



## doctrine and covenants 3

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<sup>1</sup>The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught. <sup>2</sup>For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round. <sup>3</sup>Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men; <sup>4</sup>for although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him.

It is more than useful, it is necessary for us to apply scripture to ourselves. In doing so, we must, at the same time, read scripture within its original historical, cultural, and literary context. The third section of the Doctrine and Covenants contains as good an example of the importance of dual reading as any.

The specific historical context for this section is well known. Joseph had been translating the Book of Mormon for a little over two months. In that period, he had, with Martin Harris' assistance as scribe, translated 116 manuscript pages. Both were excited by the work in which they were engaged. Both were excited to have their work known. In his desire to justify the time and effort he was spending with Joseph, Martin wanted to show the manuscript around to his detractors. He asked Joseph permission to do so on several occasions. The Lord, however, forbade it. Finally, with a stern warning to Harris and strict limitations concerning to whom the manuscript was to be shown, the Lord yielded to Harris' request.

Under circumstances that are to this day obscure, the manuscript was lost. Section 3 was given in response to this loss. While we can liken the section to ourselves, it is important to observe that every word uttered was aimed directly at Joseph Smith. When God speaks of the individual who "may have many revelations" and has "power to do many mighty works," he is speaking specifically of Joseph. When he speaks of the individual who "boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires," he is talking about Joseph. When God warns that such an individual "must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him," he is aiming the warning squarely at Joseph.

The loss of the manuscript was a consequence of personal sin and vice. That sin and vice was as much a part of Joseph as it was of Martin. Indeed, Joseph, with the great light, was guilty of the greater sin. It seems important to acknowledge these truths lest we create a false hagiography of Joseph Smith.

However unfortunate the loss of the manuscript pages, the loss was revelatory. It revealed a boastfulness in Joseph. It revealed an exaggerated ego. It revealed an inclination on Joseph's part to ignore God's directions and do as he darn well pleased. Indeed, we will hear in a moment the divine charge that, not unlike ancient Israel who had vexed God from the day they met, Joseph had "suffered the counsel of [his] director to be trampled upon *from the beginning*" (vs. 15). It revealed that Joseph had willfully allowed "carnal desires" to dictate many of his actions.

One wonders if all this revelation, painful though it must have been to Joseph, was far more beneficial to Joseph than the loss of the manuscript pages was unfortunate for him or anyone else. We seem to be doing just fine without whatever the lost manuscript pages contained. But what would have become of Joseph without this revelation? Joseph would demonstrate throughout his life that he possessed something more than a big ego. He could boarder on tyrannical. How much more so without this experience.

This is not to excuse Joseph's actions. Had he not repented he would have "fallen," presumably rejected as a gospel minister, and suffered under God's vengeance. He could not serve God with these vices masked and denied. With them unmasked and brought to light, he could be on his guard and strive over a lifetime, with varying degrees of success, to check them. In addition, those who followed him would also be on their guard, understanding that he was subject to personal weakness and thus was not to be "trusted in" as God is "trusted in."

We are little more likely to overcome our vices than Joseph. Many of them will be present and accounted for even as we take our final breath. To be ignorant of them is damnation. To be aware of them, to faithfully confess them to God, to struggle against them and ask God to help us keep them in check, and even, once in a while, entirely eliminate one or two of them, this is salvation, or the hope of salvation. God is greater than our sin and vice. If we will acknowledge and strive against them, God's work, his designs, his purposes for us cannot and will not be frustrated.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

<sup>5</sup>Behold, you have been entrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises which were made to you, if you did not transgress them. <sup>6</sup>And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. <sup>7</sup>For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—<sup>8</sup>yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble.

<sup>9</sup>Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. <sup>10</sup>But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; <sup>11</sup>except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift.

These verses continue the record of the Lord’s response to Joseph’s loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. In the opening verses of this response, the Lord indicated that it was not His plans that were frustrated but Joseph’s. Joseph’s plan in circulating the manuscript, minimal as the circulation was to be by covenant, was done to some extent to “boast in his own strength” But in the manuscript’s loss, Joseph was exposed as weak and thus frustrated in his desire to look strong. In circulating the manuscript, Joseph “set at naught the counsels of God, and follow[ed] after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires.”

These were serious charges against Joseph, and we know from his mother’s history that these charges and the truth they spoke of his character left him feeling deeply sorrowful and depressed. In today’s reading, the Lord goes further. This is not the first or second or even third time Joseph has been guilty of defying God’s wishes and plans. “How oft,” the Lord laments, “you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God.”

