

DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT delivered
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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

SOMETIMES I am in the habit of taking a text, but at present there is no passage of Scripture which presents itself to my mind; I, therefore, commence speaking and, through your faith and prayers before the Lord, I trust that something may be given to me that will edify, and benefit the congregation. The subjects pertaining to the kingdom of God are so numerous that, sometimes, the great difficulty in the mind of a servant of God who attempts to address the people is to know the mind and will of the Spirit in regard to what shall be said. If I know my own heart, I have no desire to speak my own words or to impart unto you my own natural wisdom; but it is the earnest desire of my heart that I may impart instruction according to the mind and the will of the living God. This I can not do unless God shall grant unto me the inspiration of his Spirit at the very moment, and this will depend in a great measure upon the hearers as well as upon the speaker. If the people have faith in God, and pray unto him, exercising that faith, he may give them something that will be instructive to their minds; but if they have not faith the Lord may not see proper thus to impart.

We are permitted, Latter-day Saints, to live in a very peculiar age of the world. It is called by us, the dispensation of the fulness of times. Many dispensations have been revealed to the inhabitants of the earth in past ages, and God has given, from time to time, since the creation, much instruction to the people. What I mean by a dispensation, is power, authority and revelation given from Heaven to direct and counsel men here on the earth. This has been given at different ages of the world, and the instruction which God has given has been in accordance with the circumstances of the people, the revelations and instructions which he has given being different at one period from those given at another. When I say different, do not misunderstand me. Many of the revelations of God are unchangeable in their nature, and are adapted to all dispensations; but many commandments have been given that were adapted only to the dispensations in which they were revealed. I will name some of these.

For instance, when some sixteen hundred or two thousand years had passed away from the creation, the world had become very much corrupted in the sight of God, so much so that what little history we have on the subject informs us that all flesh had corrupted its way upon the face of the earth. God gave a new commandment in that period, differing entirely from all former commandments. It was not adapted to any dispensation that had preceded it, neither would it be suitable for any future dispensation: it was intended for that particular period only. The Lord commanded his servant Noah to build an ark, according to certain rules and dimensions that he gave unto him, for, said the Lord, "I intend to destroy all flesh with a flood, except those who shall gather together into the ark which you shall build."

This was a new commandment. If there had been any sectarian preachers who then lived, and perhaps there were, for preachers who have not been sent of God seem to have been numerous in all dispensations—they would perhaps have reasoned with Noah in relation to this new revelation and commandment, and said to him, "What is the use now, of getting new revelation from God? You will not dispute, Noah, but what Enoch was saved and translated to heaven. He had enough revelation to save him, and can not we be saved in the same manner that he was, without having any new revelation communicated to us?" I mention this, because such arguments are used at the present day in reference to the new revelations which the Latter-day Saints carry forth to the world. The people say, "You believe in the Book of Mormon as a new revelation, and that God has given new commandments. Have we not enough? Were not the people who lived in the days of Enoch, Abraham, Moses and the prophets, in the days of Jesus and the apostles, saved? and if they had enough to save them, if we follow the instructions which they received, what is the use of obtaining another book, called the Book of Mormon, or new commandments and revelations?" This has been brought forth as an argument ever since my youth to my certain knowledge, in all countries where I have traveled and attempted to communicate to the world our ideas about new revelation. The same arguments might have been used in the days of the flood—"Enough has been given; Enoch has been saved and translated, and if we follow the revelations given to him, why may we not be saved without having anything new?" But Noah would have answered, and very properly too, "God designs to accomplish something now that he did not accomplish in the days of Enoch, nor in the days of Abel and Seth, nor in the days of any of those ancient worthies—he intends to bring destruction on all flesh that will not repent, by overwhelming this world of ours in a flood of water. He intends to pour out his indignation and just wrath upon those who cor-

rupt themselves in his sight; and he has provided a particular way of escape therefrom, by which you may, if you will, be saved from this judgment, and that way has to be made known by new revelation. We will pass on, however.

