

## Chapter 2 – The World is Upside Down

Picture in your mind for a moment a modern American shopping mall. A wide variety of goods are on display through shining glass and open doors. Shoppers are enticed by bright colors, music, and carefully arranged displays. The air is filled with perfume and the smells of luxury. In the food court, the aroma of oriental stir-fry mingles with the spice of fresh-baked cinnamon rolls. Anything one could want is here: clothing, jewelry, furniture, entertainment, food, sweets, toys....

The Bible describes this same scene in the Book of Revelation:

The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. (Revelation 18: 12-13)

There are, of course, a few minor differences between this description and the shopping mall. Our chariots are purchased at the car lot next door and the horses are under the hood. However, the slaves are still there – in the form of, mostly young, minimum wage workers.

The important point is that this is a description of Babylon. This most American of scenes, the shopping mall, is identical, in both character and purpose, to that corrupt, shallow, cruel, materialistic society that became a type and a metaphor for all evil societies and wicked cities.

Chapter 18 of the Book of Revelation is about the lament of the fall of Babylon. Interestingly, those who are lamenting are not the customers of this great marketplace, but the sellers, those who were “made rich” by her. The “kings of the earth” (who corrupted her) are bewailing in verse nine, the “merchants of the earth” (who bought and sold) weep and mourn in verse eleven, the shipmasters and sailors (who delivered the goods) are weeping and wailing in verse nineteen.

How would we react if all the shopping malls disappeared “in one hour” as Babylon does in the Book of Revelation? Well, of course, people would be shocked, and surprised, and confused. We would certainly hope that in the destruction there was no loss of life. But how many of us would be in the frame of mind to rejoice?

Look at verse 20 which says: “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.” So, in a chapter in which there is a great deal of lamenting and wailing, the apostles and prophets are found rejoicing. Is it possible that a destructive event that puts an end to private profit making should be something that the Latter-day Saints should rejoice over?

Surely this cannot be true doctrine. After all, the modern American shopping mall is the epitome of our successful capitalist economy. What will become of us if we can’t buy and sell and make a profit (i.e. if we leave Satan’s employ)? After all, you can buy anything in the mall if you have money....

## The selling of the sacred

Just the other day, on one of our major Utah television stations, I heard the following: “The weather has been brought to you by Joseph Smith, the Seer.” It seems someone has put together a CD-ROM about the life of Joseph Smith and, to promote its sale, the company was sponsoring that particular weather broadcast. “Joseph Smith, the Seer” was, of course, the name of the product being sold. The person Joseph Smith, whom I believe to have been a Seer, and whom I believe to still be alive and active in another realm of existence, had, of course, nothing personally to do with the TV weather broadcast.

Nevertheless, even though I clearly understood the situation, I was troubled when I heard those words. Even now, writing about it, I feel uncomfortable and disturbed. It could well be that the CD-ROM is a quality product. It may well contain important factual historical material about the Prophet’s life and mission that will educate and edify the user. But still – the weather sponsored by Joseph Smith, the Seer?

I’m afraid that what bothers me the most about this story is that it doesn’t seem to bother anybody. We are so used to everything around us being prettified, packaged, advertised, and sold that it doesn’t occur to us that some things should be beyond commercialization. The life and mission of Joseph Smith has an important meaning for many people. His contribution to this world is second only to that of Jesus Christ, the Savior. At best, this commercial was in very poor taste. I hope (probably in vain) that that TV station got a lot of concerned phone calls that night.

Another example of the selling of the sacred is the recent promotion of “Temple Medallions – the perfect gift.” I guess it’s silly (or hopeless) of me to complain about this. After all, the major Salt Lake hotels have sold Salt Lake Temple shot glasses in their gift shops for years. The key difference here is that these medallions are being marketed directly to the Saints themselves (I am assuming that not many Mormons were in the market for shot glasses!).

I hope I am not the only Mormon who feels that these promotions cheapen, demean, and subvert our Holy places by turning them literally into graven images and then selling them. If not, then I fear that, like Esau of old, we are selling our birthright for a “mess of pottage.” We are converting the things of Eternity into immediate cash. We are falling into Satan’s trap of selling our sacred things for money.