Years after the events surrounding the lost manuscript and the revelations relating to it,<sup>1</sup> the “school of the prophets” would be taught that “such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that is liable to sin continually.” Joseph Smith’s personal life is such as to make this utterance less a detached theological proposition than a personal confession, for it applies all too well to the “latter days” first prophet—and, no doubt, to all those who have followed him.

Joseph’s “oft” repeated transgressions were in large measure the result of his having “gone on in the persuasions of men.” He yielded to the “persuasions of men” because—and, astonishingly, even after intimate experiences he claimed to have had with Divinity—he “feared man more than God.”

Joseph’s experience in losing the manuscript, the Lord’s response to that loss, and what the loss and response teach us about Joseph’s character has much to teach all of us. We are reminded that all of us wish to be well thought of and that sometimes our lust for reputation leads us to think more of how others think of us than how God thinks of us. We are reminded of how oft—practically speaking, “continually”—we transgress the “commandments and laws of God.” We are also reminded of Paul’s counsel that we are “not to think of men above that which is written”<sup>2</sup>—including prophets who are “of

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<sup>1</sup> See DC 3 and 10

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 4.<sup>6</sup>

reputation,”<sup>3</sup> and “seem to be somewhat.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, in all of this we are reminded yet again,

“He that glorieth, let him a glory in the Lord,”<sup>5</sup> for “His name alone is excellent.”<sup>6</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 2.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 2.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 148.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Behold, you have been entrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises which were made to you, if you did not transgress them. <sup>6</sup>And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. <sup>7</sup>For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—<sup>8</sup>yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble.

<sup>9</sup>Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. <sup>10</sup>But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; <sup>11</sup>except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift.

The first eight verses of section 3 are brutal. Joseph is accused of being boastful, lustful, dismissive of God's directives, dismissive of God's opinion of him and more interested in what mere mortals think of him. Such character flaws did not simply arise out of a desire to be known for the work of translation in which he was engaged. They had been and were continuous. As a result, God has already taken the plates and the Urim and Thummim from him. If he is not more careful, he will "fall" and "become as other men, and have no more gift" to perpetuity.

Understandably, all this left Joseph anxious, sorrowful, and depressed. Indeed, more was lost, he feared, than a few scraps of paper. "“Oh, my God! All is lost! All is lost!” What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God,” his mother reports him to have lamented. “Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!”<sup>1</sup>

One can imagine, then, the relief and joy Joseph felt upon hearing

“Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord... Repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work.”

But all of this is possible because of who God is, not who Joseph is—however skilled the latter may be at repenting. After all, it is God, not Joseph, who brought the very possibility of repentance into existence. All of this is possible because God throws Joseph the same lifeline that He has thrown so often to so many others.

“But remember, God is merciful.”

Perhaps you do not need to imagine Joseph's joy at this promise. Perhaps you have felt the same joy when the Lord threw you the same lifeline. Lord knows, scripture has born testimony to God's merciful nature a thousand times over. The pages of this site are replete with these scripture testimonies. But His mercy, His unshakable fidelity to us, is so expansive—as expansive, by the Psalmist's lights, as the universe<sup>2</sup>—that we are as inclined to diminish or dismiss it as we are inclined to transgress against him.

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 126-129

<sup>2</sup> see Psalm 103.<sup>10</sup>

“Who could have supposed that God would have been so merciful.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, this inclination to diminish or outright deny God’s expansive mercy in our lives, causes God as much pain as our inclination to transgress.

“Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies.”<sup>4</sup>

To understand God’s mercies can be a labor. For some, it is as great a labor as others find in exercising faith to pay tithing or stop smoking, or any other of the multitudes of commandments we have been given or we have, ourselves, invented. But Joseph seems to have had a near childlike faith in God’s mercy and His willingness to forgive. It’s a good thing, really, for he, like all of us, needed it often. Joseph seems to have understood His mercies. He seems to have understood that this was central to the Divine character. We end with this testimony of God found in the Lectures on Faith, which, if not composed by him, approved of him.

