

DISCOURSE

By Elder JOHN TAYLOR, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday, March 17, 1872.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

In rising to address the congregation this afternoon, I do so, as I always do, with very great pleasure. It always affords me gratification to contemplate the things pertaining to the Church and Kingdom of God, and to the interests of humanity on the earth. I love to speak of these things, I am always pleased to hear of them, and I am as willing to listen to the truth when emanating from some person else as I am to communicate it to others, as it may be made manifest to me. I feel as our elders generally do—that we are seeking to communicate,—not our own special ideas, or any peculiar theory that we may have entertained; but, under the guidance of the Almighty, that we may instruct and teach as we may be led and guided by the spirit of the living God. I feel, as it is expressed in the Scriptures, "That it is not in man to direct his steps;" and it is not especially in man to teach things pertaining to eternity, or to the everlasting welfare of the human family, unless he be under the guidance and direction of the Almighty, and feels that he is simply an instrument in his hands, to unfold and develop certain principles that are made manifest unto him. I feel always willing to hear, to teach, to receive instruction or to communicate unto others those principles that are calculated to promote their happiness and well-being in time and in eternity. These things lie at the foundation of the happiness of the human family; they emanate from God, our father, in whom, we are told, "we live and move and have our being," and upon whom we are dependant for all the blessings we enjoy, whether they pertain to this world, or the world to come. Ignorant of all true principles without inspiration from him, we feel at all times that it is necessary for us to be under his guidance and direction, and to seek for the aid of his Holy Spirit; that we may be led and taught, instructed and directed in all of our acts and associations in life; that we may be prepared for any events that may transpire, associated with the affairs of this world, or relative to the world to come. We look upon ourselves as eternal beings, and that God is our father. We are told in the sacred record of truth that he is the God and father of the spirits of all flesh—of all flesh that has lived, that now lives or that will live; and it is proper that we should have just conceptions of our relationship to him, to each other, to the world wherein we live, to those who have existed before us, or to those who shall come after, us that as wise, intelligent beings, under the inspiration of the Almighty, we may be able to conduct our steps, so that our pathway in life may be such as to secure the approval of a good conscience, and of God, angels and good men; and that whilst we live upon the earth we may fulfil in an honorable manner the measure of our creation, and, obeying our Creator, feel that he is indeed what the Scriptures represent him to be, and what we believe him to be—"the God and father of the spirits of all flesh."

There is a feeling generally extant in the world that God is a great and august personage who is elevated so high above the world, and is so far separated from humanity that it is impossible to approach him, and although the Christian religion, under whatever form it may be practised, teaches mankind to pray unto God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet it is very few who suppose that their prayers amount to anything, that God will listen to their supplications, or that they will prove of any special benefit. A feeling of this kind tends more or less to unbelief, instead of faith in God, and hence we find very few men in our day who act as men of God did in former days, that is, seek unto him for guidance and direction in the affairs of life. If we examine what is termed the sacred history of the Bible we shall find that in the various ages of the world, until soon after Christianity was introduced, there was a feeling among men to call upon God and to have their prayers answered—a feeling that, if they would approach the Most High and call upon His name in faith, He would answer their supplications and give unto them wisdom, intelligence and revelation for the guidance of their feet in the pathway of life; and it was not based, as it is now, generally, upon some old theories, or upon communications made unto others; but if we trace the records of Scripture through we shall find that men generally, sought for themselves, guidance and direction, and revelation adapted to the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed.

If we go back to the time when Adam first made his appearance on the earth, the Lord God, we are told, communicated with him, gave him certain commandments, told him what he should do and what he should not do; and when he transgressed the law, we are told that he heard the footsteps of the Lord in the garden, and he heard his voice speaking unto him, and when, at the dictum of the Almighty, he was expelled from the paradise in which he lived, an angel was placed there as a guardian to prevent his return.

