

CHAPTER THREE

The Kingdom of God: Both Religious and Political

In the overview of the parallels in Book of Mormon history, we considered both temporal and spiritual applications. The distinction made between parallels to an individual and those to a nation is representative of a general subdivision that can be made of the whole Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is both religious and governmental. Our response to both realms will be measured in the day of judgement, so we would do well to understand what each entails and be engaged in promoting them accordingly. Consider this categorization enumerated in Table 2.

Table 2	
Kingdom of God*	
religious	political
gospel	government
spiritual	temporal
individual	collective
personal	national
word of the Lord	law of the Lord
law of Moses	Abrahamic Covenant
focus of the Gentiles	preoccupation of the Jews
Jews' blunder	Gentiles falter
Christ's first coming	Christ's second coming
priests & priestesses	kings & queens
Lord of lords	King of kings

References:

1 Ne. 22:3; Isa. 5:24; Rev. 1:6; Matt. 21:42-44; 3 Ne. 15:4; 3 Ne. 28:7; D&C 45:16; 3 Ne. 20:26,27; 16:10,11; 2 Ne. 28:32

* Synonyms for "Kingdom of God:" Zion, exaltation, church of God

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Neglecting the Governmental Realm

As Christians, we pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." (3 Ne. 13:9 = Matt. 6:10.) Yet many professing Christians forget about the political realm of God's kingdom -- often even going so far as actively opposing it. When Christ reigns in our midst during the millennium, "he will be [our] king and [our] lawgiver." (D&C 45:59.) How can we think to receive an inheritance in God's kingdom on earth today if we do not understand the government of God and seek to establish it here upon the earth? Pointing to our ultimate salvation, John said that Christ "hath made *us kings and* priests unto God...." (Rev. 1:6.) Does God offer mankind a choice of either becoming a priest/priestess *or* a king/queen, as if they could obtain one and not inherit the other? Our living prophet has proclaimed: "The cause of freedom is a most basic part of our religion. Our position on freedom helped get us to this earth and it can make the difference as to whether we get back home or not."¹⁷ Still, sometimes we have tended to hearken to Satan as he whispers in our ear: "There is no need to get involved in the fight for freedom -- all you need to do is live the gospel."¹⁸ Sometimes we are not aware, or we forget that there is a need to continually work to maintain not only our spiritual, but also our temporal freedom in order to retain both.

Whether or not Christians rally to their foreordained assignments, Satan and his innumerable hosts have been hard at work. There is no lack of evidence that the devil's forces are laboring to establish a counterfeit kingdom -- and they have been highly successful. (1 Ne. 22:22.) Having been evicted from the pre-mortal counsels because he sought to usurp the agency of man, Satan is now continuing that assault against freedom (in both realms, spiritual and temporal) here upon the earth. (Moses 4:3; JST-Rev. 12:1,7,17; 13:1,7; 1 Ne. 14:13.) Once again, he is "[rebell]ing against God, and [seeks] to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ." (D&C 76:28.)

The Gentiles Will Reject Their King

Because many Christians do not understand their responsibility toward establishing God's governmental kingdom, they become gullible targets for Satan's recruiting efforts. This tragedy has grown to such proportions that it appears that we are today, where the Jews were at the time of Christ -- only this time the tables have turned. The Jews, preoccupied with God's political salvation, having focused on the prophecies of such to come, wanted nothing to do with the promised Messiah when He came among them, offering salvation on an individual level. (3 Ne. 20:26.) Lamenting this, the Lord proclaimed, "In that day when I came unto mine own, no man among you received me, and you were driven out." (D&C 133:66; Isa. 50:2 = 2 Ne. 7:2; Isa. 59:16.) The Law of Moses, which in every iota pointed to that great and final sacrifice, was fulfilled when those who professed to honor that law, crucified the final Pascal Lamb. In our day, the Gentiles (speaking collectively, not individually) have focused on the gospel as preached by Jesus Christ during his ministry in the meridian of times, but have given comparatively little thought to the governmental realm. In the latter days, the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled, which covenant features the temporal salvation of

the Lord's people. The cry of the Lord concerning the tragedy to come in our day is essentially the same as it was for the Jews: "When I called *again* there was none of you to answer...." (D&C 133:67.)