“Unless he was merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, long suffering, and full of goodness, such is the weakness of human nature, and so great the frailties and imperfections of men, that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, the faith necessary to salvation could not exist; for doubt would take the place of faith, and those who know their weakness and liability to sin, would be in constant doubt of salvation, if it were not for the idea which they have of the excellency of the character of God, that he is slow to anger, and long suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression and sin. An idea of these facts does away doubt, and makes faith exceedingly strong.”<sup>5</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>3</sup> Alma 26.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Alma 33.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Lecture Third

<sup>5</sup>Behold, you have been entrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises which were made to you, if you did not transgress them. <sup>6</sup>And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. <sup>7</sup>For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—<sup>8</sup>yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble.

<sup>9</sup>Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. <sup>10</sup>But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; <sup>11</sup>except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift.

We often call them “commandments.” God, Himself, using language we understand, so calls them. But we can almost come to think of them as a kind of manufactured test “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”<sup>1</sup> But to think of them and call them “commandments,” “decrees,” “orders,” “laws” is too legalistic. To think of them as tests, examinations is too trivial. We would do well to abandon the language of command and decree and adopt the language of instruction and tutorial—not tutorial for the purpose of testing our willingness to comply, but to prepare us for an enduring and progressive future existence.

Perhaps I should explain what I am getting at and what it has to do with today’s reading.

Some 11 years after Joseph received section 3—the first of two officially recorded Divine responses to Joseph’s loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon (10 being the other)—Joseph found himself a prisoner in a Liberty, Missouri jail, where he penned another section, section 121, of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is a hodgepodge of anguished petition, comfort, threats, and instruction. Among the instructions, we find this nugget concerning offering “reproof.”

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of a death.”<sup>2</sup>

The application of this instruction to section 3 and Joseph’s experiences surrounding “the lost manuscript” is probably obvious to the reader. Nevertheless, we ask for the reader’s indulgence.

Up to this point in section 3, The Lord has been unsparing in His reproof of Joseph. He has leveled some serious accusations against the young man. The Lord has accused the young man of boasting “in his own strength—most likely relating to the rather heady work of translation in which the semi-literate man was involved. He has accused him of setting “at naught the counsels of God” and following “after the dictates of his own will”—this, specifically in relation to the sharing of the 116 pages. He has accused him of following “carnal desires” as the young man, contrary to all instruction, has continued to think there might be some financial and/or reputational benefit to be found in the gold plates and/or their translation.

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham 3.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Vs. 43-44



But Joseph’s willfulness, the Lord charges, has not been limited to the recent past or matters relating only to the manuscript. Adopting language Joseph understands, the Lord laments the fact that he, Joseph, has “oft... transgressed the commandments and the laws of God.” Indeed, as God will make known momentarily, Joseph has “suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon *from the beginning!*”<sup>3</sup>—if ever a sentence deserved an exclamation mark, this one does.

Finally, though, as we discussed in our previous meditation on these verses, God turns from afflicting the young man to comforting him. All is not lost. God begins His rapprochement by calling Joseph by name, “Thou art Joseph.” Obviously, Joseph knows who he is, though he may be questioning his character. But this naming is a way for God to assure Joseph that He knows him better than he knows himself. That God has called him in spite of his flaws and is prepared to forgive and continue His working relationship with him. Joseph will need to straighten up and fly right—or, at least, better—but the fundamental reason for God’s rapprochement and willingness to engage Joseph in the work once more is God’s own goodness.

“Remember, God is merciful.”

We see, then, God, Himself, “reproving betimes with sharpness... and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love,” just as He will direct His disciples to do eleven years later. God practices what he preaches. Indeed, this is precisely the point of this and every other “commandment.” Every “commandment” contains something in it that is instructive to the character of God. In giving “commandments,” God is revealing the kind of character that is required if individuals are to endure. In this example, only individuals who can reprove and then comfort through love can, themselves, endure, form enduring relationships with others, and, finally abide in an enduring society.

So, we come back to where we started. “Commandments” are about more than testing our compliance or our ability to follow instructions. True “commandments” are instructive. They are revelatory. They teach us of the character of God and how He, Himself, conducts Himself in His relationships with others. They always represent but one of the many means he uses to reveal the sort of character we must possess if we are to endure as individuals and as part of an enduring society that is greater than ourselves.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>3</sup> Verse 15

## dc 3.<sup>12-15</sup>— meditation

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<sup>12</sup>And when thou deliveredst up that which God had given thee sight and power to translate, thou deliveredst up that which was sacred into the hands of a wicked man, <sup>13</sup>who has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises which were made before God, and has depended upon his own judgment and boasted in his own wisdom. <sup>14</sup>And this is the reason that thou hast lost thy privileges for a season—<sup>15</sup>for thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon from the beginning.