I am suggesting that the Saints should know better. If we provide a market for this kitsch by actually buying the stuff, the situation will only get worse. The recent explosion of poor quality “Mormon fiction” has helped to open the “Mormon market” and the capitalists have arrived in force to profit from us. At the very least, please, let’s try to draw the line by not buying the more profane items. If we can’t resist, we will soon see “Title of Liberty action figures,” “Carthage Jail: The Video Game,” and shirts that say “My parents were married for Time and Eternity, but all I got was this lousy T-shirt.”

I know these examples seem ridiculous now, but I am not kidding in the least. This is how Capitalism works. Find a new market and exploit it in any way possible. The only moral imperative of Capitalism is profit, the bottom line of the spreadsheet. I hope those readers among you who have believed, until now, that the free market is

inherently good (and are quite likely Republicans), will begin to recognize just whose kingdom the free market capitalists are really building.

### Capitalism vs. Compassion

The economic system known as capitalism is familiar to most Americans and most Mormons. It is often referred to as the “free enterprise system” or the “free market system.” A capitalistic economy is based on the right of private property, the right of contract, little or no government regulation of business, individualism, and the profit motive.

On the surface, capitalism appears healthy, even noble. Surely it is good to let people make their own economic decisions as far as possible. However, it is important for Latter-day Saints to note that the scriptures are overwhelmingly opposed to the spirit of capitalism. Capitalism promotes a type of economic Darwinism or “survival of the fittest.” Those who believe that the government should not regulate the marketplace at all are promoting the same doctrine taught by the Anti-Christ Korihor in the Book of Mormon who taught that “every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.” (Alma 30:17).

American capitalists are heavily linked into the old Puritan ethic that “you get what you deserve and you deserve what you get.” Under this idea the upper classes are obviously more highly favored of God because of the material “blessings” he has given them. The lower classes are presumed to be poor because of their sinfulness or their slothfulness, and have been placed here on Earth to serve “their betters.”

This attitude is clearly manifested every time Congress addresses a welfare bill. The Republicans typically favor restricting eligibility and reducing the amount of funding. It is not uncommon to hear the sentiment that the government would not have to spend money on welfare if only “those people would get a job.” The Democrats are invariably more generous about helping those in need.

It is important at this juncture for the reader to understand that I am not trying to unfairly accuse Republican politicians of anything. Their voting records speak for themselves and are generally quite predictable. They vote on many, if not most, issues according to a fairly consistent political philosophy. In this book I am simply trying to encourage the reader to take a long hard look at the Republican philosophy, and a long hard look at the scriptures, and ask if the Republican political philosophy is really compatible with the long-term spiritual and temporal goals of Mormonism.

As to as the question of which political party is more concerned about the issue of human suffering, I can offer no better testimony than that of noted Utah philanthropist, Jon M. Huntsman, a lifelong Republican and former appointee in the Nixon White House. In the Mormon church owned Salt Lake City newspaper, *The Deseret News*, on December 17, 2000, he is quoted as saying, “I’m a one-issue man at this stage of my life: It’s the elimination of human suffering. And therefore I’ve developed a very close relationship with many of the U.S. Senators who are Democrats. They seem to have a stronger desire to help in these areas.” He goes on to say, “I’ve got a tremendous sense of support from the Democrats who understand social problems of human suffering. And

I'm terribly disappointed that I haven't had more support from my own (Republican) political party."

The Book of Mormon clearly tells us Mormons which side of this debate we should support.

And also ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish." (Mosiah 4:16).

The above statement speaks of no exceptions. We are not to help some and not others. We are not to judge whether a petitioner is "worthy" of our help. We are instructed simply to give of our substance whenever asked. This is actually quite hard for most of us to do. However, in such situations the person who is being tested is not the beggar but the giver. The next two verses make it quite clear that we are not to rationalize excuses to prevent our giving.

Perhaps thou shalt say: the man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just –  
But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth for ever and hath no interest in the Kingdom of God." (Mosiah 4:17-18).

At this point a Republican apologist would likely claim that the above verses are good advice for the individual, but that they do not imply a role for *the government* in caring for the poor. This argument conveniently ignores the fact that the verses quoted above are spoken by King Benjamin. He *was* the government at the time. And here he is calling the people to repentance because of the way they treated the poor. Is there a role for the government in caring for the poor? There certainly is in the Book of Mormon.

In Jesus' time the scribes and Pharisees were all good Capitalists. They loved buying and selling so much they even had a rousing free market right in the temple! (Of course Jesus referred to this market as "a den of thieves."). (Matt 21:12-13). These are the type of people that Jesus depicts in His parable of the Good Samaritan who "passed by on the other side" of the road to avoid the needy and injured man (Luke 10:25-37).

