

## DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, delivered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Dec. 19th, 1869.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

There is a passage which will be found in one of the epistles of John, the substance of which I will repeat: "Every spirit that confesses not that Jesus is the Christ is not of God." I may not have given you this passage word for word, as it is recorded, but I have given you the substance of it as laid down in the scriptures. It is well known by all readers of the scriptures, that in every age of our world mankind have had to contend against a power which is in opposition to the Almighty. It seems that our world is infested with those spirits of darkness which were, in the beginning, cast down from the Almighty, in consequence of their rebellion against Him; and in every age of the world these wicked spirits have manifested themselves, and especially when the priesthood has been upon the earth and a dispensation has been committed from Heaven to man; then all hell has seemed to be in an uproar, and the power of all the fallen angels made manifest. Hence, it is written, somewhere in the New Testament, that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood merely, but against spiritual wickedness in high places." We not only have to meet with wicked men, and the power of the devil manifested in them, but the Saints of God have always had to meet with manifestations of power from beneath—powers not ordained of God, and which are calculated, if possible, to deceive the very elect.

Now there are in existence two great powers: one is of God, including all the heavenly host—the angels and celestial beings who dwell in the presence of God and partake of His glory, holding power and authority from Him to go forth and minister according to His command. The other power is an enemy to God; it is the power of that being who rebelled against Him in heaven, and sought to take possession of the throne of the Almighty. According to the history that is given of this event, a general council was held in heaven about the time of the creation of this earth. In that council there was a personage called an angel, who stood in authority in the presence of God; and when the question was asked, "Who shall go forth and redeem mankind?" Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, this angel who stood in the presence of God, answered and said, "Here am I, send me; I will go forth and redeem all mankind, that not one soul shall be lost." But the Only Begotten Son of the Father, who was with the Father from the beginning, replied and said, "Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever." And here a rebellion rose up between Satan, the Son of the Morning, and the Son of the living God, as to the redemption of mankind. One sought to destroy the plan of God and the agency that the Lord intended to give to intelligent beings, and to redeem them whether they would be redeemed or not; and because he considered that his plan was so good before the Heavens, and so much superior to the plan that God had devised, said he, "Surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor, which is the power of God." That is, he sought to obtain the throne of the Almighty, and to carry out his own purposes in preference to yielding to the purposes and power of the Almighty. This rebellion became so great, and the influence of its spread so rapidly among the heavenly host, that one-third part of that heavenly throng, I mean the spirits, rebelled against God and followed the evil design and purpose of this angel. No doubt some of them thought that they could accomplish their design; for they had not a knowledge of the future designs and purposes of God, only in a small degree, and consequently they supposed that their plan was better than that of the Almighty; and in this great rebellion the Lord caused Satan, or Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, and those who followed him, to be cast out of heaven.

We may form some little calculation of the vast numbers thus thrown out of Heaven, when we consider that they were one-third of all the spirits that were born, intended for this creation. Only two-thirds kept their first estate, and they have the great privilege of coming here to this creation and taking bodies of flesh and bones, tabernacles wherein their spirits may dwell, to prepare themselves for a more glorious state of existence hereafter. If, then, only two-thirds of the hosts of heaven are to come to our earth to tabernacle in the flesh, we may form some idea of the vast number who fell. Already our earth has teemed for six thousand years with numberless millions of human beings whose spirits existed before the foundation of the world. Those who now exist probably number one thousand or twelve hundred millions. Twelve hundred millions of spirits now dwelling in mortal flesh! Think of the immense numbers who must have preceded us and the myriads who are to come! These are the two-thirds who kept their first estate. Their numbers, probably, cannot be less than two hundred thousand millions, leaving, as an approximate estimate, one hundred thousand millions of rebellious spirits or devils who were cast out from heaven and banished to this creation, having no privilege of fleshly tabernacles.

