

## Lesson 49: D&C 137-138, "The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead"

### Historical Background

Alvin was Joseph's oldest brother and died while Joseph was preparing to receive the golden plates

Lucy Mack Smith

"But to Joseph [Alvin] said, 'Joseph, I am going to die now. The distress which I suffer and the sensations that I have tell me my time is very short. I want you to be a good boy and do everything that lies in your power to obtain the record. Be faithful in receiving instruction and in keeping every commandment that is given you. Your brother Alvin must now leave you, but remember the example which he has set for you, and set a good example for the children that are younger than you. Always be kind to Father and Mother.'" (History of Joseph Smith by his Mother Lucy Mack Smith, pg. 38)

### Judged by Works and Desire

D&C 137:1,5-6

1 The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell.

5 I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept;

6 And marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.

Why did Joseph believe that his brother could not inherit the celestial kingdom?

(and had not been baptized for the remission of sins)

This revelation was received in Kirtland and, obviously, before Joseph received revelations about work for the dead

Craig A. Cardon

"Earlier in Kirtland the Lord had taught the Prophet Joseph about the oath and covenant of the priesthood, explaining the conditions by which promised blessings are realized. In Nauvoo understanding grew as to the eternal scope and power of the priesthood in blessing all His faithful children, whether in this life or the next." (CR, Oct. 2006)

D&C 137:7-10

7 Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God;

8 Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom;

9 For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.

10 And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.

How will the Lord judge “all who have died without a knowledge of this gospel”?

(will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts)

George Q. Cannon

"They who died in ignorance of the law will not, of course, be judged by or held accountable to the law, having never known it.... If they die in their ignorance they will be judged according to the light they received. But will they forever, through the endless ages of eternity, remain in this ignorance? Certainly not.... All of the sons of our Father who ever dwelt upon the earth, and his daughters also, will hear at the proper time and under the proper circumstances the glad tidings of salvation, the name of our Redeemer and the plan by which they can be redeemed and be exalted into his presence."  
(JD, 19:104)

Neal A. Maxwell

"Actually, everything depends—initially and finally—on our desires. These shape our thought patterns. Our desires thus precede our deeds and lie at the very cores of our souls, tilting us toward or away from God. God can educate our desires. Others seek to manipulate our desires. But it is we who form the desires, the 'thoughts and intents of [our] hearts' (Mosiah 5:13.)

“The end rule is 'according to [our] desires ... shall it be done unto [us]' (D&C 11:17.) 'For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts' (D&C 137:9.) One’s individual will thus remains uniquely his. God will not override it nor overwhelm it. Hence we’d better want the consequences of what we want!" (CR, Oct. 1995)

Joseph F. Smith

Joseph F. Smith was born in 1838 when his father, Hyrum Smith, was in Liberty jail. His father died at Carthage when he was 5. He crossed the plains with his mother, Mary Fielding Smith, and arrived in Utah when he was 10. His mother died 4 years later.

He served his first of 4 missions to Hawaii when he was 15. When he was 28 he was ordained an Apostle. He served as a counselor to Presidents Taylor, Woodruff, and Snow. He served as President of the Church for 17 years before he died in 1918.

He receive this revelation six weeks before his death.

### Pondering the Scriptures

D&C 138:1-4

1 On the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures;

2 And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God, for the redemption of the world;

3 And the great and wonderful love made manifest by the Father and the Son in the coming of the Redeemer into the world;

4 That through his atonement, and by obedience to the principles of the gospel, mankind might be saved.

What was Joseph F. Smith doing that led to him receiving the vision of the redemption of the dead?

(pondering over the scriptures  
reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice)

Marion G. Romney

"As I have read the scriptures, I have been challenged by the word ponder, so frequently used in the Book of Mormon. The dictionary says that ponder means 'to weigh mentally, think deeply about, deliberate, meditate.' Moroni thus used the term as he closed his record: 'Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things... that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men... and ponder it in your hearts.' (Moro. 10:3.)

"Pondering is, in my feeling, a form of prayer. It has, at least, been an approach to the Spirit of the Lord on many occasions." (CR, April 1973)

D&C 138:5-11

5 While I was thus engaged, my mind reverted to the writings of the apostle Peter, to the primitive saints scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and other parts of Asia, where the gospel had been preached after the crucifixion of the Lord.