Q. How is it that the Gentiles will reject their Lord in the latter days, and be "driven out"?

A. The Lord warned, "Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they *will deny me.*" (2 Ne. 28:32.) Included in that number who will deny the Messiah in the latter days will be "the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant." (JS-M 1:22 = Matt. 24:24.) Joseph Smith "saw a vision of the sufferings of those with whom [Satan] made war and overcame." (D&C 76:30.) Joseph was describing an elect group, "Who...know [the Lord's] power, and have been made partakers thereof." (76:31.) The Lord said that such a people of promise, who allow "themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy my power -- they are they who are the sons of perdition, of whom I say that it had been better for them never to have been born." (76:31,32.)

If even some of the very elect -- those who have received the Second Comforter -- could be so deceived as to align with Satan and oppose Christ (D&C 76:35,43), how can we be assured that we too do not become "deceivers and hypocrites" doomed to "be cut off," being "overcome of the world" (50:6,8)? The answer is provided in the very same context as the references just cited. The solution should be at least somewhat familiar to the vast membership of God's Church. It is drilled into the missionaries, and they explain it to their investigators when they teach them the gospel. Leaders, instructors, and lay members teach and remind us often of this key. The admonition is simply this: "...*Preach my gospel by the Spirit*, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth." (50:14.) To the hearer, the admonition is the same: to "[receive] the word of truth...*by the*

Spirit of truth...." (50:14.) "If it be by some other way it is not of God." (50:18,20.)

Not all the deception that is perpetrated is done "innocently." Ezra Taft Benson has stated, "Yes, within the Church today there are tares among the wheat and wolves within the flock. As President Clark stated, 'The ravening wolves are amongst us, from our own membership, and they, more than any others, are clothed in sheep's clothing because they wear the habiliments of the priesthood.... We should be careful of them....' (CR., Apr. 1949, p. 163.) The wolves amongst our flock are more numerous and devious today [1969] than when President Clark made this statement."¹⁹

The wise, therefore, are those who "have received the truth, and haven taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived." (45:57.) Sons of Perdition, on the other extreme, are described as those who "deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in [them], and [they] know that [they] deny it...." (Alma 39:6; Matt. 12:31.)

From this it would seem that no faithful member of the Church, who has been exposed to the plain truth, could oppose, or be lackadaisical about the cause of freedom without having first put off the Spirit of the Lord to some degree. The admonitions have been sufficiently abundant and frequent, both by modern and ancient prophets -- especially in the Book of Mormon. How does the Lord feel today when he sees a rising generation that unwittingly embraces damning philosophies of Satan because of the negligence of their parents and teachers?

Parallels: A Key for Being Numbered Among God's People

The Book of Mormon is essential for helping us understand both the religious and political realms of the kingdom of God. The parallels are a clear evidence of that

reality, and they are a key in and of themselves. They are discernable only by the Spirit of God, so only those who are wise in the Lord will fully understand them. Through the Spirit, the Book of Mormon parallels provide us with a bulwark of understanding to help us avoid being led away captive by Satan. When unveiled, the precious truths, concealed in this ancient American record, lay out in great plainness the interrelationship of the governmental and religious realms of God's kingdom. When the Holy Spirit is our instructor, the hidden messages these parallels contain will become illuminated in our lives. The oil in our lamps will be sufficient in preparation for the wedding feast soon to come. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear," is what Jesus said to his disciples anciently. (Matt. 13:16.) In this light, John the revelator's statement, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," can be seen as more than just a plea; it is a promise -- repeated eight times in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 2:7,11,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9.)

The parallels vividly illustrate how the principles of salvation that apply to the religious realm of God's kingdom also apply to the political. In both cases -- spiritual and temporal -- disobedience brings captivity, while obedience maintains freedom. When transgression occurs, whether it be in the case of an individual or a nation, the Lord's redeeming intervention is required to deliver from captivity and restore to freedom. Agency hangs in the balance in both counts. Gospel principles such as faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost also have their counterpart roles in the governmental realm of God's kingdom.

When destruction comes upon the hypocrites in the latter days, it will be due to their disregard of the religious and the political realm of God's kingdom. The Lord's anger will be kindled against them because they will "have cast away the *law* of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the *word* of the Holy One of Israel." (2 Ne. 15:24,25 = Isa.

5:24,25.) The "law" refers to those eternal principles of freedom that God has ordained for the government of nations (as embodied in the Constitution).²⁰ The "word" refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which could be thought of as those principles of freedom that enable an individual to govern himself in accordance with God's will. Like the Israelites anciently, the Christian Gentiles -- especially the Latter-day Saints -- "were set to be a light unto the world, and to be the saviors of men." (D&C 103:9,10.) Have we become instead "as salt that has lost its savor..., thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men"? (103:9,10; 3 Ne. 12:13 = Matt. 5:13.)