Soon after the days of Noah, we find that certain men lived upon the earth, whose names are recorded in this sacred history (the Bible), who were called to be the chosen servants of God, and whom the Lord blessed in a peculiar manner. I refer now to the patriarchs, and more especially to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—three very worthy men, so worthy that the Lord chose them as representatives of the faithful in all future ages, and declared that all who should be saved in future ages should become their seed, either springing directly from their loins, or being adopted, through the gospel, into the family of Abraham, who was to be called the father of the faithful: that is the father not only of the faithful who lived from his day until the coming of Christ, but of all who should live after Christ who followed in the footsteps of this ancient patriarch and embraced the same gospel that he taught, and they should have a claim on the promises that were made to him.

Now, did the patriarch Abraham receive anything new from God, or was there enough already given? Perhaps many may cry, "Enough to save Noah, Enoch, Abel, and all persons who would walk before the Lord according to ancient revelation, without anything new." But there was not enough adapted to the circumstances by which Abraham was surrounded. Why? Because the Lord designed to call Abraham out from his father's house, from his friends and country, and to lead him into a strange land. Abraham might have searched all former records and revelations, but here was a duty he never could have learned therefrom—"Depart from thy father's house!" It could not be found written in former revelations, hence the circumstances required new revelation, and God gave it by commanding this great man—the father of the faithful—to leave the land of Chaldea and to go forth into a country where he never had been. Abraham was obedient, he went forth and traveled to the country that we call Palestine—a small territory east of the Mediterranean Sea. And having arrived in that land, he might have searched all former revelations in vain to have learned what his duty was then, for there were certain duties required of him then in regard to which the revelation given to him in his native land did not enlighten him. One of these duties was to go forth upon a certain eminence or mountain in Canaan. He did as he was taught. It was a peculiar commandment. I have never been commanded to do so, neither has any other person in this congregation; neither was any person who lived before Abraham; but he, and he alone needed new revelation to find out that he was to go to the top of a certain mountain. When he got there another new revelation was given to him, commanding him to look to the east, then to the west; and then to cast his eyes to the north, and to the south, and then, behold, a great promise was made to him by new revelation, namely, "All the land which thou seest shall be given to thee and thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession." No such promise could be found in any former revelation: this promise was adapted to that peculiar individual, and to the circumstances in which he was placed.

We would imagine that Isaac, having his father's revelations right before his eyes, and knowing all about them, would say in his heart, "I need not trouble myself about inquiring from God and receiving anything new from the heavens. My father was a good man; he was saved, and I shall content myself by giving heed to the old revelations." But Isaac did not reason in this way; and the Lord had some new revelations to communicate to the son of Abraham, and one of them was to confirm the promise that had been made to his father. One might naturally suppose that the revelation made to his father was broad enough and covered the case without being confirmed, for it declared that the land promised to Abraham should be given to him and to his seed after him, and we might suppose that that included Isaac, and that there was no need of a new revelation to him on the subject; but if it did include him, Isaac was not fully satisfied, he would not place his dependence on something that had been said to some other man, but wanted to know for himself whether God intended him to possess that land, and there was no way for him to obtain this knowledge except by direct communication with the heavens. He obtained it, God renewing the promise to him that he had made to his father Abraham.

By and by comes along the grandson of Abraham—Jacob, who, not satisfied with the promises made to his grandfather and his father—Abraham and Isaac, and not considering himself safe to depend on promises made to somebody else, came before the Lord and pleaded with him, and the angels of God came and visited this lad, and he saw a ladder reaching from the ground on which he slept to the very heavens, upon which the angels were ascending and descending; and he, on that occasion, obtained a confirmation of the promise made to his father and grandfather.