This parable teaches two important lessons. The first is that one's position in society or in the church (ie. the priest and the Levite in the story) has no connection at all to the question of whether or not one is righteous. It is one's behavior, not one's status, that matters in the eyes of God. The second lesson is that goodness, compassion, and generosity are often found among those who are despised, outcast, and downtrodden. In the context of this book, I hope the reader will forgive me for pointing out that in many ways Democrats are the Samaritans of modern Utah.

This idea, that the so-called political "conservatives" are less sensitive to the needs of the poor, the hungry, the elderly, the infirm, is so obvious by their voting records, and so damaging to their political image, the national Republican party came up with a catch phrase to rhetorically deflect attention away from their very real lack of

charity. The catch phrase is “compassionate conservatism.” It purports to mean that “we Republicans aren’t really insensitive brutes, we just believe public welfare should be a private concern not a government concern.” In practice, compassionate conservatism means that in the parable of the Good Samaritan a Republican Congressman would walk over to the injured man and say, “I wish I could help you, but as a representative of the government, helping you is not my responsibility.”

I will have more to say on the subject of capitalism in chapter 5. At this juncture I just want to point out that capitalism engenders selfishness, worldliness, and materialism. It clearly is not a part of the Kingdom of God and the Latter-day Saints should take care not to become enamored of a system that will not exist in the eternities.

As Brigham Young once said: “No one supposes for one moment that in heaven the angels are speculating, that they are building railroads and factories, taking advantage one of another, gathering up the substance there is in heaven to aggrandize themselves, and that they live on the same principle that we are in the habit of doing.... No sectarian Christian in the world believes this; they believe that the inhabitants of Heaven live as a family, that their faith, interests and pursuits have one end in view – the glory of God and their own salvation, that they may receive more and more.... We all believe this, and suppose we go to work and imitate them as far as we can.”(Journal of Discourses 17:117-118).

## Freedom and the Gospel

I believe Mormons have been tricked into defending capitalism because of its use of the word “freedom.” Mormons believe that all people are free moral agents. We must remember that “free agency” and “free enterprise” are not in any way related. Free agency is a gift from God. It is the ability to act for ourselves, in a world filled with opposition, and to reap the consequences, good or bad, of the choices we make.

The free agency given to us by God is universal. No matter what kind of family one is born into and no matter what kind of government one lives under, everyone is free to act righteously or unrighteously. Those who are accountable before God (in Mormon doctrine this excludes small children and some of the mentally ill) are responsible for the choices they make.

On the other hand, free enterprise is a particular type of worldly economic system. It has not been present on the Earth at all times and in all places. In fact, during the very most prosperous and righteous of times, free enterprise is not the economic system of choice at all. In the antediluvian City of Enoch, and in the Book of Mormon during the 200 years immediately following Christ’s visit to the Americas, the selfish, profit-motivated, free enterprise system was replaced with an economic system known as the United Order under which all property is held in common and no one is poor. Mormons are generally quite familiar with the United Order, and believe it to be a necessary part of establishing God’s Kingdom on Earth. However, despite repeated attempts, they have consistently proven themselves unworthy to live by its precepts (at least so far).

In contrast with the United Order, Free Enterprise is based on the idea that selfishness is good. (I am not making this up! Ask any economist!) Goods and services are distributed according to greed rather than according to need. Rather than spreading

wealth to all, it concentrates wealth in the hands of the few. It has its own version of the Golden Rule known as, “Them that has the gold makes the rules.” Throughout history, free enterprise has rarely promoted much freedom. Rather, it typically functions as an instrument of oppression: master over slave, noble over peasant, landowner over servant, boss over worker, manager over employee -- the endless dominance of capital over labor. However noble the capitalists try to make free enterprise sound, it clearly isn't part of God's plan because it invariably leads to inequality.

But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. (Doctrine and Covenants 49:20.)

Freedom is such an expansive word it is very easy to manipulate. Unfortunately, the word “freedom” has become a major cultural icon in the United States. The word “freedom” is often used uncritically as a metaphor for the entire American way of life. Everyone is so sure they know what it means no one ever bothers to define it very carefully. This is dangerous because it makes all kinds of villainy possible if one does it in the name of “freedom.”

Freedom means a lack of external control, restraint or restriction. I hope the reader will agree with me that a complete lack of any kind of control, restraint, or restriction is not a good thing. It makes freedom synonymous with anarchy.

