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The Great Plan of Salvation

“The great plan of salvation is a theme which ought to occupy our strict attention, and be regarded as one of heaven’s best gifts to mankind.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In September 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his family moved 30 miles southeast of Kirtland to Hiram, Ohio, where they lived for about a year in the home of John and Alice (also known as Elsa) Johnson. In this home, the Prophet did much of his work on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

This important work, which the Prophet called a “branch of my calling,”¹ contributes significantly to our understanding of the plan of salvation. The Prophet began this work in June 1830 when the Lord commanded him to begin making an inspired revision of the King James Version of the Bible. The Prophet had long known that the Bible was not always clear on some important matters. He had noted that Moroni quoted some biblical passages to him “with a little variation from the way [they read] in our Bibles” (Joseph Smith—History 1:36). While translating 1 Nephi 13:23–29, he learned that many “parts which are plain and most precious” had been taken out of the Bible, including “many covenants of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26).

The Prophet later said: “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors. . . . Look at [Hebrews 6:1] for contradictions—‘Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.’ If a man leaves the principles of the doctrine of Christ, how can he be saved in the principles? This is a contradiction. I don’t believe it. I will render it as it

should be—“Therefore *not* leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.’”²

As guided by the Spirit, Joseph spent about three years going through the Bible, making thousands of corrections to the text and restoring information that had been lost. This restored information sheds marvelous light on many doctrines that are not clearly presented in the Bible as it exists today. These inspired revisions to the text of the Bible are known as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Hundreds of passages from the Joseph Smith Translation are now included in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible.

The Prophet’s translation of the Bible was an important part of his own spiritual education and the unfolding restoration of gospel truth. As he revised the Old and New Testaments, he often received revelations clarifying or expanding upon biblical passages. In this way, the Prophet received many doctrines from the Lord, including those now found in Doctrine and Covenants 74, 76, 77, 86, and 91, and in portions of many other sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.

When the Prophet first began his translation of the Bible in June 1830, the Lord revealed to him a lengthy passage from the writings of Moses. This passage became chapter 1 of the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. It records a vision in which Moses saw and conversed with God—a vision so remarkable that Joseph Smith called it “a precious morsel” and “a supply of strength.”³ In this vision, God taught Moses the fundamental purpose of the great plan of salvation:

“And the Lord God spake unto Moses, saying: . . . For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:37, 39).

The doctrines, ordinances, and promises that constitute the plan of salvation were revealed to the earth in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. As one who clearly understood the importance of this plan, the Prophet declared: “The great plan of salvation is a theme which ought to occupy our strict attention, and be regarded as one of heaven’s best gifts to mankind.”⁴

Teachings of Joseph Smith

In the premortal world, Jesus Christ was chosen to be the Savior, and we chose to accept the plan of salvation.

“At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it.”⁵

“The Lord [is] a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek, and the anointed Son of God, from before the foundation of the world [see Psalm 110:4].”⁶

“The salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men, in order to triumph over the devil. . . . All will suffer until they obey Christ himself.

“The contention in heaven was—Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and the devil said he would save them all, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads for him.”⁷

We are eternal beings; we can advance toward exaltation as we obey the laws of God.

The Prophet Joseph Smith received the following revelation from the Lord in May 1833, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 93:29: “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” In April 1844, the Prophet taught: “I have another subject to dwell upon, which is calculated to exalt man. . . . It is associated with the subject of the resurrection of the dead,—namely, the soul—the mind of man—the immortal spirit. Where did it come from? All learned men and doctors of divinity say that God created it in the beginning; but it is not so: the very idea lessens man in my estimation. I do not believe the doctrine; I know better. Hear it, all ye ends of the world; for God has told me so; and if you don’t believe me, it will not make the truth without effect. . . .

“I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is it logical to say that the intelligence of spirits is immortal, and yet that it has a beginning? The intelligence of spirits had no beginning, neither will it have an end. That is good logic. That which has a beginning may have an end. There never was a time when there were not spirits. . . .

“. . . I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man—the immortal part, because it had no beginning. Suppose you cut it in two; then it has a beginning and an end; but join it again, and it continues one eternal round. So with the spirit of man. As the Lord liveth, if it had a beginning, it will have an end. All the fools and learned and wise men from the beginning of creation, who say that the spirit of man had a beginning, prove that it must have an end; and if that doctrine is true, then the doctrine of annihilation would be true. But if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house-tops that God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself.

“Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age and there is no creation about it. All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.

“The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits.”⁸

“We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoy-

ments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin; and like the ancients, arrives at that point of faith where he is wrapped in the power and glory of his Maker, and is caught up to dwell with Him. But we consider that this is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment.”⁹

**We came to earth to obtain a body, to gain knowledge,
and to overcome through faith.**

“All men know that they must die. And it is important that we should understand the reasons and causes of our exposure to the vicissitudes of life and of death, and the designs and purposes of God in our coming into the world, our sufferings here, and our departure hence. What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling away, to be here no more? It is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any other. We ought to study it day and night, for the world is ignorant in reference to their true condition and relation [to God].”¹⁰

“The design of God before the foundation of the world was that we should take tabernacles [bodies], that through faithfulness we should overcome and thereby obtain a resurrection from the dead, in this wise obtaining glory, honor, power, and dominion.”¹¹

“We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none. All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not.”¹²

“Salvation is for a man to be saved from all his enemies; for until a man can triumph over death, he is not saved. . . .