From the accounts that we have in our

possession of events that took place soon after that time, we learn that the Lord communicated His will unto others, and there was a man called Enoch, a very remarkable personage, whose history is very brief indeed, considering the important events that transpired during his day. We are told that he walked with God, had communication with him, and that "He was not, for God took him." Our recent revelations give us information pertaining to this same man—that he gathered together a people, that he taught them the principles of the gospel, that he gathered together all who would listen to the principles of truth previous to the flood; and that he and his city were translated, or as the account of the Bible says—"He was not, for God took him."

By and by another event transpired. The people had become excessively wicked and corrupt, so much so, that, as the Scriptures inform us, "Their thoughts were only evil, and that continually;" and in consequence of this the Lord decreed that He would destroy the people from the face of the earth. But before He did it He gave revelation unto Noah, telling him that the destruction of all flesh upon the earth had been decreed by the Almighty in consequence of the wickedness of the people; and Noah had special revelation given to him adapted to the circumstances which surrounded him, and the age in which he lived. He was not told to build a city, to preach the gospel and gather the people as Enoch had done; but he was told that the wickedness of all flesh had come up before the Almighty and that He had determined to destroy them with a flood; and Noah, believing in God and in the revelation which He gave unto him, according to the testimony of the Scriptures, built an ark, and gathered into that ark himself and wife, his sons and their wives, and two—male and female—of the various kinds of beasts, birds and creeping things that dwell on the face of the earth. History records the coming of the flood, the destruction of the world by it, and the preservation in the ark of those who had listened to the word of God and to whom He communicated His will.

Subsequent to this time a variety of singular circumstances transpired and there existed many prominent characters both good and bad, worshipers of God and worshipers of idols. We find that after the re-peopling of the earth after the flood men set to work to build a tower, and the Lord confused their languages and scattered them from thence, throughout all the earth. About this time a singular kind of personage appeared on the stage of action, named Abraham. He had been taught by his father to worship idols; but the Lord had manifested himself to him on certain occasions and instructed him in the true religion. He did not teach him as he taught Enoch, or as he had taught Noah; the circumstances of Abraham were different from those of Enoch and Noah, and if Abraham had the history of their times, as he unquestionably had, for Abraham was contemporary with Noah and Noah with Adam, and must have been acquainted with the events which had transpired, from the days of Adam at least from information given by Adam to Noah and by Noah to himself, he would know that the revelations they received were not applicable to his case, but he needed revelation from God for his own guidance and direction, that he might be led aright, and that he might be able to instruct his children after him in the path they should tread, in the principles, doctrines and ordinances that should be according to the mind and will of God.

There is something humorous in a history that we have in relation to this personage. The priests of those days offered sacrifices to their gods and, like the priests of these days, they were generally opposed to new revelation from God. Abraham's father had instructed him in the doctrines of these idols, and had sought to induce him to have faith in them and in their power, authority, and dominion, telling him what great personages they were. But Abraham, inspired by the Lord, went on a certain occasion into the temple of these gods and smote them right and left, upsetting and breaking them in pieces. His father came in and asked what he had been doing, what great sin this was that he had committed, why he was so sacrilegious in his feelings and so wicked as to seek to destroy these gods? Said he, "Father, I did not do anything to them, they quarreled among themselves and went to work fighting and knocked one another down, broke one another's heads and knocked off one another's arms and legs." "Oh," said his father, "my son do not tell me anything of that kind, for they are made of wood and they could not move or stir from their place nor knock one another down; it has been some other agency that has done it." "Why, father," said he, "would you worship a being that could not stir or move, that had hands and could not walk, a mouth that could not speak, and a head and it was of no use? Would you worship a being like that?" But nevertheless our history informs us that the priests were angry and stirred up his father against him. But the Lord inspired Abraham to leave there. The Bible tells us the Lord said to him: "Get thee up from thy father's house, from the land wherein thou wast born, and go up to a land I will show unto thee, and which I will afterwards give unto thee for an inheritance." And we are told that, "he went up, not knowing whither he went."