It is instructive to remember the words of Cain after he killed Abel. “I am free; surely the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands” (Moses 5:33). Cain actually felt good about the murder he had just committed because he was now “free” to take possession of his brother's flocks. This example should make it very clear that not all types of freedom are noble and good. Freedom may well be an important value, but it certainly should not be our highest one.

The word “freedom” really has no useful meaning until one pins it down by asking two questions: 1. Freedom from what? and 2. Freedom for whom? The war in Vietnam, like all American wars, was supposedly fought to defend “freedom.” But let's assume for a moment that the American side had won a complete and total victory in that war. Would the common peasant in that country now be free from hunger, poverty, ignorance, disease, fear, and hatred? Would he now enjoy freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and dissent, or due process of law? Would he be free from a corrupt and authoritarian government? If not, then Americans have a false idea of what freedom means. The hungry are not free. The under-educated are not free. The homeless are not free.

Freedom does not mean American corporations have the right to exploit underpaid workers in foreign sweatshops. Freedom should not allow wealthy criminals to stay out of prison while financially poor lawbreakers face “mandatory minimum” sentences. Freedom should not allow suburban high schools to resemble country clubs while inner city high schools resemble jails. It is not freedom when women are paid less than men for the same, or superior, work. The destruction of our natural environment is not an act of freedom. Frankly, it sickens me when acts of naked, selfish, greed are justified in the name of freedom, and I feel even worse when such acts are perpetrated, promoted, and financed by my fellow Mormons.

We, brothers and sisters, should remember that the only true freedom is to be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord said, “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Only the Gospel, and the knowledge it brings, can free the world from poverty, sickness, superstition, fear, and damnation. If we truly wish to act like Saints, we need to stop relying on the military and the marketplace to bring us the freedom that can only be found through faith, repentance, and charity. We need to place our trust in the Lord.

The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh – But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world. (Doctrine and Covenants 1: 19-20).

### Materialism vs. Spirituality

Materialism, setting our hearts upon the things of this world, is the precise opposite of Spirituality, or setting our hearts upon the things of God. The scriptures say that the love of money is the root of ALL evil (1 Timothy 6:13). Why do we choose to ignore such warnings? When Christ said it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24), he was saying that it was impossible. His disciples were “exceedingly amazed” when they heard it. Yet many Mormons cling to that story of the “postern gate,” a purported back entrance to Jerusalem through which a camel could supposedly pass if its load was removed and it was made to crawl on its knees.

The problem is that this story, while comforting to many, is a work of fiction. It was invented by a minister in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to assuage the consciences of his well-heeled congregation (Nibley, *Approaching Zion* p.169). The story is so effective at countering an unpleasant scripture it has traveled through the Christian churches for years and now pollutes the Mormons without us being aware of its origins. Even so, the point of the story still metaphorically carries the message that your riches will not enter the Kingdom with you, and you had better plan to enter on your knees (ie. Humbly).

Here is the original story from the New Testament:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.  
And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.  
When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?  
But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:16-26.)

Now that last line seems to give hope that perhaps a rich man could indeed be saved if God so chose. Interestingly, in Joseph Smith's "Inspired Translation" of the Bible this verse has some added language.

But Jesus beheld their thoughts, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but if they will forsake all things for my sake, with God whatsoever things I speak are possible. (JST Matthew 19:26.)

Clearly, Joseph Smith's version of the story reinforces that idea that if one wants God's salvation, one must "forsake all things" in the material world for the sake of the Kingdom.

The Gospel of the Nazaraens also adds an interesting verse immediately after verse 21 where the Lord told the young man to give away all he had. Jesus explains further to the young man why he still falls short of keeping the commandments:

But the rich man began to scratch his head, and the saying pleased him not. And the Lord said to him, "Why do you say, 'I have kept the law and the prophets?' For it is written in the law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' and behold, many of your brothers, children of Abraham, are dressed in filthy rags and dying of hunger, and your house is full of many good things. Yet nothing at all goes out from it to them." fn  
(Stephen E. Robinson. *The Noncanonical Sayings of Jesus, BYU Studies, vol. 36 (1996-97), Number 2--1996-97.*)

This Gospel then continues with the young man leaving, as in the Matthew version, and Jesus mentioning the camel and the eye of the needle. Need I point out that many of us today have houses full of "many good things" while others go hungry? And is not ignoring these scriptures the very same thing as the young man in the story walking away from Jesus?