“The spirits in the eternal world are like the spirits in this world. When those have come into this world and received tabernacles, then died and again have risen and received glorified



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bodies, they will have an ascendancy over the spirits who have received no bodies, or kept not their first estate, like the devil. The punishment of the devil was that he should not have a habitation like men.”¹³

“The principle of knowledge is the principle of salvation. This principle can be comprehended by the faithful and diligent; and every one that does not obtain knowledge sufficient to be saved will be condemned. The principle of salvation is given us through the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

“Salvation is nothing more nor less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet. And when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world, and a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come, then we are saved, as in the case of Jesus, who was to reign until He had put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy was death [see 1 Corinthians 15:25–26].

“Perhaps there are principles here that few men have thought of. No person can have this salvation except through a tabernacle.

“Now, in this world, mankind are naturally selfish, ambitious and striving to excel one above another; yet some are willing to build up others as well as themselves. So in the other world there are a variety of spirits. Some seek to excel. And this was the case with Lucifer when he fell. He sought for things which were unlawful. Hence he was sent down, and it is said he drew many away with him; and the greatness of his punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle. This is his punishment.”¹⁴

**God has given us moral agency and the power
to choose good over evil.**

“If men would acquire salvation, they have got to be subject, before they leave this world, to certain rules and principles, which were fixed by an unalterable decree before the world was. . . . The organization of the spiritual and heavenly worlds, and of spiritual and heavenly beings, was agreeable to the most perfect order and harmony: their limits and bounds were fixed irrevocably, and voluntarily subscribed to in their heavenly estate by themselves, and were by our first parents subscribed to upon the earth. Hence the importance of embracing and subscribing to principles of eternal truth by all men upon the earth that expect eternal life.”¹⁵

“All persons are entitled to their agency, for God has so ordained it. He has constituted mankind moral agents, and given them power to choose good or evil; to seek after that which is good, by pursuing the pathway of holiness in this life, which brings peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Ghost here, and a fulness of joy and happiness at His right hand hereafter; or to pursue an evil course, going on in sin and rebellion against God, thereby bringing condemnation to their souls in this world, and an eternal loss in the world to come.”¹⁶

“Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. Our organization is such that we can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents.”¹⁷

“The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”¹⁸

On May 16, 1841, the Prophet addressed the Saints: “President Joseph Smith . . . observed that Satan was generally blamed for the evils which we did, but if he was the cause of all our wickedness, men could not be condemned. The devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary. Those who resisted the Spirit of God, would be liable to be led into temptation, and then the association of heaven would be withdrawn from those who refused to be made partakers of such great glory. God would not exert any compulsory means, and the devil could not; and such ideas as were entertained [on these subjects] by many were absurd.”¹⁹

Eliza R. Snow recorded: “[Joseph Smith] said he did not care how fast we run in the path of virtue. Resist evil, and there is no danger; God, men, and angels will not condemn those that resist everything that is evil, and devils cannot; as well might the devil seek to dethrone Jehovah, as overthrow an innocent soul that resists everything which is evil.”²⁰

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- What are some specific truths about the plan of salvation and the purpose of life that we know because of revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith? How have these truths helped you?
- Joseph Smith taught that the plan of salvation is “a subject we ought to study more than any other” (page 211) and “a theme which ought to occupy our strict attention” (page 208). In what ways can we study the plan of salvation? As we go about our daily activities, what can we do to give the plan of salvation our strict attention? What are some ways we can teach the plan of salvation to others?
- Review Joseph Smith’s teachings about the Council in Heaven and about our eternal nature (pages 209–11). How might

knowing of these doctrines be a blessing to you in your life on earth?

- The Prophet Joseph testified, “All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement” (page 210). What do you think this means? How might this truth influence the way you face challenges? the way you feel about your own worth and capabilities? the way you treat other people?
- Read the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 210. Ponder the blessings we receive as we give “heed and diligence . . . to the light communicated from heaven.”
- Review Joseph Smith’s teachings about the significance of having a physical body (pages 211–13). How might this knowledge affect the way we care for our bodies?
- Read the last paragraph on page 213 and the first paragraph on page 214. Think about what these teachings mean to you as you exercise your agency. What are some specific things we can do to resist Satan’s influence?

Related Scriptures: 2 Nephi 2:25; 9:6–12; Alma 34:31–33; D&C 76:25–32; 101:78; Abraham 3:22–25

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 1:238; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 175, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *History of the Church*, 6:57–58; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 15, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
3. *History of the Church*, 1:98; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, miscellaneous papers, Church Archives.
4. *History of the Church*, 2:23; from “The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Apr. 1834, p. 152.
5. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” p. 7, Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives.
6. “Baptism,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 1, 1842, p. 905; spelling and capitalization modernized; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
7. *History of the Church*, 6:314; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.

8. *History of the Church*, 6:310–12; capitalization modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
9. *History of the Church*, 2:8; from “The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Feb. 1834, p. 135.
10. *History of the Church*, 6:50; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 15, 1843, p. 331; this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published late.
11. Quoted by Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 21, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Notebook, Church Archives.
12. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” pp. 7–8, Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives.
13. *History of the Church*, 5:403; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 21, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:387–88; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 14, 1843, in Yelrome, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
15. *History of the Church*, 6:50–51; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 15, 1843, p. 331; this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published late; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
16. *History of the Church*, 4:45, footnote; from a letter from the First Presidency and high council to the Saints living west of Kirtland, Ohio, Dec. 8, 1839, Commerce, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Dec. 1839, p. 29.
17. Quoted by William P. McIntire, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith in early 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois; William Patterson McIntire, Notebook 1840–45, Church Archives.
18. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” p. 8, Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives.
19. *History of the Church*, 4:358; bracketed words in original; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 16, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by *Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1841, p. 429.
20. *History of the Church*, 4:605; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.