It is unnecessary for me to trace the history of these patriarchs, or to mention the

various times when God thought fit to communicate a new revelation unto them, according to the circumstances in which they were placed. We might relate the revelations given to Jacob after he went down into the country of Laban, where he married his four wives. We might relate to you the various revelations God gave to him during his sojourn in that land. We might also relate to you the revelations he received after he left that country with his four wives and his children. When he came to the brook Jabbok, sending over all his family before him, he stooped back, and the Lord condescended to give him a new revelation. An angel came down, and Jacob and this person laid hold of each other, the same as men do occasionally now, to try each other's strength, in what is termed wrestling. These two persons wrestled together all night long. The angel did not see proper to take any advantage of Jacob by miracle, but he wrestled with him as one man would with another; and it seems that neither of them overcame the other. The angel did not succeed in throwing Jacob to the ground, neither did Jacob succeed in throwing the angel to the ground; but after contending together all night, the angel at last put forth his finger and touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and lamed him a little, and by this means was enabled to overcome him. After being thus lamed, Jacob found that he had been wrestling with an angel of God, and, said he, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me," and God, through the mouth of that angel, gave to him the same great and glorious promises that he had given to his father; and also blessed him as a prince, because he had power to wrestle with an angel all night and prevailed with him.

Some suppose that this was the first conversion of Jacob; but, be this as it may, Jacob, prior to this time, had many great revelations from God. After wrestling in this manner on one side of the brook Jabbok, he started, the next day, to overtake his family, and he placed his four wives and their children in a certain order, preparatory to meeting his brother Esau. By and by Esau comes along with quite an army of men, and he meets the forward company, consisting of Bilhah and Zilpah and their children—two of Jacob's wives and their polygamous offspring. He continues on until he meets Jacob's third wife, and finally he comes to the fourth and her children, with whom Jacob was, and turning to Jacob he says, "Who are all these women and children?" Jacob answered, "These are they whom God hath given thy servant." What! God give to Jacob more than one wife, and a number of polygamous children! Is that so? Well, Jacob says so, and we are informed that he was then converted, that this meeting between Jacob and Esau took place, and this declaration of Jacob was made after his conversion at the brook Jabbok. Now, would you suppose that a converted man would make such a declaration about his wives and children as Jacob made to Esau, if it had not been true? If a man nowadays declares that God has given him more wives than one, and a host of polygamous children, he is accused of blasphemy, yet Jacob, after wrestling with an angel, declared that such was the case with him; he knew it was so and he acknowledged the hand of God. After he reached the land of Canaan we find that God continued to give to this man revelation after revelation, suited to his circumstances; and thus we may trace the history of the dispensations of God to man.

I will now touch, in short, upon the history of Moses, who lived several hundred years after Jacob,—at a period when circumstances called for commandments and revelations different to any that had ever been given before. After having slain the Egyptian, Moses fled from the house of Pharaoh, and went down into the land of Midian, and dwelt there forty years. At a certain time, when he was herding the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, he saw a bush burning with a very brilliant flame. This excited his curiosity, and he drew near, and saw the bush apparently burning, and yet not consumed. As he drew nearer God spoke to him out of the burning bush, and told him to take the shoes from his feet for the place on which he stood was holy ground. He never could have found out by former revelation that the ground whereon he stood was holy. This God, who appeared in the burning bush, or the angel, as the case may be, had something for Moses to do that he could not possibly learn from former revelation, and that something was to arise and go down into Egypt and deliver God's people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—from the hands of their enemies. Do you not see that it required new revelation to inform him of this fact? He was obedient to the commandment, for taking Aaron with him, he went down into Egypt and stood before the king, and then commenced a series of new revelations that were wonderful and marvelous in their nature. The revelations of to-day, however, would not suit to-morrow, and those of to-morrow would not suit the next day. Why? Because God had something new to perform every day, and that which was given yesterday would not be adapted to the work God saw fit to perform to-day or to-morrow, hence, as often as the day rolled round new revelation had to be given to Moses to make known to him what the Lord required at his hand, what his mis-

sion was, what he was to do in the house of Pharaoh and before all the Egyptians. Having accomplished these wonders, by new revelation, Moses and the whole house of Israel, some twenty five hundred thousand in number, left the land of Egypt and came forth to the eastern border of the Red Sea.