According to its heading, Joseph Smith penned Section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants in July 1828, shortly after the loss of 116 Book of Mormon manuscript pages. Joseph was 22 years old at the time. It found its way into the *Book of Commandments* published in 1833, when Joseph was 27, and the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, when Joseph was 29. It remained in the 1844 edition of the DC, the last edition approved in Joseph's lifetime. He was 38 years old. It is, of course, still to be found in the current edition of the DC.

Given the extreme criticism that is leveled against Joseph Smith in this section, it might be viewed as something of a miracle that it is still found in the DC today. In Joseph's more mature years—such as they were, for he had not reached middle-age when he died—he became more than a little autocratic and increasingly resistant to criticism. He was surrounded by loyalists that would hear no criticism of their beloved prophet. The generations of Church leaders that have followed have, to put it mildly, been impatient with any accounts of Joseph and his ministry that were anything short of hagiographical—they have been, perhaps, even less patient with any criticism of themselves and their leadership. So, Joseph, his contemporaries, and the leaders who have followed them are to be commended, I suppose, for leaving a section in the DC that paints Joseph in something less than the best of light.

And the section is, as we have seen in previous meditations, anything but complimentary toward Joseph. According to the Lord's critique, Joseph “boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires.”<sup>1</sup> All of this in spite of the fact that he has received “many revelations” and had “power to do many mighty works.”<sup>2</sup> Further, the Lord laments “*how oft* you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men.”<sup>3</sup> In today's passage, we learn that Joseph's transgressing has not only been “oft,” but that “thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon *from the beginning*,” Joseph doing his fair share of the trampling.

In all of this, we might say that Joseph showed himself to have more than a little bit of “Israelite” in him. As we read of Joseph's “oft” repeated transgressions that started right from the get-go, we can't help but think of the ancient Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, and his characterization of Israel as God knew it.

“Yet my people have forgotten me  
days without number.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 4

<sup>2</sup> Verse 4

<sup>3</sup> Verse 6

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 2.<sup>32</sup>

“This hath been thy manner from thy youth,  
that thou obeyedst not my voice.”<sup>5</sup>

“We have sinned against the LORD our God,  
we and our fathers,  
from our youth even unto this day,  
and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”<sup>6</sup>

“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day... they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck...”<sup>7</sup>

Like the handful of LDS generations that have allowed DC 3 to speak its truth, the hundreds of generations of editors and translators who have followed Jeremiah are to be congratulated for having left intact such brutally honest commentary concerning a people they love and think of as God’s chosen people. We, who live in a day when criticism of our chosen religious and secular leaders along with criticism of our religious and national history are viewed as signs of disloyalty and pronounced anathema, would do well to take note of this historical boldness and respect for truth—what really was and is—and follow suit.

Even more importantly, we should be faithful enough to acknowledge and confess that almost certainly the same things could be said of us today and will be written of us tomorrow. It is no exaggeration to say that we transgress “oft,” have done since day one, do today, and likely will continue to do until the day we die, however aged we may be on that day.

But, still, God refuses to let this be the final word. If we will face up to the reality of our failures and boldly confess these truths, we will hear, indeed, may hear every single day, these comforting words spoken to that flawed young man of 22,

“But remember, God is merciful.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 22.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 3.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 7.<sup>25-26</sup>

## dc 3.<sup>16-20</sup>— meditation 1

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<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

It has always struck me so. It is like someone flipped a switch. Turned the page. Entered a new universe. Up to this point, DC 3 has focused unrelentingly on the loss of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript. Or, rather, on Joseph's transgressions that caused the loss—Section 10 will focus more truly on the actual loss and the plans for dealing with that loss. But with verse 16, the subject seems to change—abruptly, it feels—from Joseph and the lost manuscript directly to the Book that Joseph is producing. We could characterize the shift from one of admonition to one of doctrine.

And yet, one might hear admonition in verse sixteen's, "Nevertheless, my work shall go forth"—a warning that notwithstanding Joseph's errors in judgment and behavior, the Book that he has been working on will be brought to light, one way or another, with or without Joseph. He can be part of a marvelous work or not. And even in the doctrine concerning the purposes of the Book, one seems to sense that, perhaps, Joseph has not fully appreciated the importance of the Book. So, the Lord tries to help Joseph understand how vitally important the Book is. Maybe this doctrine will convince Joseph to think more solemnly and act more carefully?

