfected. The power to change the body from a corruptible state to an immortal state is “eternal,” or godly in nature.

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Atonement has the power to not only change the physical body but also to change the nature of man’s spirit. King Benjamin taught that “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19). The Atonement, combined with the influence of the Holy Spirit, has the power to change man’s character and behavior from its earthly nature to a saintly or Godlike nature.

Third Nephi records that the Savior also received power through the Atonement to draw all men to Him that they may be lifted up to the Father to be judged (see 3 Nephi 27:14).

As one comes to understand the Savior’s sacrifice, its effects and its coverage, one realizes that the Atonement must be infinite and eternal in its power to save and exalt humankind. It has power to overcome the consequences of Adam’s sin, it has the power to save men from their own sins, it has the power to change the nature of one’s character as well as the physical body, and it has power to sanctify men and women that they may be lifted up to the Father. No wonder it took the power of a God, the Son of God, to accomplish it.

The Great and Last Sacrifice Must Be the Son of God

Only a God has the power and endurance to perform the Atonement (see D&C 19:18). King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon describes the Savior’s suffering in these words: “And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (Mosiah

3:7). The Book of Mormon confirms the historicity of these events and clarifies that He actually sweat blood and suffered for our sins. Therefore, the Book of Mormon restores vital truths that the Atonement began in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As noted above, Christ achieved Godhood before coming to earth. He was Jehovah, the Almighty God of the Old Testament. His creations included the heavens and the earth. He was foreordained to be the Savior. His powers and Godhood continued into mortality through His birth. His mother was mortal. His Father was immortal. He was the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father (see 1 Nephi 11:21). That is why He stated near the end of His life, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17–18). Speaking of Christ, the prophet Abinadi in the Book of Mormon, sums up His power with the following: “He is the light and life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death” (Mosiah 16:9). Because he was an eternal being who lived without sin in mortality, he did not have to die. He chose to die, and therefore had the power to rise from the tomb.

The Intimate Atonement

The Book of Mormon teaches not only that the Atonement was infinite, but also intimate. Christ experienced the pain, suffering, grief, and death of every person. One of the great passages in the Book of Mormon is Alma’s teachings to the people in Gideon in Alma chapter 7. His sayings concerning Christ not only teach the elements of the Atonement, but also describe the intimate nature of it. Alma teaches that Christ “shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

The Son of God performed the Atonement in the flesh in order to know fully how to succor His brothers and sisters in their extremities. He descended below all things that He might comprehend all things (see D&C 88:6). In the garden and on the cross, Christ experienced the deepest feelings of each human being. He felt our pains and sufferings, our sicknesses and griefs. His sojourn in mortality and his atoning experience gave him unique insights regarding our challenges, sorrows, and weaknesses. Those insights make it possible for him to come to our aid and help us through our trials and afflictions. It was not a collective mass of sin that He experienced, but the sins, wounds, and sufferings of an infinite stream of individuals. As Alma said, He knows according to the flesh how to succor each soul.

The Doctrine of Christ

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news, the good tidings or glad tidings that Christ restored during His ministry on earth. What are those good tidings? Here is one definition of the gospel accepted by many using the Bible: “That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Christ Himself adds to that definition in the Book of Mormon. He defines the gospel, or doctrine of Christ, as the Atonement, Resurrection, and Judgment, and then expands the definition to include the responsibilities that men and women have in the salvation process. In 3 Nephi chapter 27, Christ outlines the gospel for the righteous Nephites. His definition begins with the role He plays in the good news:

Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross, and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (3 Nephi 27:13–14)

After explaining His role, Jesus outlines the principles of the gospel that men and women must live in order to be full beneficiaries of His Atonement (see 3 Nephi 27:16–21). The Savior states the following:

1. We must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. We must repent of our sins.
3. We must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
4. We must receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and be sanctified by it.
5. We must endure to the end.

Each step leads naturally to the next. For example, Mormon teaches, “The first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments . . . and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:25–26; see also 2 Nephi 31:5–20). Let me highlight just a few of the contributions of the Book of Mormon with respect to the doctrine of Christ.

Developing Faith in Christ

The Bible teaches the importance and necessity of faith in Christ but does not explain the process by which one obtains and builds faith. One reads in the Bible about events that establish faith in individuals. An example is the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). But for most people, and even for Paul, developing faith in Christ is a process that takes place over one’s lifetime.

The Book of Mormon explains the manner in which people can build faith in Christ. Alma’s discourse to the Zoramites on how faith develops is profound and unique. The path Alma outlined begins with a “desire to believe.” The person must then act on that desire by conducting an experiment. The experiment is to plant a seed in one’s heart. What is the seed? It is the “word of God.” What is the word of God? It is the holy scriptures; it is the words of the prophets. Ultimately, “the word” is Christ. One must give place for Christ in one’s heart. One must be willing to follow the Master. Alma then makes a promise. If we diligently strive to apply “the word” in our lives, the Holy Spirit will cause feelings to come into our souls. The seed will sprout and grow, and we will come to know that the seed is good and the gospel is true.

Alma then asks, “Because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth . . . is your knowledge perfect?” (Alma

32:33–34). The answer is no, you have just begun. The seed is now a small seedling that requires further nourishment and care. It must continue to take root, grow, and mature before the tree yields fruit. As the tree continues to grow, our belief, faith, and hope in the Savior deepen because we feel the swelling motions that come through the Holy Ghost. Our commitment to action expands from wanting to know for ourselves to wanting to serve and help others. Service and consecration become part of one's life. As we serve others, the Holy Spirit provides additional witnesses that the seed is good and that forgiveness can be obtained. If with diligence, patience, and faith we continue to nourish the tree, it becomes fully rooted inside our souls and we can pluck the fruit thereof. A person filled by the fruit will "hunger not, neither . . . thirst" (Alma 32:42; see also vv. 41, 43). The fruits are the blessings of the Atonement—forgiveness, sanctification, and eternal life.