It was in the Garden of Eden that the devil, or one of these foul spirits, entered into a certain animal or beast, called a serpent, and came before our first parents and beguiled them, and they suffered themselves to partake of the forbidden fruit. If, then, they were in the earth as early as the Garden of Eden, no doubt they have been here from that day to this, and that the earth is the place of their habitation. They wander to and fro in the earth seeking whom they may devour! Only think of a hundred devils to every being that now exists on the earth.

Though these spirits had not the full knowledge of the Almighty; though they had not that superior knowledge that reigns in the bosom of the Son of God, and of many that stood in His presence, yet they had great information before their fall. They had stood in the presence of God, and had, no doubt, learned many things from His own mouth. How long they had been in His presence it is not for us to say, God has not revealed it. But they had great experience. I am speaking of the knowledge and the cunning that these enemies of God possessed when they were cast down here to the earth. They have cunning beyond what you have ever seen manifested by the children of men. They can, at times, apparently, be perfect gentlemen when they enter the tabernacles of the children of men. They can become, apparently, very pious, and, if you could not discern spirits, you would think, from the manifestations of devils, when in the tabernacles of many individuals, that they were perfect angels on earth.

The devil operates in every conceivable form, and this is what the apostle meant when he said "We do not merely wrestle against flesh and blood, but also against principalities and powers." We have enemies far more powerful than men to contend against. The devil has not the power to take full possession of the tabernacles of human creatures, unless they give way to him and his influence to that degree that he gets power over them. But we have not time now to trace the history of the powers of darkness in early ages; but will briefly state, that they did show forth their power in ancient times.

Moses was called of God and ordained to the holy priesthood after the order of Melchisedec, by the hands of his father-in-law, Jethro, and sent forth with power and authority into Egypt to seek after the welfare of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in bondage there. Just as soon as the Almighty began to manifest Himself through the power of the legal priesthood, so soon these opposite powers began to work whenever they could find a chance; and the individuals through whom they worked were the principal men of Egypt, the most popular men they had in their midst—the priests, magicians, and astrologers were the ones through whom Satan manifested this opposite power. His design, no doubt, was to frustrate or destroy the influence of the miracles, signs and wonders that were made manifest by Moses among the people of God for their redemption. Hence when Moses came before Pharaoh he cast down his staff and it was turned into a serpent, or into something having the appearance of a serpent, and was full of life and animation. That was a great miracle that the Lord saw proper, on that occasion, to manifest before this wicked king, that he might have what he had desired, for he had asked for a sign, and the Lord granted it. But immediately others were called by the king—the magicians, soothsayers and those whom Satan had gained power and influence over, and they were commanded to show what they could do. They cast down their rods and they likewise became serpents.

Now, here was a manifestation of similar power.—Moses' rod became a serpent and the rods of the magicians also became serpents; but by and by Moses' rod swallowed up the rods of the magicians. What did that prove? In the estimation of wicked men like the king of Egypt and his subjects, it was nothing more than the extending of this power had in possession by the magicians. They did not look upon it as a distinct and separate power, because they had not the spirit to discern, the spirit of the Lord was not with them, and they could not discern the difference. But there were manifested on that occasion two distinct and separate powers, so similar in their effects, that none but those who lived near unto God and understood the workings of the holy spirit, could detect the difference between them.

A succession of wonderful manifestations of the power of God was made through Moses, and in all, save two or three instances, the magicians did likewise. What would naturally be the conclusion at which wicked men would arrive under such circumstances? They would naturally say, "here is Moses, who has been brought up in all the learning of the Egyptians and he is more advanced than our magicians; he has learned lessons that they have not yet acquired," consequently men of that stamp would decide that it was all by the same spirit, and they would not acknowledge the finger of God in it.

That may be a sample to all people in future generations in the manifestations of these powers. The wicked cannot discern and comprehend the difference between these two powers. If we believe that there is a God and a heavenly host standing in His presence, ready to do his behests, we must believe in the manifestations of di-

vine power; and if we believe that there are fallen spirits who have been cast down to this earth, we must also believe that they will manifest their power just as far as they are suffered or permitted. But we do not wish to dwell too long upon the history of past ages, we want to come down more immediately to our own time.