And what of the Book? "Forget about the loss of the manuscript. Forget, Joseph, about all that you have done amiss. Think on the Book. Think of its purposes. Think on the wonders that it is to accomplish!"

As I count them, the Book is to accomplish eight things according to this passage. You might count them differently. That's fine. We are not engaged in science or mathematics. Probably, these eight things I identify are but the tip of the iceberg. But it's early. The Book doesn't even exist at the time of this section's writing. One has to start somewhere, though, and these eight purposes are as good a place to start as any.

In this and the remaining meditations focused on DC 3.<sup>16-20</sup>, we will explore the purposes the Lord had and undoubtedly has in store for the Book of Mormon. As usual, the Lord is not thinking small. He has high hopes for the Book. Joseph will grow in his appreciation of the Book, later calling it "the most correct of any book on earth,"<sup>1</sup> whatever that means. Who knows, perhaps Joseph's growing appreciation of the Book began right here, with the instruction concerning the purposes of the Book of Mormon.

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<sup>1</sup> *Book of Mormon*, Introduction

There is much to learn here about the Book of Mormon and its purposes. Perhaps it can lead all of us to appreciate the Book a little more and understand the uses to which we might put it in our and other's lives. I have been moved by the voices and testimonies heard in this Book. The Book is not, of course, God any more than the Bible. We do not worship it. But we value it as one of His messengers, standing right there with the Bible. But it is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of whom the Book bears witness that we praise, honor, glorify, and seek to follow.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

## dc 3.<sup>16-20</sup>— meditation 2

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<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

Joseph lost the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon because, as he had done “from the beginning” and “oft,” he “boasted in his own strength,” “set at naught” and “trampled upon” “the counsels of God,” and “followed after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires.”<sup>1</sup> After a long and stiff rebuke of the young man in verses 1-15, God sets aside His rebuke and turns to the teaching of doctrine in verses 16-20. This doctrine establishes the importance and purposes of the Book of Mormon. In this meditation, we begin looking at the specific purposes of the Book.

Before reviewing these purposes, however, we should note that the Book also has a target audience. The Book is meant, in the first instance, for the descendants of those who wrote the Book in the first place. Simply called, “Lamanites,” elsewhere and often, these descendants are, here, a diverse group composed of “Nephites,” “Jacobites,” “Josephites,” “Lamanites,” “Lemuelites,” and “Ishmaelites.” Every “they” and every “their” in these purpose statements points to the descendants of the Book’s authors and editors.

“that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of *their* fathers,

and that *they* might know the promises of the Lord,

and that *they* may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through *their* repentance *they* might be saved. Amen.”

There are eight purposes of the Book of Mormon. But, though it is not presented with the grammar or syntax of purpose as the above are, there is one other purpose. It is the overriding purpose of the Book of Mormon. It is implied in the other seven. But here it is explicitly.

“Inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people...” The “knowledge of the Savior” that comes to the descendants of the Book’s author’s and editors will come through the secondary witness: the Book of Mormon, the Bible being the first.

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<sup>1</sup> See verses 4, 6, and 15.

This purpose statement is consistent with that found on the original title page of the Book. There, in addition to showing “what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers,” and making known “the covenants of the Lord,” we are informed that the Book is “also to the convincing... that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

The “fathers,” numerous and omnipresent in the text, are not the subject of the Book. Their wonderings, their wars, their highs and lows, their apostasies, their faithfulness... none of these are THE subject of the Book. If there are “great things” done in the Book, they are Christ’s doing. If there are covenants—read promises—made in the Book, they are of Christ’s making. For those who lived and wrote the Book, that most correct of books, Jesus is more than “Christ.” He is not “God the Son.” He is not “*an* Eternal God.” He is “*the* Eternal God.” Jesus Christ is the only God with whom the “fathers” found in the Book had to do.

This then, is the Book’s first purpose. It is to present “knowledge of a Savior,” a Deliverer, an Emancipator, a Redeemer. A God. *The* God. *The Eternal God*. The Eternal God who makes Himself known through His labors with and for and among humankind. The Eternal God who makes and keeps promises.