In professing devotion to the gospel of Jesus Christ -- to the exclusion of the political struggle that faces our generation -- the Gentiles have become corrupt on both counts, the religious and the political: just like the Jews, when they rejected their Messiah. The light of Christ is given "to every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9) "that he may know good from evil" (Moro. 7:16). That light enables man to discern truth from error, whether it pertains to the governmental or to the religious realm of God's kingdom. Repelling that light on any count results in the general diminishing of that light. To the extent that the Gentiles have rejected that portion of the light, which would testify to them of the truthfulness of God's word concerning the temporal realm, they have lost a measure of that light they have been given, which testifies of the importance of the religious realm. Whenever those who have been enlightened harden their heart to the word of God, not only are greater things withheld, but the Lord will also "take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and give unto them who shall have more abundantly." (Ether 12:35.) This was spoken concerning the Gentiles of the latter days. It was told to the Jews at the time of Christ: "Whosoever receiveth, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever continueth not to receive, from him shall be taken away even that he

hath." (Matt. 13:12 -- JST.) Will we be numbered among those seeming "devout saints" who, notwithstanding having "done many wonderful works" in the name of the Jesus Christ, will hear Him "profess..., I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (3 Ne. 14:22,23 = Matt. 22,23.) Will we be partially responsible for the Lord's wrath coming down "upon [His] house..., first among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me..."? (D&C 112:25,26; 1 Pet. 4:17.)

The main issue of our time, which we Gentiles have so fully neglected, is to prepare for the second coming of the Savior of mankind. (D&C 45:9.) John the revelator explained that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of *prophecy*." (Rev. 19:10.) Those who do not treasure up the word of God, watching for the fulfillment of the signs and preparing for the day (JST-M 1:46,5 = Matt. 24:42,4), will not be prepared for that day. Isaiah said, "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not"? (Isa. 6:9,10 = 2 Ne. 16:9,10.) Jesus quoted these words to his disciples when he explained why he spoke in parables to the Jews. (Matt. 13:10,14,15.) This commentary applies to the current-day Gentiles, to whom the Lord has delivered a "sealed" message as well. (2 Ne. 27:1,2,5,8.)

In the latter days, the Messiah is coming in glory to vanquish every foe, to subdue the "kingdoms of the world...under [His] feet," and to give the earth "unto the saints to possess it forever and ever." (D&C 103:7; Dan. 7:18,27.) Secret combinations that seek "to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries," will be utterly destroyed, and the yokes of captivity burst. (Ether 8:25; 1 Ne. 14:2; Ne. 6:14-17; 10:15,16; Isa. 10:27; 49:25.) All this will be so that the covenant made to Abraham might be fulfilled. (2 Ne. 6:14; 10:15.) The slothful, who have hidden their talent will end up by default in Satan's camp where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30); for "they who are not for me are against me, saith our God" (2 Ne. 10:16). While claiming to be with the Lord, in

actuality, they are among that number who "have blasphemed against [God] in the midst of [his] house..." (D&C 112:26.)

Few realize the calamities that will be incurred because of unbalanced emphasis on the gospel-centered "three-fold mission of the Church," to the exclusion of members' other "mission, namely, the perpetuation of the free agency of man and the maintenance of liberty, freedom, and the rights of man."²¹ Both have been admonished to the membership by prophets of God, but most members have hardened their hearts to the latter. The emphasis on the three-fold mission has indeed brought millions of souls into the gospel net; but what sort of fish are they? Jesus Christ explained, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." (Matt. 13:47,48.) Commenting on this scripture, Ezra Taft Benson said:

"The Lord distinguishes between the Church and its members. He said he was well pleased with the restored Church, speaking collectively, but not individually. (D&C 1:30.) ...There are some who, for the time being at least, are member of the Church but not in harmony with it. These people have a temporary membership and influence in the Church; but unless they repent, they will be missing when the final membership records are recorded."²²

Ironically, the political salvation from which the Gentiles have shirked is the very salvation that the Jews were so zealous to receive when the true Messiah came among them. Even after the forty days of instruction with Jesus after his resurrection, when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven from the mount of Olives, his *Apostles* -- as James Talmage described it -- "still imbued with their conception of the kingdom of God as an earthly establishment of power and dominion, asked of Him, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6.)"²³

These devout followers would not have possessed this zeal if there were not abundant prophetic utterances of such a salvation to come. Had not John the baptist proclaimed that Christ would thoroughly "purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"? (Matt. 3:12.) Just because the Jews missed the mark in understanding when these things would take place, does not mean that the prophecies are no longer valid. As the Resurrected Savior said to the Nephites: "...Because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come. For behold, the *covenant* which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me." (3 Ne. 15:7,8.)