There is something very peculiar about this little history, so far as we have it in the Bible. I think I see this man of God rising up, after he had incurred the displeasure of the priests and his father, and had slain these gods, making preparations to leave his native country. I fancy I see some of his neighbors coming to him, and saying: "Abraham, where are you going?" "Oh," says he "I do not know." "You don't know?" "No." "Well, who told you to go?" "The Lord." "And you do not know where you are going?" "Oh no," says he, "I am going to a land that he will show me, and that he has promised to give me and my seed after me for an inheritance; and I believe in God, and therefore I am starting." There was something very peculiar about it, almost as bad as us when we started to come off from Nauvoo; we hardly knew where we were going, but we could not have rest, peace or safety among the Christians, consequently we left them and started off to the Rocky Mountains, under the direction of God, hardly knowing whither we went, just as Abraham did, and I do not think we were any bigger fools than he, for he went just about as we did, not knowing whither he went.

Afterwards the Lord gave him a son, for when he was an old man, and his wife Sarah was seventy years old, they were childless, and at this advanced age the Lord gave them a son. There had been no event of that kind ever transpired before in the history of the Bible, and if it were the Bible they had to look at it would have been of no use to them, for they could not get any instructions there how they were to act; but he feared God and put his trust in him, and the Lord gave him revelation. The angel of the Lord, we are told visited Abraham and his wife, and told her she should have a son. Sarah was a good deal amused at it, and laughed over the matter, for she was about seventy years old and thought it rather strange that she should have a son at that age, and she laughed at the idea, as many of our old sisters would unquestionably do now if they were told such a thing. It seems all very natural when you look at it just about as it is. And when the angel asked her why she laughed she lied and said: "I did not laugh," she did not want to have it known that she laughed at what the Lord said. "Nay, but," said he, "thou didst laugh." And as the time came round, lo and behold she had a son and called his name Isaac. And after this the Lord seemed determined to try Abraham and see whether or not he would be faithful to him and obey him in all things. He had obeyed him in breaking up those gods, and in leaving his father's house and going up to a land that he had shown unto him, and the Lord was determined to try him to the uttermost, and see whether he would obey him yet further. "Now," says he, "Abraham, take thy son, thine only son Isaac, and go to a place that I will indicate, and offer him up as a burnt offering before me." That was a curiosity, it had something odd and strange about it. It was not really what you would call philosophical; it was not in accordance with any principles that we could understand anything about, in our day; and it would have been difficult for Abraham to have reasoned it out why he should be called to offer up his son as a sacrifice. Nothing of the kind had ever transpired before as a precedent; no such thing written in the Bible that had taken place among men before. In offering up his only son there was something very peculiar, not especially as a sacrifice, but it came in contact with every parental feeling which he must necessarily have felt for his only child. This, in and of itself, rendered it one of the most severe and painful trials that could be placed upon man; but there was something else connected with this which was explained by the Prophet Joseph Smith who, when speaking of these things, said God was determined in these days to have a tried people as he had in former times, and that he would feel after their heartstrings and try them in every way possible for them to be tried; and if he could have invented anything that would have been more keen, acute, and trying than that which he required of Abraham he would have done it. But that, no doubt, was one of the greatest trials that could have been inflicted on any human being. Notice the old gentleman tottering along with his son, brooding over the promises of God and the peculiar demand now made upon him. Says he: "Isaac, let us go up into the mountain here, and offer a sacrifice to the Lord." And he took him along; they ascend the mountain, they gather together some rocks and together build an altar; they gather the fuel and place it on that altar; and when everything is prepared Isaac says: "Father, here is the altar and here is the wood, but where is the sacrifice?" What would the feelings of a father be under such circumstances? Says he, with a heart gushing with sorrowful emotions, "My son, God will prepare himself a sacrifice," and finally the old man gave his son to understand that he was the sacrifice, and he bound him and placed him on the wood upon the altar, and lifted the knife to strike the fatal blow, and while his arm was outstretched the Lord spake, saying: "Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, for the Lord shall provide thee a sacrifice," and he looked round and found a ram in a thicket, and he placed it on the altar and offered a burnt offering before the Lord. The Lord then took him aside and said: "Lift up