I now appeal to the aged and to the middle-aged in this assembly, and I will ask them this one question "What was the condition of the world forty years ago in regard to miraculous manifestations of power, and to new revelation?" I am now speaking of the Christian world at large. Did they believe that God would perform any miracles in our day? The old and the middle-aged know that the whole world had come to the conclusion that there was no such thing as supernatural power to be made manifest in our times. That was the almost universal belief among the children of men. When you talked to them about new revelation, they considered the very idea of such a thing a folly. Tradition had taught them and their fathers for many generations, that the book, called the Old and New Testament, contained all that God ever did reveal or ever would reveal to the human family. This notion was not peculiar to some few classes of Christian society, but it was almost universal throughout Christendom. Such a thing as new revelation was discarded by them, all over the world. Said they, "the canon of scripture is full, it is complete, and it is the very height of blasphemy to suppose that God would give any more!"

This was the condition of mankind before this Church arose, forty years ago. By and by an obscure individual, a young man, rose up, and, in the midst of all Christendom, proclaimed the startling news that God had sent an angel to him; that through his faith, prayers, and sincere repentance he had beheld a supernatural vision, that he had seen a pillar of fire descend from heaven, and saw two glorious personages clothed upon with this pillar of fire, whose countenance shone like the sun at noonday; that he heard one of these personages say, pointing to the other, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." This occurred before this young man was fifteen years of age; and it was a startling announcement to make in the midst of a generation so completely given up to the traditions of their fathers; and when this was proclaimed by this young, unlettered boy to the priests and the religious societies in the State of New York, they laughed him to scorn. "What!" said they, "visions and revelations in our day! God speaking to men in our day!" They looked upon him as deluded; they pointed the finger of scorn at him and warned their congregations against him. "The canon of scripture is closed up; no more communications are to be expected from heaven. The ancients saw heavenly visions and personages; they heard the voice of the Lord; they were inspired by the Holy Ghost to receive revelations, but behold no such thing is to be given to man in our day, neither has there been for many generations past." This was the style of the remarks made by religionists forty years ago.

This young man, some four years afterwards, was visited again by an holy angel. It was not merely something speaking in the dark; it was not something wrapped up in mystery, with no glory attending it, but a glorious angel whose countenance shone like a vivid flash of lightning, and who was arrayed in a white robe, and stood before him. This young man saw the countenance of the angel; he saw his person and his glory and rejoiced therein. This angel revealed to him some great realities; not mysterious or dark sayings, covered up without any particular information, light or knowledge, but certain realities were made manifest to him concerning the ancient inhabitants of this land. This angel told him that they were a branch of the House of Israel; that they kept sacred and holy records; that those records were kept by prophets and inspired men; that they were deposited, some fourteen centuries ago, after the nation had fallen into wickedness, by one of their last prophets, and that the time was at hand for this record to be brought forth by the gift and power of God.

Here, then, was a reality;—something great and glorious, and after having received from time to time, visits from these glorious personages, and talking with them, as one man would talk with another, face to face, beholding their glory, he was permitted to go and take these plates from the place of their deposit,—plates of gold,—records, some of which were made nearly six hundred years before Christ. And then, to show still further a reality, something tangible, the Urim and Thummim, a glorious instrument, used by ancient seers, was also obtained with the record, through which, by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost and by the commandment of Almighty God, he translated that record into our language, and the book was published in the fore part of the year 1830.

During the translation, before the book was published, when the prophet came towards the latter part of the record, he discovered that the ancient inhabitants of this continent were baptized in a certain way, by those having authority from Almighty God. He felt anxious to know how he, in connection with his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, might participate in the blessings of this holy ordinance. They very well knew, from what God had revealed to them, and from what they had understood by translating the main portion of the record, that there

was no man in all Christendom that had authority to baptize them. They were anxious to know how they might be baptized, and how the authority might be restored. They went out into a grove, and joined in secret prayer, and the Lord sent an holy angel to them, a man who once dwelt on the earth, and held the priesthood of his fathers, according to the promise of God to the lineage of Aaron. John the Baptist, the fore-runner of Christ, who was beheaded by Herod—John who preached repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, came to Joseph and to Oliver Cowdery, as a ministering angel.