I am not a descendant of those who wrote the Book of Mormon. I am a white man of European stock. The Book’s authors and editors would call me a “gentile.” The Book did not and does not have me as its primary target. The impact it has had on me seems, almost, an afterthought, an accident of history. Nevertheless, I’ll not complain or feel slighted. The Book has influenced me more than I can say, probably even more than I know. My spiritual hunger is such that I would be grateful even for a few crumbs from the master’s table. But, through that Book, God has given me far, far more than a few crumbs. He has given me the very best the universe has to offer. He has presented Himself. His beautiful, holy, and loving Self. And I, “I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.”<sup>2</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: October 24, 2024*)

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<sup>2</sup> Alma 26.<sup>16</sup>

### dc 3.<sup>16-20</sup>— meditation 3

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<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

In verses 1-15 of this third Section of the DC, the Lord addressed Joseph's deep complicity and guilt in the loss of the 116 manuscript pages. With the sixteenth verse, the Lord turns from admonition to instruction and doctrine. That instruction and doctrine focuses on the purposes of the Book of Mormon. The first purpose, discussed in our second meditation on verses 16-20, is to expand upon the "knowledge of a Savior" by serving as another witness of Jesus Christ, "the Eternal God."

In this meditation, we will focus on the second, third, and fourth purposes of the Book of Mormon. These purposes are introduced, logically enough, with the grammatical marker, "that."

"that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of *their* fathers,

and that *they* might know the promises of the Lord..."

God makes and keeps promises. God has never made or kept any promise greater than that in which He promised and delivered "mercy." Luke reports that two of the principal actors found in the introduction to his Gospel, Zacharias and Mary, gloried in and testified of the fulfilled promise of mercy. This fulfillment would be most powerful found in the person of Jesus.

"[God] hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham."<sup>1</sup>

"He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy."<sup>2</sup>

Given the principal purpose of the Book of Mormon, there can be no doubt that this promise of mercy through Jesus is the promise most prized by the Book's authors and editors. No doubt, they appreciated many other promises made and kept. But there is another promise that held a special place in their hearts

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1.<sup>69-73</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1.<sup>54</sup>



and that seems especially relevant to the promised appearance of the Book of Mormon found in today's reading. Several of the Book of Mormon authors and editors were anxious to know that the record they worked so hard to write and preserve would endure through time. God promised them that they would endure.

“Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation... Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God.”<sup>3</sup>

“Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records, I cried unto him continually... And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, we read in today's text, “And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people.”

So, there is our second purpose. The Book of Mormon serves as evidence that God keeps His promises. While this is particularly meaningful to those who wrote and received the Book of Mormon, the witness that God keeps His promises is important and meaningful for all of us. God is trustworthy. God is faithful. We can count on Him.

While “the knowledge of the Savior” found in the Book of Mormon is the most precious, the Book purposes to provide another kind of knowledge.

“That the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of *their* fathers,

This, of course, is of more than antiquarian interest. This allows one to place themselves in time and space. It roots them to others. It reminds them that they are part of a great human web of relationships and dependencies. It allows them to learn from others' mistakes and to build upon others' successes. In this case, it has one other very important benefit.

“That they might know the promises of the Lord...”

Here, obviously, we return to the idea of “promises.” Attached, as they are to those who passed before them, descendants of the fathers can legitimately embrace as their own the promises that the Lord made to their fathers. Reading of God's faithfulness, trustworthiness, and promise-keeping character, the descendants can pray and ask and entreat “the Eternal God” just as their fathers did.

Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon is a Book of and with promise. God promised to preserve it. He kept His promise. By keeping His promise, the children come in possession of the precious record of their fathers. By seeing that God kept the promises He made with their fathers, the children can exercise greater faith in God's promise-keeping nature. By believing in God's promise-keeping nature, they can experience even greater promises than those of their fathers. Each generation, building on those that proceeded, can, if they will accept the witness, grow ever nearer to God until, happily, they enter His presence and behold his beauty.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Nephi 25.<sup>21-22</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Enos 1.<sup>15-16</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 27.<sup>4</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

## dc 3.<sup>16-20</sup>— meditation 4

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<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

Having finished His stern rebuke of Joseph over the loss of the 116 manuscript pages (vs. 1-15), the Lord directs Joseph's attention away from his transgressions and toward the record that he has been translating and the purposes the Lord has planned for it (16-20). We have already looked at the Book's primary purpose: to yield additional "knowledge of a Savior." We have discovered, additionally, that the book's emergence is intended as fulfillment of ancient promises, especially the promise concerning God's commitment to preserve the record." Coming to know the promises the Lord has made and seeing their fulfillment would serve to increase faith in God's promises and, more, in God, Himself, and His faithfulness toward all.