If there had been sectarians in that large company, they would doubtless have reasoned with Moses on this wise: "Moses, what an abundance of revelation God has given in former times, and have we not enough for our guidance now?" I say if there had been Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, members of the Church of England, or of any of the several hundred different sects into which Christendom is now separated, this would have been their argument, for their argument now is—"We have enough, and do not need any more." But Moses and the children of Israel were not influenced by such considerations, for they were placed in circumstances that required something new. The Red Sea was before them, and there were mountains on the south and on the north, and on the west the Egyptians were pursuing them, and the inquiry with them was "What shall we do?" God gave them revelation. He did not tell them to search previous revelations for that was all that was necessary, but he gave them revelation telling them what to do, and that revelation was, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God?" If they had not got this new revelation they might have been so confused that, instead of standing still, some would have run for one mountain, and some for another, some this way and some that; but a new revelation made them understand that their duty, instead of fleeing, was to stand still and see the salvation that God would work out for them. Moses was commanded to smite the waters of the Red Sea, and he did so, and they were parted asunder by the power of the Almighty and, as we are informed in another place, they stood up like walls on either side of the path on which the children of Israel traveled through the midst of the sea. We would naturally suppose that that water would not do this, but it was a miracle wrought by the power of the Almighty. He placed the waters, like solid walls on each side of his people, and they walked through on dryshod, while the Egyptian army, in trying to pursue them, were overthrown in the midst of the sea.

Then comes another new revelation—given by inspiration—telling how the Lord had overthrown the enemies of his people, how the Lord had magnified his great power and preserved his people from the Egyptian nation, and delivered them from bondage. The hosts of Israel traveled along from the shores of the Red Sea until they came to the foot of Mount Sinai, where, by new revelation, they camped; and at a certain time, the Lord, by new revelation, called Moses up unto the mount; and when he got there the Lord saw fit to write a certain code of laws on tables of stone, and, after keeping Moses in the mount forty days and forty nights, he sent him down, and when he got down he found that the children of Israel had corrupted themselves in the sight of the Most High, for they had made unto themselves gods, certain golden calves, and they were worshipping them. Aaron had caused the people to strip themselves naked, and they were dancing around the calves. Moses was very angry, not with that kind of anger which fills the bosoms of foolish men and women; but that principle of justice which burns in the bosom of the Almighty, burned in the bosom of Moses, and he threw down the tables of the covenant which he had brought from Mount Sinai, and they were smashed to pieces. He called for those on the Lord's side to come out from the midst of that company and stand with him, at the same time commanding them to gird on their swords and put to death those who were not for the Lord. That was a new revelation, and a curious one, was it not? After all this had taken place, the Lord called Moses a second time up into the mount by new revelation, and again gave him tables of stone and laws written thereon. He kept him there the second time forty days and forty nights, without eating or drinking anything. One would suppose that he could not have stood so long a period of fasting—eighty days and eighty nights, forty each time. When he had obtained the tables the second time he came down and stood before the children of Israel, and his countenance shone with such brightness that they were filled with fear, and fled from before the presence of Moses. They could not endure the glory of his countenance, and they besought Moses that the presence of the Lord might not be manifest in their midst. "Do you, Moses, go and talk with the Lord. You can converse with him, and let us know what the Lord says, but do not let the Lord come and converse with us, lest we be destroyed." We find that they had so corrupted themselves in the sight of God that he, who would have delighted to converse with all the people, as one man talks with another, was obliged to hide his presence from them, and to send Moses to teach them. Moreover their corrupt hearts had become so great that the Lord, in his wrath, swore that they should not enter into his rest. This was made known to them by new revelation while in the wilderness, or they never could have learned it. The Lord also informed them that he would not go up in the midst of their camps. Said he,