The Law of Moses, which was given *last* (after the Abrahamic Covenant), was fulfilled *first*, in the meridian of times. The Abrahamic covenant, given *first*, will be fulfilled *last*. The Jews, expecting the temporal salvation but getting the religious, crucified Jesus Christ. The Gentiles, focusing on the religious salvation, have disregarded the temporal. By so doing, they reject God, "[crucify] him unto themselves and put him to an open shame."²⁴ (D&C 76:35; 3 Ne. 28:31-35; Jacob 6:7-10.) Thus the Lord said: "The first shall be last, and...the last shall be first in all things whatsoever I have created by the word of my power, which is the power of my spirit. For by the power of my Spirit created I them; yea, all things both spiritual and temporal -- first spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work." (D&C 29:30-32.) When the Lord set forth his hand to redeem his people anciently, he started with the Jews ("Jews" in the Book of Mormon sense, i.e. house of Israel). Then the gospel was taken to the Gentiles, after the Jews rejected it, consummated by their crucifying Jesus Christ.²⁵ In the latter days, when the Lord set his hand the second time to

recover his people, through Joseph Smith, He began with the Gentiles. Now that the Gentiles are rejecting the gospel (this will culminate in the rejection of Christ again -- via rejecting his servants (3 Ne. 28:34,35)), the gospel will soon be taken once again to the Jews (the house of Israel) (3 Ne. 16:11).

Toward the end of D&C 29, the Lord proceeded to explain what he meant when he said, "First spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work." (29:32.) When Adam and Eve were cast out from the Garden of Eden, from "the presence of the Lord," it was "because of his transgression, wherein he became spiritually dead, which is the first death, even that same death which is the last death, which is spiritual, which shall be pronounced upon the wicked when [the Lord] shall say: Depart from me, ye cursed." (29:41.) After Adam's spiritual death, came his temporal death. In the latter days, when the Lord comes in his wrath, he will cut off the wicked from the land of the living, and the hypocrites will then die spiritually, "for they cannot be redeemed from their spiritual fall, because they repent not; for they love darkness rather than light, and their deeds are evil...." (29:44,45.) Thus we might summarize this pattern as follows:

spiritual death of an individual
 temporal death of an individual
 temporal death of a hypocritical people
 spiritual death of a hypocritical people

These remarks were directed to those "having knowledge," whom the Lord "commanded to repent." (29:49.) (Those who will repent will be redeemed, for the Lord "will be merciful unto them...if they will repent and come unto me" (2 Ne. 28:32).)

Jesus' statement to the Jews anciently is applicable once again: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matt. 21:43; Jacob 5:7,9.) Paul cautioned the Gentiles, "For if God spared not the natural branches [referring to the

house of Israel], take heed lest he also spare not thee." (Rom. 11:21,17; Jacob 5:7,9.) The only way to not be "cut off" is to "continue in [God's] goodness," he said; "Be not highminded, but fear." (Rom. 11:22,20; Jacob 5:69,65,48.) "...If thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (11:24; Jacob 5:36,37,54.) The Lord of the vineyard's instructions to his pruners is, "Begin at the last that they may be first, and that the first may be last...." (Jacob 5:63.)

Not all Gentiles will reject their Lord. Those Gentiles who repent will be numbered among the house of Israel and Zion (2 Ne. 30:2; 28:32; Rom. 11:17; Jacob 5:64); just as the Jews who followed Jesus when he came among them, were numbered among the Christians who then carried the gospel into all the world. Following the example of the few humble followers of Christ at his first coming, we must respond to the issues set forth by both the religious and the governmental aspects of the kingdom of God on earth today if we are to be numbered among his people. The Book of Mormon parallels can help us understand and then act in accordance with our responsibilities.