thine eyes eastward, westward, northward and southward, for to thee and to thy seed after thee will I give this land; and thy seed shall be as numerous as the stars in heaven, and like the sand on the sea shore, so shall they be innumerable; and in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee, and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." The Lord proved him and found him faithful in all things. That was a severe test to human nature; but there were other ideas crowding on his mind that were ten thousand times more formidable than these paternal feelings which gushed and welled up in his bosom when told to offer up his son as a sacrifice. What was it? Why the Lord had told him that he would make of him a nation and a multitude of nations, and that he should be the father of many nations, and yet he told him to go and offer up his only son. And he was an old man and his wife an old woman; and it was not only the idea of taking the life of his son that was crowding upon his mind, but the cutting him off in regard to posterity and the promises that God had made to him in regard to the magnitude of the peoples that should arise from him, or from his loins, and leaving him, as it were, a dry root, helpless, hopeless, tottering on the grave without any heir. Paul very justly remarks that in the midst of all these things, "he staggered not through unbelief, but was strong in faith giving glory to God; believing that he from whom he had received him, as it were from the dead, would be able, if he had even slaughtered his son, to raise him from the dead." He was strong in faith, says Paul, "giving glory to God." He had had the visions of his mind unfolded in regard to the future; he had looked through the dark vista of future ages. Inspired by the spirit of revelation he contemplated the purposes of God as they rolled forth in all their majesty and glory and power, and considered that he was to be one of the great actors in this great world drama that should be exhibited in the after ages of time, and in the eternities that were to come. Jesus said of him: "Abraham saw my day and was glad." But he saw in this, apparently, all his hopes blasted; but notwithstanding he had faith and confidence in God, and he stood there like the beaten anvil to the stroke, or the sturdy oak defying all storms and blasts and influences. He was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Nothing but the spirit of revelation could have given him this confidence, and it was that which sustained him under these peculiar circumstances.

He then told him that, by and by, his seed should go down into bondage in Egypt, and should remain there four hundred years, and that then they would be delivered. He also made promises concerning his posterity, telling that they should inherit that land; and yet, singular to say, notwithstanding these revelations and promises from the Lord, several thousand years after, when Stephen was referring to these promises, he said "he gave him none inheritance in it, no not so much as to set his foot;" but he told him that he would "give it to him, and to his seed after him, for an everlasting inheritance." And as we have to do with a truthful God, and with eternal things, we expect that these promises will be literally fulfilled, and that God will accomplish all things that he spoke to him pertaining to his seed. But there was one peculiarity about this that I wish to notice in connection with others—that when God gave revelations to the human family in the different ages of the world it was particularly adapted to the circumstances in which they were placed. They were not dependent, as Christians are now, simply on the Bible or upon some old revelation, from which they could learn many great things, but they could not learn what was necessary, what plan it was proper for them to adopt under the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed.

We find, in continuing the history of these things, that after the children of Israel had been in Egypt for a length of time, God sent them a deliverer—he raised up Moses and inspired him with the principle of revelation, told him he had a work for him to do, that he was to deliver Israel from the bondage that had been placed upon them by the Egyptian kings; Moses shrank from the responsibility, and told the Lord that he was a "man of stammering tongue and of slow speech," and that he was not competent to perform a work of such magnitude. The Lord told him never to mind, it would be all right, that he would provide a spokesman for him in Aaron, his brother, and Aaron should be a mouthpiece to the people, and Moses should be as a god to Aaron and dictate him in the course that he should take. And this very Moses gives us an account of all the histories that we have in relation to the dealings of God with the human family from Adam's day until the time in which he lived. There was something peculiar about the mission that he had. He was sent on several occasions to present himself before the Egyptian king with a message from the Lord that he should let his people Israel go; and in these various messages you will find, just as I stated before, the revelations that he had were adapted to the particular circumstances he was placed in. He was not told to build a city, as Enoch had been, and to gather a people together to be translated; he was not told to build an ark, as Noah did; he was not told to leave his father's house and go to a strange land as