Even in the Matthew version, the idea of forsaking the things of this world for the sake of the Kingdom is reinforced. The story continues in the next verses with Peter asking about the situation of the Disciples.

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?



And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.  
And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.  
But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.  
(Matthew 19:27-30.)

So the Twelve Apostles will sit on thrones helping to judge the tribes of Israel, but *every one* who forsakes the things of this world shall inherit everlasting life. The warning is that many prominent people in this world will find themselves at the end of the line in the next world. One must wonder how many of the “first” that “shall be last” are Latter-day Saints?

There is a joke about a rich man who manages to persuade Saint Peter to let him bring several sacks of gold along with him into Heaven. As the man is bragging to a new acquaintance how he had managed to pull this off, the acquaintance gives the man a puzzled look and then points to the street, which is paved with gold! This story should cause anyone, and especially Latter-day Saints, to reflect on the ultimate value of material things and reconsider just what kind of “riches” they should devote their lives to.

In the Book of Mormon, Alma tells the story of the Zoramites who had separated themselves from the Nephites and lived in a land to the East of Zarahemla, which they called Antionum. These people had a peculiar form of worship wherein once a week they would stand, one at a time, upon a raised platform in the center of their synagogue and recite the same prayer. The disturbing thing about this prayer is its self-congratulatory, prideful nature. Here is an excerpt:

Thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which Holiness, O God, we thank thee.  
(Alma 31:17).

Alma noted that this weekly ritual was the only time the people ever mentioned their God. The rest of the week it was business as usual.

Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.  
Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride. (Alma 31: 24-25).

The root of their wickedness was that they valued their material possessions above anything else. They believed that because they wore precious jewelry and wore costly apparel, they were superior to the people who had less money and believed that they actually were more highly favored by God. They even went so far as to not allow the poor to enter and worship in their synagogues “because of the coarseness of their apparel.” (Alma 32.2).

Why did the Lord bring forth the Book of Mormon in these last days if not to warn the Latter-day Saints of the very dangers and failings we would be subject to? Is it possible that the story of the Zoramites was preserved for us as a warning because of our tendency to behave the very same way? During the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught very clearly where our priorities belong.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.  
(Matthew 6:19-21)

### Why are we here on Earth?

In the bustle and confusion of daily life, it is easy to forget or become distracted from the real reasons we are here on Earth. If you ask a typical Mormon about the purpose of life, he or she can easily tell you about the “Plan of Salvation” by which God allows His spirit children to come to Earth, gain a physical body, and be tested to see if they will obey His commandments. Mormons often refer to this Earth life as a “time of probation.”

After this life, Mormons believe life continues in a Spirit World and that we will all eventually be literally resurrected from the dead, which means that our spirit bodies will re-inhabit our physical bodies, thus bringing them back to life. The model for this is the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, who, after the crucifixion, met with his disciples, had them physically touch him, and ate food with them.

On the Day of Judgement, Mormons believe they will be assigned to a Kingdom of Glory based upon their choices and actions while they were here on Earth (and, perhaps to a lesser extent, their choices and actions while awaiting the judgement day in the Spirit World). In the highest of these Kingdoms, Mormons hope to dwell in the presence of God, and, eventually, to become like Him.

Thus, for Mormons, we are here on Earth as part of a divine plan to gain experience with the physical world. Our bodies are subject to pleasure and pain and both are intended by God to teach us and to test us. Our interactions with others provide us with frequent opportunities to be noble or ignoble, generous or selfish, friendly or cruel. Our interactions with the natural world can be harmonious or destructive. Every thought, every choice, every action reveals to God what kind of person we are.

Typically, the wicked hope for a long, drawn-out period of probation, while the righteous pray for a speedy arrival of the Lord’s Millennial Kingdom. The sticky point here is that while Mormons believe, along with many Christians, in the idea that Christ will some day return to rule the Earth for a thousand years of peace, for Mormons the judgment day happens at the beginning of the Millennium. This means that those who are too comfortable in the current world order aren’t likely to be around during the millennial world order.

Mormons need to remember that this fine world we live in, with its cars, and televisions, and entertainment spectacles, is Satan’s world. Mormon doctrine teaches

quite clearly that Satan, the Lucifer who was cast out of Heaven during the pre-earth councils for defying God, is the “prince of this world” (John 12:31, 14:30). This Earth life is likened to the Telestial Kingdom, the lowest of the Mormon’s three post-resurrection kingdoms, the dwelling place of thieves and liars. It is the obligation of believing Mormons to strive for something much higher.

