

Conditions of Covenants Fulfilled

By Arthur A. Oakman

Latter Day Saints have always looked to the word of prophecy for light, for encouragement, and for confirmation of their home of Zion. The men who built this Church in these last days knew their Scriptures. They knew, moreover, what those Scriptures meant; and, as their work in us testifies, they were stable and steadfast. We shall do well in these troublous times also, to find an anchor in the Word of God that will keep and steady us, give poise and culture in the midst of confusion and decay. We can thus help carry forward to completion the great work started by our forebears.

As we view the situation confronting us in Europe and in Asia today [1940], there is one prophecy that comes vividly to mind:

And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon the great and abominable church, insomuch that there were wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth, and as there began to be wars and rumors of wars among all the nations which belonged to the mother of abominations, the angel spake unto me, saying, Behold, the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots; and behold, thou seest all these things; and when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great and abominable church of all the earth, whose foundation is the devil, then at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants which he hath made to his people, who are of the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 3:232-237)

The background of this prophecy is interesting. Father and son had been inspired to leave the Old World and to embark on the hazardous undertaking of founding, under the province of God, a nation of promise in a land of promise. Both Lehi and his son, Nephi, were visionary men. Perhaps we would say that they were given to mysticism. At any rate they were seers of things to come. Naturally they were concerned about the outcome of their venture; and as most of us do when we are not too sure of ourselves, they leaned heavily upon the source of their inspiration. They were men of prayer.

The Setting of the Prophecy

After committing themselves wholly to the exodus from Jerusalem, they journeyed in the wilderness, dwelling in tents. Under these circumstances Lehi had viewed many things in vision and dream. He shared them with his four sons and their companions. The youngest, Nephi, was tre-



Arthur Oakman as a young man at Lamoni, Iowa, about 1930

mendously interested in what his father had told him and sought diligently to add to that testimony the sure knowledge of original experience. His diligence unto prayer was rewarded.

He was shown the growth of his own nation, the division and strife in, and the final destruction of his own people. The descendants of his elder brethren, he saw, were preserved. They were, however, dispossessed of their land after the space of many generations by the coming of the Gentiles, known by us as Pilgrims and settlers. Nephi then saw conditions prevailing in America prior to the coming forth of the Restoration Movement. He viewed the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and, inspired as few men have

been inspired, said:

And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end, they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be. (1 Nephi 3:187-189)

He saw, too, the situation prevailing in the Old World from which the white man had come. That continent had been under the domination of a system of thought and superstition which elsewhere in Holy Writ is denominated, "MYSTERY, BABYLON [THE GREAT], THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS" [Revelation 17:5]. The prophet saw that the fruitage of this devilish net of mental and spiritual darkness was blood and fire and vapors of smoke, and stated that the fulfilling of the covenants was to be undertaken when these things abounded.

Establishment and Fulfillment

Now there is a distinction to be made between the establishment of a covenant and its fulfillment. The covenant, we believe, has been established. Men have entered into relations with Deity similar to those engagements to which the fathers were committed. Of this covenant the following statement is all-inclusive:

And this is mine everlasting covenant, that when thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall tremble with joy; and the general assembly of the church of the first-born shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth, and shall have place until the end come. (Genesis 9:22-23, Inspired Version)

The movement of men in this direction has taken place. But yet the covenant is still unfulfilled. It has only been established. We must suppose therefore that this statement of Nephi's concerning fulfillment has immediate significance, since the conditions in which it was to take place prevail. War is the chief business of nations right now. Experience and study alike convince one that unless Deity does intervene in no uncertain manner, humanity is doomed. We are counting upon God. Nephi saw what would happen. Let us try to anticipate it also and prepare to cooperate with the Maker of the universe.

We may expect then, imminently, that the "work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants." Is there any inkling in the written Word as to how this will take place? There is. Abundant precedent will guide us in our expectancy of God's movement.

The Basic Dynamic

A principle that is primary may be stated thus: *The assurance of the final triumph of right is reserved for those who do right.* Nephi did not stumble onto his conviction. The prophecy was not given to him just because he thought it would be "nice to know about." He was one of a company that had left all, and he had diligently listened to the word of his father. He desired to know and entered into the appropriate spiritual disciplines which wait on knowledge. He fasted and prayed. God cannot entrust the riches of His grace to those careless or indifferent. Neither will faith (which is the assurance of things hoped for) thrive in a soil that is corrupted by the things of this present world or by undue pandering to the appetites of the flesh. The way of God is revealed in the Word of God and nowhere else. That Word testifies that the men of faith whose vision now blesses us, were men of power because they disciplined themselves. They probably ran the gauntlet of false accusation, were told they were spoilsports and narrow-minded as Nephi was told by his older brethren, but they had sense enough to know that the things of the Kingdom had their price. They paid it. True, they carried the treasure in earthen vessels, but they carried it. It was theirs. Others knew not of that treasure, but they did, and it could not be taken from them.

Can we now pay the price?

When all the world has sold out to the wisdom of men and the appetites of the flesh, shall we be men of faith? The assurance that our cause is invincible—which is another way of saying that we know God does not lie—is the basic spiritual equipment we now need. Possession of it will constitute the very condition in which the covenants may be fulfilled.