We live in a day in which many of the prophetic parables uttered by Jesus during his ministry will now be literally fulfilled: the parable of the talents, the wise and foolish virgins, the wedding feast, the pounds. (All these just mentioned have direct bearing on the themes we have been discussing.) Take the conclusion of the *parable of the entrusted talents*, for example: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." (Matt. 25:29.) The "good and faithful" servants will hear the exalted welcome, "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (25:21) while the "unprofitable" servants will be "cast...into outer darkness..." (25:30.) Not only is our Messiah

speaking to us again in parables -- or parallels -- but, as we have seen briefly in the above discussion, the very time in which we live parallels the time in which He lived.

Expounding the Scriptures in One

Throughout the scriptures we find many parallels with different levels of comparison. These types and shadows can be understood more readily through an understanding of the model Book of Mormon pattern. It lays out a whole picture of Israel's progression from beginning to end, and that same pattern mirrors the progression of an individual through life, hence covering the temporal and the spiritual realms.

Was this pattern what the resurrected Lord taught the Nephites, when he "expounded all the scriptures in one, which they had written..."? (3 Ne. 23:14.) The *vision of all*, which we now have in parable form in Book of Mormon history, is a "revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof." (2 Ne. 27:7.) What the Savior taught the Nephites when he "expounded [the scriptures] unto the multitude" was "all things, even from the beginning until the time that he would come in his glory -- yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth...even unto the great and last day...." (3 Ne. 26:1,3-5.) The wicked having been destroyed from among the people, the Lord no longer had need to withhold his pearls from the faithful who had been "firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord." (3 Ne. 6:14.)

After Mormon recorded this account of Christ "expounding all things unto them, both great and small," he then spoke of the "greater things" that would "be made manifest," if the Gentiles would believe that portion of the Book of Mormon they would be given. By speaking of the greater things that the Savior taught, in the same context of speaking about the greater things to

come forth in the latter days, Mormon points out the similitude of these two.

Inasmuch as Christ taught the "greater things" to the Nephites; and inasmuch as the Book of Mormon history contains the "greater things" in preparatory, parable form; and inasmuch as the pattern laid out in the Book of Mormon parallels is an overview of both the temporal/political and spiritual/religious progressions; and inasmuch that these patterns are woven throughout the scriptures; and inasmuch as these patterns interrelate to form a whole understanding; we can therefore conclude that these patterns would have been a central part of what Christ discussed when he "expounded the scriptures in one."

Because our salvation hinges on our acceptance of the word of God, knowing more clearly what that path entails and where it leads will provide us with added strength to be able to endure to the end of that path. The stronger our roots of understanding the word of God become, the more able we will be to pluck from our lives those branches that corrupt, and graft in their place branches of righteousness until the perfect day. (Jacob 5:65,66; Rom. 11:16-27.) So it is with nations as well. The more mature the righteous wheat in the earth becomes, the sooner God will be able to pluck out the tares and burn these counterfeits, harvesting his wheat unto himself. (Matt. 13:24-30; 3:12; D&C 87:1-7.)

Notes for Chapter Three:

17. Ezra Taft Benson, Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Deseret Book, SLC, Utah, 1988, p. 656.

18. *Ibid.*

19. CR. Apr. 1969, p. 11.

20. In the dedicatory prayer of the Idaho Falls Temple, President George Albert Smith identified the "law of the Lord" as the principles contained in the Constitution. After quoting the statement, "...Out of Zion shall go forth the law..." (2 Ne. 12:3), he continued, praying "that kings and rulers and the people of all nations under heaven may be persuaded of the blessings enjoyed by the people of this land...and be constrained to adopt similar governmental systems..." (Harold B. Lee, *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1945, p. 564; *Ensign*, Nov. 1971, p. 15.)

21. President John Taylor, as quoted by Ezra Taft Benson, CR, Oct. 1963, p. 16.

22. CR., Apr. 1969, p. 10.

23. Jesus the Christ, Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1974, p. 696.

24. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: "I prophesy, in the name of the Lord God of Israel, anguish and wrath and tribulation, and the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from the earth await this generation, until they are visited with utter desolation. This generation is as corrupt as the generation of the Jews that crucified Christ; and if He were here today, and should preach the same doctrine He did then, they would put Him to death." (DHC, Vol. 6, p. 58.)

25. James E. Talmage gives the following commentary on the rending of the veil of the temple at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross: "It was the rending of Judaism, the consummation of the Mosaic dispensation, and the inauguration of Christianity under apostolic administration." Jesus the Christ, Deseret Book, SLC, Utah, 1974, p. 662.