## The city Zion

Good Mormons have solemnly pledged their time, talents, and material possessions to help build the Kingdom of God here on Earth in preparation for the arrival of the Heavenly Kingdom at the beginning of the Millennium. This is serious stuff. Mormons literally believe that they, as individuals, as families, as ward congregations, and as a church are active, responsible, committed agents of God’s will and purposes. They are charged with the responsibility and the privilege of building both a Holy City and a Holy Society pure enough to welcome the Lord Jesus Christ, and numerous hosts of angels and resurrected beings, back to the Earth in the “Fullness of Times.” The name of both the Holy City and the Holy Society they are striving to build is Zion.

The LDS tenth Article of Faith states:

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this (the American) continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

The gathering spoken of here is much larger than the “Zionist” movement among the Jews with regard to the modern state of Israel. It includes the descendants of all twelve sons of the Old Testament prophet Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:24-28). The Jews, descendants of Israel’s son Judah, are indeed returning to their ancestral lands.

Mormons, most of whom claim to be descendants of Judah’s brother Joseph (yes, the one with the colorful coat!), believe we are another branch of Israel’s family. In one sense, Mormon missionary work around the world is seen as a process of finding the scattered family of Israel and reuniting them, through baptism into the LDS church, with the truths, priesthood, and blessings they had lost.

Thus, the LDS church teaches that there are two “gatherings” of God’s “Chosen People” taking place now in the “Last Days,” the gathering of the Jews in Israel and the gathering of the Latter-day Saints in “stakes” (similar to a parish) around the world. During the Millennium, there will be TWO holy cities, the old Jerusalem and a New Jerusalem (the city Zion) that will be built in the “western boundaries of the state of Missouri.” (D&C 84:3-5).

The Doctrine and Covenants is a collection of revelations from God to Joseph Smith that Mormons consider to be scripture on the same level as the Bible and the Book of Mormon. It is very specific about the location of the city Zion, and Joseph Smith himself dedicated the lot where the temple in Zion will eventually be built. During the Millennium, the “Law of the Lord” (ie, the government of the planet) will go forth from

this temple. Again, I must say, to Mormons who really understand their religion, this is very serious stuff, indeed.

### A Zion people

The reason I took the time to describe some aspects of the future City of Zion as understood by Mormons is because this Holy City can only be built by a Holy People. The LDS church has a “Threefold Mission” to “Preach the Gospel, Perfect the Saints, and Redeem the Dead.” Our missionary work and membership growth are legendary, our temple work is growing rapidly, but in the area of “Perfecting the Saints” I believe we Mormons, as a people (I include myself), are falling far short of our potential and of our obligations.

The book of Genesis, in listing the patriarchal line from Adam to Noah, says something rather cryptic about a man named Enoch (father of the long-lived Methuselah). “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” Genesis 5:24. The Apostle Paul gives a bit more information about this event in his letter to the Hebrews. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” (Hebrews 11:5).

Joseph Smith, in the third of his “Lectures on Faith” encouraged us to follow this same path:

Let us here observe, that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. First, the idea that he actually exists. Secondly, a *correct* idea of his character, perfections, and attributes. Thirdly, an actual knowledge that the course of life he is pursuing is according to His will.

In Lecture six, the Prophet describes what must be done in order to know that one pleases God:

Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life, and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are pleasing in the sight of God.

Interestingly, while the other Lectures are followed by study questions and answers, Lecture Six has this footnote at the end: “This lecture is so plain, and the facts set forth so self-evident that it is deemed unnecessary to form a catechism upon it: the student is, therefore, instructed to commit the whole to memory.”

Thus the continual question Mormons should be asking of themselves, both individually and as a people, is: “Do we know that the course of life we are pursuing is pleasing to God?” And the ultimate litmus test is whether we are sacrificing earthly things to pursue the will of God, or sacrificing the will of God to pursue earthly things.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24).

## Zion vs. Babylon

One of the oldest teachings of both Christianity and Judaism (although seldom heard today) is the Doctrine of the Two Ways (Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, p. 30-31). According to this doctrine, every day of our mortal life is a choice between the Way of Light and the Way of Darkness, the Way of Life and the Way of Death. It is not possible to compromise these two positions because they are opposites. It is not possible to take an easier path to heaven because there is only a single “straight and narrow” path (2 Nephi 9:41).