Power and Fulfillment

The power to fulfill the covenants is guaranteed in the conditions of the covenants. What are those conditions? To answer that question we shall have to examine briefly some of the powers that attach to the promises of Deity. Those powers are heavenly. They are not of this world. Searching among the decaying systems of earth will never disclose to

us what can only come from that which is not earthly. Let us frankly face the fact, in light of our last twenty years' experience as a Church, that we have depended too much on our own judgment, and have not ensured that that judgment was right. The advice and counsel of heaven we ignored. We took no care to avoid speculation, and we permitted ourselves the futility of internecine conflict. Because of this, further advice from that source which alone can guarantee the success of our cause was withheld. Deity cannot work with men who are self-sufficient and self-regarding. Therefore the ministry of angels which we might have had, and which could have saved us from stumbling, still waits on our consecration. For:

... neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. . . . And the office of their ministry is, to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill and to do the work of the covenants of the Father which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him; and by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men. (Moroni 7:30, 32-34; italics added)

The powers of the covenants then, center in Heaven and in those agencies which have, through their own commitments to them, been empowered to bind Heaven and earth together. Without continued angelic ministry there can be no Zion.

Since these powers are thus placed, what are the conditions of securing them? The answer is summed up thus:

For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, shewing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind, in every form of godliness. (Moroni 7:31; italics added)

What is here but a summary of Section Four in the Doctrine and Covenants? A strong faith and a firm mind we are told. A faith that shines "more bright and clear" because it is constantly enriched and empowered to move in wider fields by the application of an eye "single to the intelligence of God." "Mind and soul according well" in other words.

I here submit that if twenty thousand people in our Church would spend fifteen minutes every day in studying the Word of God at a time of day when they were at their best, untold power would flow to the Church.

Worldliness and the Second-Best

We are in bondage today because we do not *know*. Knowledge is on the other side of the veil (the veil of our ignorance), but we have to get it. Can we renounce our cheap novels (and maybe the more expensive ones too); the plays; the movies; the cheap, gaudy claptrap that feeds and blinds the millions of futility? If we can, we can have life. Let every man be his own judge. Let him compare the good things of the Word of God with other good things not quite so good, and if he does, assuredly he will see from whence

all things derive their goodness. As Apostle Edwards says: "The greatest enemy the best has is not the *worst*; but the *second best*."

The great bar to the fulfilling of the covenants (which is another way of saying "bringing forth Zion") is not that the will of God is not done in the world. It is because of the worldliness of the Church. We don't expect people who never knew our God to be acquainted with His ways. We have a right to expect that those who claim to know Him shall not ape the ways of those who know Him not.

The characteristic principle of worldliness is not a renunciation of the existence of God. Plenty of folk can prove there is a governing power through all things—a "God"—and they do not have to be baptized into the Church to prove it. In fact, worldliness is not incompatible with the reason which can infer His existence. Worldliness is the spirit that ignores Him. It is the disposition to pay no attention to His Word. It may even acknowledge that God speaks today (a fact our worthy elders spent much time and energy in proving). But if a spirit in the Church or in the world ignores what He says, and pays no attention to it, and chooses its own way, it is worldly. It has no place in the fulfilling of the covenants; in fact, it will hinder their consummation.

Leadership in Consummation

Priesthood leadership must be qualitative and is vital to the fulfilling of the covenants. When confronted with conditions similar to ours today, the four sons of Mosiah entered into the realm of darkness of their own free choice, and built up the Church of Christ in the midst of the kingdom of the Devil. This is how they did it:

They were men of a

Sound understanding, and they had

Searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. But this is not all: they had given themselves to

Much prayer, and fasting, therefore they had the Spirit of prophecy, and the

Spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with

Power and authority, even as with the power and authority of God. Yea, by the

Power of their words, many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name, and confess their sins.

(Alma 12:4–5, 7; italics added)

Deity will prepare the way by preparing the men, as He prepared these men, who chose the way of righteousness. As fine and as noble as people in the world may be now, unless they are harnessed to the covenants of God they are ineffective in face of the powers of destruction now prevailing. What shall we do, who know these covenants?

The fulfilling of the covenants demands that their spirit be shared with those who know nothing about them. Other people, not yet of our faith, have a right to the Kingdom. Apostle Garver once said that "Zion is for those who cannot make the grade without it." In other words, it is an endeavor which has at its heart a loving concern for others. It is mis-

sionary in intent and universal in scope.

Why all this timidity about bearing our testimony? Why all this fear of the face of clay? Is it to men we shall look when we stand before the great bar of judgment? Shall we find excuse of God because we seek honor of men or one another and fail to tell the whole counsel of God? For—mark it well—it is either the fulfillment of the covenants or it is the total destruction of the race. Take your choice.

There is no man so learned, nor is there any woman so cultured but will not be enriched by your humble testimony of your experience with God. Zion is only for those who build it for others. Its foundations can be laid in them by nothing but the testimony of Jesus Christ as it is given by those of us who are fortunate to possess it. If we possess it not, we have nothing.

One final word. We need not mumble our belief or faith. It is basic to the structure of the universe, and when the prattle of men and nations has died away, and the rulers of this world lie in state, the Kingdom of our God and His Christ will endure forever.

Can we not then embrace the truth, and look upward?

Gloucester, England,

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(*The Saints' Herald* 87 [February 10, 1940]: 167–169).

"And the Lord said unto Enoch, As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfil the oath which I made unto you concerning the children of Noah. And the day shall come that the earth shall rest. But before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth. And great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve; and righteousness will I send down out of heaven, and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men. And righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine own elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare; an holy city, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion; a New Jerusalem. And the Lord said unto Enoch, Then shalt thou and all thy city meet them there; and we will receive them into our bosom; and they shall see us, and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other; and there shall be mine abode, and it shall be Zion, which shall come forth out of all the creations which I have made; and for the space of a thousand years shall the earth rest."
(Genesis 7:67–72)