In this meditation, we examine the next purpose of the Book of Mormon as this section identifies them.

"And that they may believe the gospel..."

There are many ways to think of "the gospel." At its most basic, the gospel is "the good story" or "the good news." We often use, "the gospel," in an expansive way that takes in all divine truths writ large. In this way, "the gospel" comes to mean the system of all accumulated principles and doctrines. Certainly, there is "good news" to be found in every revealed truth and in their conglomerate. However, we do not understand "the gospel" to have this expanded meaning in this section. Rather, we think of it in the more traditional and restricted sense of "the good story/news about Jesus."

Our understanding of "the gospel" in this way is, admittedly, subjective. But given the historical likelihood that Joseph possessed a traditional view at this early stage and given the Lord's habit of communicating with humans according to their language and understanding, this more traditional understanding seems reasonable. The Book's unrelenting focus on and witness of Christ adds weight to our understanding. No less telling is the follow up to "that they may believe the gospel:"

"And rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

Here, we see the focus on Christ. Of course, the reality of Jesus' "merits" is "good news" that makes all other "good news" possible. So, while we speak of a more "restricted" sense of "good news" being focused on Christ, this understanding of "the gospel" is infinitely expansive; for Jesus' universal impact is beyond reckoning. While Jesus' impact is ultimate, however, it is also intimate. Jesus is a real Being. As a

real Being he is relational. He is personable. He is interested and anxious to be part of each of our lives in ways that heal and encourage us when necessary, and in ways that strengthen and advance us—as is always necessary.

When it comes to principles and doctrines, the Book of Mormon seeks to clarify and simplify, but adds little to what the Bible teaches. But except for the New Testament’s four Gospels, it remains every bit as dedicated as the Bible to a focus on the person of Jesus and the impact he has on the lives of everyone, but especially on those who consciously trust him. It contains a message about the best news ever heard by human beings and rewards those who read it thoughtfully and searchingly with a desire to know him more intimately. There can be no more noble purpose than that.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

In this meditation, we continue to explore the purposes of the Book of Mormon as they are outlined in DC 3. The Lord’s main objective in bringing forth the Book of Mormon is to provide another testimony of the good news concerning Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches that it is not enough to believe the good news. We must “rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ.” And so, the Book of Mormon seeks to help us go beyond believing to relying on Jesus and relying particularly on his “merits.”

It will come as no surprise, then, that in considering what it means to “rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,” our first order of business will be to understand what is meant by “merits.”

The word comes from Latin, *meritum*, meaning, “a merit, service, kindness, benefit, favor; worth, value, importance, achievement; what one deserves.” So, we might read, “rely upon the service of Jesus Christ,” “rely upon the kindness of Jesus Christ,” “rely upon the worthiness of Jesus Christ,” “rely upon the achievements of Jesus Christ.” In addition to an appeal to etymology and lexical helps, one can sometimes gain insight into a word’s meaning through consideration of its antonyms. In this case, the most instructive antonym of “merit” is “*demerit*.” We might all be familiar with the concept of demerits from our school days when to receive a demerit was acknowledgement of failing to advance in some way. There, to receive a “merit” was acknowledgement of achievement or advancement. Demerit is indicative of failure, merit of success and achievement.

With this in mind, we might think of the Book of Mormon as serving to convince us to “rely upon the successes/ achievements of Jesus Christ.” The Book does this indirectly through the stories it tells and the examples it gives of individuals and groups that benefited by relying on Christ’s value, achievements, and abilities. The Book also does this by directly addressing the matter of Christ’s merits. For example, in teaching his son, Jacob, Lehi declares,

“Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be *through the merits*, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Nephi 2.<sup>8</sup>

In addressing how one receives the Holy Spirit and receives a remission of sins, Jacob's older brother, Nephi, affirms that no one arrives at such a blessed place "save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, *relying wholly upon the merits* of him who is mighty to save."<sup>2</sup> The great Book of Mormon evangelist, Aaron, goes further, declaring that "since man had fallen *he could not merit anything of himself*; but the suffering and death of Christ atone for their sins,"<sup>3</sup> making Jesus' "sufferings and death" two of his merits. One, a king, who heard and accepted Aaron's witness, confessed,

"And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, *through the merits of his Son*."<sup>4</sup>