In the Book of Mormon, Jacob is teaching this doctrine when he says, “Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life (2 Nephi 10:23). The fact of our imperfect lives is that we spend a great deal of time vacillating between these two choices. Every time we make a mistake (which, of course, is often), we are choosing the way of death. Fortunately, however, every time we repent we are choosing the way of life. Clearly we should repent often.

Just as there are Two Ways of life constantly before us, so there are two types of society we can choose to build: Zion or Babylon. The scriptures describe these two societies both as patterns, or archetypes, and as real, specific, places or conditions of human experience.

Zion is the type of society built by the pure in heart (D&C 97:21). It is pure, unalloyed, and complete. It is the type of society found in Heaven. The people of Zion are “of one heart and of one mind, ” they dwell in righteousness,” and there are “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18)

Babylon is that society which is the opposite of Zion in every way. It is contaminated, compromised, and polluted. Babylon is described very clearly in the scriptures as a great marketplace (Revelation 18). The key characteristic of Babylon is the great inequality of material substance among its people.

The interesting (perhaps frightening) thing to note here is that the United States has the most unequal distribution of wealth of any industrial nation. The gap between the rich and the poor in New York City is actually the same as in Guatemala! (Chomsky, *Class Warfare*, p.34) These deplorable statistics are made even worse by the fact that inequality in the United States has been increasing dramatically in recent years.

Given this situation, it is impossible not to conclude that the greatest example of Babylon in the modern world is the United States of America. It is also hard to avoid noticing that not only is Utah not immune to the wiles of Babylon, but that it is

comfortably in the mainstream, if not the vanguard, of Babylon. In my view, this sad state of affairs is directly related to Utah being “the most Republican” of U.S. States.

There is a very popular LDS hymn known as “Come, Come Ye Saints.” It was sung by the Mormon Pioneers as they crossed the plains toward their “promised land” of Utah. The song contains the repeating refrain “All is Well, All is Well.” Modern Mormons seem to miss the irony of the song. In pioneer days, the “All is Well” refrain was sung to cheer up a weary, beleaguered people and remind them that God was aware of their troubles and would reward them for their sacrifices.

In contrast, it seems a bit ludicrous today to hear comfortable, upper middle class Utah Mormons, in their beautifully appointed churches, sing “no toil nor labor fear,” or “though hard to you, this journey may appear.” When modern Mormons sing “all is well” it sometimes sounds contented and even, dare I say it, self-congratulatory. We believe “all is well in Utah” because, after all, we are the “chosen people”, who have the “true church,” and live in comfortable homes, and drive nice cars.

This tendency to believe that everything is going well should be resisted with all our strength. It should set off flashing red lights and warning sirens. The Book of Mormon warns us that this type of complacency is a primary tool of the devil.

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21).

“Carnal security,” of course, means comfortable and happy in our material possessions. Satan “pacifies” us from doing God’s work by “lulling” us with material wealth. He leads us to confuse material prosperity with our true purpose, which is to build Zion. By convincing us that “all is well,” he locks us into the status quo and prevents us from progressing. By convincing us we are righteous, he prevents us from repenting.

The priorities of the world are upside down because Satan has been given free reign to tempt and deceive us (at least for a time). We shouldn’t be surprised that he has set up a system intended to “deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). That is his assigned role in this world -- to provide opposition to God’s truth in order to test us (2 Nephi 2: 15-18). The depressing thing is that so many of the Latter-day Saints, who of all people ought to know better, have not only been deceived by Satan’s false priorities, but in many cases have embraced and actively promote them.

The Heavenly city of Zion will not come to Earth until there is a people and a place prepared to meet it. It is the responsibility of the Latter-day Saints to become that people and to build that place. Brigham Young said, “We are not going to wait for angels, or for Enoch and his company to come and build up Zion, but we are going to build it.... The elements are here to produce as good a Zion as was ever made in all the eternities of the Gods” (*Journal of Discourses* 9:284-285).

It is high time for the Latter-day Saints to get to work. It is time for our actions to more closely match our beliefs. It is time for our civic ideals to be brought in line with our religious ideals. It is time for us to give up the pursuit of the treasures of the Earth and begin to pursue the treasures of Heaven.

The Lord told Joseph Smith, “I give not unto you that ye shall live after the manner of the world.” (D&C 95:13). The choice is clear. Will you follow the prophets or the profits?