Perhaps you may inquire here: Was John without a tabernacle? Was he a spirit or was he a personage of tabernacle, of flesh and bones? We all know that he was, beheaded before the crucifixion of Christ; and if you wish to know the condition of John when he came to Joseph and Oliver, read the appendix to the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; and you will find that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and many others, who are named there, among whom was John the Baptist, were with Christ in His resurrection; that is, they came forth in the first resurrection, at the time that Jesus received His body. About that period the graves of the Saints were opened and many of them came forth. John was amongst them; and he held, legally, the power, keys and priesthood, bestowed upon the lineage of his father, Aaron.

What did John do, when he appeared to Brothers Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery? He did not go forth into the water to baptize them, as he did anciently in the Jordan; but he gave the authority to them to baptize—he laid his hands upon their heads and ordained them. Thus the hands of an immortal being—a man sent from Heaven—were laid upon their heads! They were ordained to that same priesthood that John himself held, with the promise and prediction that that priesthood should not be taken from the earth while the earth should stand.

They were commanded to be baptized, and having received the authority to administer the ordinance, they went forth and baptized each other, on the 15th of May, 1829, nearly one year before the rise of this Church, which took place on the 6th of April, 1830. Prior to the last mentioned date the Lord bestowed authority upon His servants to officiate in still higher ordinances than those pertaining to the Aaronic priesthood. That priesthood could administer baptism for the remission of sins, but it had no power or authority to administer the spirit. But there was a priesthood that had that power and authority. John speaks of another priesthood greater than that which he held. Said he: "there is one coming after me mightier than I. He holds a priesthood greater than that which has been bestowed upon me, namely, the priesthood of Melchisedec. He shall baptize you with fire and the Holy Ghost. I can only administer in the outward ordinance; I have not the right to administer to you this higher ordinance." It was so with Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery: they could only baptize with water until they received a priesthood greater than that which John the Baptist held. And when the Lord was about to organize His Church He prepared them by sending men who had once been here on the earth—namely, Peter, James and John, to bestow upon them this higher priesthood.

How did these celestial personages come? Did they come manifesting themselves by a mere voice, or behind some screen as it were? No, they came personally, in their glory. They not only manifested their persons and their glory, but they also spoke and gave them the Melchisedec priesthood, and the holy apostleship, which is equivalent to that priesthood, and commanded them to organize and build up the Church of God on the earth, and to administer by the laying on of hands, to those who were sincerely baptized in water, that they might be baptized with the greater baptism—of fire and the Holy Ghost.

Here then was a succession of manifestations of power from the celestial abode. God did not suffer, in those days, Satan to make manifestations of his power in a very great degree. No such things as spirit rappings in those days! No such thing as planchette—a little heart-shaped wooden thing that the devil makes use of in giving revelations, in those days! No such thing as tables dancing about the room by the power of satan in those days! No such thing as a power seizing upon the hands of a man and using them independent of his control to write out what were termed revelations, in those days! But why didn't the devil manifest these powers long before that time? Because God would not suffer him: the devil is under the control of the Almighty in some respects. He has fallen, and the Lord will not suffer him to go any further than He permits; and when the people have not the gospel and priesthood in their midst, and light and knowledge from the heavens He will not suffer the devil to show forth his power to deceive and lead them astray; therefore He determined that the preliminary manifestations should come from the celestial world, and that the priesthood with its power and authority, should be given from on high, before He would suffer the devil to come in and manifest his strong delusions!

Suffice it to say, the Church was organized, individuals were baptized by water and with the Holy Ghost, and when they were filled with the Holy Ghost they were