This confirms Nephi's teaching concerning the remission of sins that he delivered nearly a half millennium earlier. This blessing comes by "relying *wholly* upon the merits" of Christ. Moroni, the last writer in the Book of Mormon, provides additional insight into this reliance on Jesus' merits by, perhaps, clarifying the earlier "wholly." He describes how those who had newly accepted Christ were "remembered and nourished by the god word of God." Moroni clearly states the objective of such remembering and nourishing"

"to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, *relying alone upon the merits of Christ*, who was the author and the finisher of their faith."<sup>5</sup>

So, this is one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon. It seeks to persuade the reader to rely wholly and alone upon the merits of Christ; to rely wholly and alone upon the successes, the benefits, the achievements, the abilities of Christ. In doing so, of course, it would have us understand that there is no one else's merits, successes, benefits, achievements, and abilities upon which he should or can rely if we wish to be forgiven or enjoy the Spirit's presence, or find wholly trustworthy guidance in today's life that leads to enduring life in days to come.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: October 24, 2024*)

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Nephi 31.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Alma 22.<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Alma 24.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Moroni 6.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—<sup>17</sup>and to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—<sup>18</sup>and this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.<sup>19</sup>And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—

that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

<sup>20</sup>and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers,

and that they might know the promises of the Lord,

and that they may believe the gospel

and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,

and be glorified through faith in his name,

and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen.

We have suggested that one can identify eight purposes of the Book of Mormon in this passage. After having looked at the first six, we now turn our attention to the final two. The Lord hopes that through the Book He might glorify and save those who accept its message of Christ and seek to apply in their own lives the principles by which he lived.

Like most traditional Christians, we LDS people probably speak more often of being “saved” than of being “glorified” even though the idea of glorification is far stronger in LDS theology than in traditional Christianity. At least it seems so to me.

Now, “saved,” can mean different things to different people. Indeed, it can mean different things in scripture, depending upon the writer. Most often, however, it seems that “saved” could accurately be replaced with “rescue” or “deliver.” Thus, the word “saved” often implies the existence of a danger or harm from which one needs rescued. Spiritually, the most common danger from which individuals are rescued is sin and its consequences—its consequences being a sense of relational separation from God and physical death. So, “salvation” is the rescue from sin through God’s forgiveness, or removal of sin in such a way as to allow to feel a reestablishment with God. In addition, it is the rescue from death. We could say, then, that to be “saved” is often backwards looking, considering past harms from which we are rescued. This isn’t 100% applicable because, as we have said, the word “saved” means different things even within scripture. But when one reads of being “saved” it is reasonable to begin with this backward-looking nature of the word.

Now, we can all be and should be grateful for rescue. We can not say enough about God’s capacity to handle every danger we face, including death and hell, and his willingness to exert Himself in our deliverance. But we might legitimately ask, what then? I am rescued from a burning house and set safely outside the inferno—past sins no longer threaten me. But what will my life look like thereafter? Where will I live? Will I live in the future in any better a house? Will I go back to the same life that I lived before the fire?

God’s answer to such questions is “glorification.” He acknowledges our human view of time and that we look backward and forward—even though, as the physicist increasingly conjecture—time might not exist in such linear fashion (for example, it is likely that God sees us as we were, as we are, and as we will be,

all at once). In laboring in our behalf, God does not only labor against the past and present harms we face. He also labors for our future. He rescues and then glorifies. Like “saved,” “glory” can have different meanings in scripture. But, we limit ourselves in this meditation to the idea of adding upon. Glorification often containing the idea of improvement and advancement.

In his earthly ministry and in the Book of Mormon’s teachings, Jesus serves to bring about both our salvation and glorification. He relates to others in ways that show his generosity of spirit, his accepting disposition, and his earnest willingness to forgive. He turns none away who come to him to be embraced and healed of past wounds and sickness—spiritual and temporal. At the same time, his own exemplary life of dedication to the welfare of others, his finding worth in others, and his teachings concerning the kind of treatment we should extend to others all show us the way to personal improvement and, more importantly, to improved relationship with others—for, whatever else “heaven” is, it is about community and belonging rather than individualism and isolation. We become better people. We improve and advance, looking more like him and growing more confident to dwell with him.

No doubt, God has other purposes for the Book of Mormon and, in fact, of all scripture than those outlined in this passage. Nevertheless, we could do worse than to allow the Book’s purposes as outline in this passage to guide us in our reading. Looking for these purposes and how they impact the way we live life daily can go along way toward our salvation and our glorification.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*