Baptism

First, as Mormon noted, faith leads to baptism. Amongst Christian denominations there is disagreement about how baptism is to be performed and whether it is necessary, but the necessity and mode of baptism are clearly outlined in the Book of Mormon. Jesus was emphatic with respect to the necessity of baptism. He told Nicodemus, who came by night inquiring what he needed to do to be saved, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Second, after the Savior defined the gospel in 3 Nephi, He expounded on the necessity of baptism by saying:

And no unclean thing can enter into his [the Father's] kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

Verily, Verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel. (3 Nephi 27:19–21)

Third, the Lord also gave the Nephites the mode of baptism. Shortly after His appearance, He called Nephi and gave him power to baptize and then instructed him to go down into the water with the person to be baptized. After saying a baptismal prayer, the person was to be immersed in the water (see 3 Nephi 11:23–26).

Fourth, the Book of Mormon is specific with regard to the baptism of little children. This is a significant doctrinal contribution of the Book of Mormon; while Christians for centuries have worried over the souls of deceased but unbaptized children, the Book of Mormon teaches that “little children need no repentance, neither baptism.” The Lord revealed to the prophet, Mormon, that Christ “came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me. . . . Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:8, 10).

The Gift of the Holy Ghost

The Book of Mormon also makes clear that every person is entitled to the gift of the Holy Ghost if they follow the path of faith, repentance, and baptism (see 2 Nephi 31:12). On the day of Pentecost, Peter promised the multitude the gift of the Holy Ghost if they would “repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38). The Book of Mormon is more explicit in stating that the gift of the Holy Ghost is given by the laying on of hands by those who have authority given to them by Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 18:36–37; Moroni 2:2).

The Power of the Book of Mormon

Let me conclude with a story about the power of the Book of Mormon. The plain and precious truths found in Alma’s sermon in Alma 32 impacted a young soldier in Afghanistan. As a teenager from an active LDS family, he determined to leave the Church even though his faithful parents had given him “every opportunity to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁸ In order to escape his parents’ disapproval, he joined the military where he became a medic. In the ensuing years, he worked hard and played hard. Eventually he married, and the couple was blessed with children.

A time came when his unit was sent to Afghanistan. Although he adapted well in the beginning to the extraordinary demands, eventually “exposure to death and the destruction of war began to take its toll,” he said. “While I continued to perform my duties as required, fear ruled my thoughts. I feared death and the justice of God, and I questioned whether I would see my wife and children again. The sins that I had so flippantly committed were now unbearable, but I had nowhere to turn for relief.”⁹

A close brush with death and spiritual promptings caused him to begin reading a copy of the Book of Mormon that his mother had given him. Over time he realized that the fear of death had diminished, but he still vowed not to return to the Church. One day he read Alma’s discourse on faith and it changed his life. The passage begins, “Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. 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” (Alma 32:26–27).

Although he had almost no faith or hope, he did have a “desire to believe” that his sins could be forgiven through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. He continued studying the Book of Mormon in Afghanistan and continued when he returned home. He said that it took many months after he returned home to gain a testimony of the gospel and follow the steps necessary to receive forgiveness, but he committed himself to Alma’s pattern, and peace and forgiveness came.¹⁰ This story is an example of the clear and powerful truths that have come forth through the Book of Mormon and the effect they can have on the lives of individual seekers of truth.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon came forth as not only another witness for the Lord Jesus Christ but also a restoration of plain and precious truths necessary for a full understanding of the Lord’s plan, including the premortality and foreordination of Jesus Christ, the preexistence of God’s spirit children, the infinite and eternal nature of Christ’s Atonement, and the principles of the gospel we must live in order to fully access that Atonement. There

are other plain and precious truths restored by the book that have not been considered. Their exegesis is left to others. The Book of Mormon is like a box of jewels—plain and precious truths for the fulness of times. Those truths, omitted from or not clearly explained in the Bible, have been restored in the last days to teach us where we came from and how to live.

Notes

1. The title page of the Book of Mormon.
2. Bible scriptures indicating a premortal existence for Christ and His role as Jehovah include John 1:1, 3:13, 6:62, 8:58, 16:28, and 17:5. Book of Mormon passages that indicate that Christ lived in an antemortal world and was Jehovah include 1 Nephi 21:26; Mosiah 3:5; 3 Nephi 1:13; 26:5; Ether 3:16; and Moroni 10:34. Biblical references regarding the premortality of men and women include Numbers 16:27; Job 38:7; Jeremiah 1:5; John 9:2; Acts 17:28; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:9; Jude 1:6; and Revelation 12:7. Key Book of Mormon passages regarding man's premortality are Alma 13:3 and Helaman 14:17.
3. Michael Maher and Joseph Bolland, "Spirit," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles George Herbermann and others (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 14:220.
4. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 220–21.
5. Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 46.
6. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 578.
7. "The Answer," *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1843, 82–83.
8. Eric Carter, "Book of Mormon in the Battlefield," *Ensign*, January 2015, 28–29.
9. Carter, "Book of Mormon," 28.
10. Carter, "Book of Mormon," 29.