6 I opened the Bible and read the third and fourth chapters of the first epistle of Peter, and as I read I was greatly impressed, more than I had ever been before, with the following passages:

7 "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

8 "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

9 "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." (1 Peter 3:18—20.)

10 “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” (1 Peter 4:6.)

11 As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great.

In Peter it states that Christ preached to the spirits in prison. This point is clarified in this revelation

Why was the gospel preached to them that are dead?

that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit

### Spirits of the Just

He relates his vision of the spirits of the just

D&C 138:12-17, 49-50

12 And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality;

13 And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name.

14 All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

15 I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand.

16 They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death.

17 Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy.

49 All these and many more, even the prophets who dwelt among the Nephites and testified of the coming of the Son of God, mingled in the vast assembly and waited for their deliverance,

50 For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage.

What did this innumerable company have in common?

(the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus)

How did they feel about being spirits without bodies?

(For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage)

Why were they rejoicing?

(because the day of their deliverance was at hand)  
Christ was about to be resurrected which means that they could also be resurrected.

Paul V. Johnson

"After resurrection, the spirit will never again be separated from the body because the Savior's Resurrection brought total victory over death. In order to obtain our eternal destiny, we need to have this immortal soul—a spirit and body—united forever. With spirit and immortal body inseparably connected, we can 'receive a fulness of joy.' In fact, without the Resurrection we could never receive a fulness of joy but would be miserable forever. Even faithful, righteous people view the separation of their bodies from their spirits as captivity. We are released from this captivity through the Resurrection, which is redemption from the bands or chains of death. There is no salvation without both our spirit and our body." (CR, April 2016)

When body and spirit united we can receive fulness of joy.

D&C 93:33-34

33 For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy;

34 And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.

D&C 138:18-24, 51-52

18 While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful:

19 And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance.

23 And the saints rejoiced in their redemption, and bowed the knee and acknowledged the Son of God as their Redeemer and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell.

24 Their countenances shone, and the radiance from the presence of the Lord rested upon them, and they sang praises unto his holy name.

51 These the Lord taught, and gave them power to come forth, after his resurrection from the dead, to enter into his Father's kingdom, there to be crowned with immortality and eternal life,

52 And continue thenceforth their labor as had been promised by the Lord, and be partakers of all blessings which were held in reserve for them that love him.

What did Christ preach to the righteous?

(declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful  
And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel)

How did they react to Christ's message of deliverance?

(the saints rejoiced in their redemption, and bowed the knee  
they sang praises unto his holy name)

Also, in verse 52, it tells us that they were rejoicing because now they could  
continue to labor to bring souls unto Christ

### Spirits of the Wicked and Ungodly

He divides the wicked into two groups.

D&C 138:20-22

20 But unto the wicked he did not go, and among the ungodly and the unrepentant  
who had defiled themselves while in the flesh, his voice was not raised;

21 Neither did the rebellious who rejected the testimonies and the warnings of the  
ancient prophets behold his presence, nor look upon his face.

22 Where these were, darkness reigned, but among the righteous there was peace;

What two groups does He divid the wicked into?

(wicked and ungodly  
the rebellious who rejected the testimonies)

Robert D. Hales

“When we choose to have faith, we are prepared to stand in the presence of  
God.... After the Savior’s Crucifixion, He appeared only to those ‘who had  
been faithful in the testimony of [Him] while they lived in mortality.’ Those  
‘who rejected the testimonies... of the... prophets [could not] behold [the  
Savior’s] presence, nor look upon his face.’ Our faith prepares us to be in  
the presence of the Lord.” (From talk by Neil L. Andersen, CR, Oct. 2017)

Christ himself did not personally visit this group

### Opportunity Given to the Dead

D&C 138:28-30

28 And I wondered at the words of Peter—wherein he said that the Son of God  
preached unto the spirits in prison, who sometime were disobedient, when once the  
long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah—and how it was possible for him  
to preach to those spirits and perform the necessary labor among them in so short a

time.

29 And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and my understanding quickened, and I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them;

30 But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead.

Who preached to those in the spirit prison?

(among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers)

Note that they there “clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth”

Heber C. Kimball

"[Jedediah M. Grant] said to me, brother Heber, I have been into the spirit world two nights in succession... O, says he, the order and government that were there! When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion. He said that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities; and when he looked at them he saw grade after grade, and all were organized and in perfect harmony." (Remarks at the Funeral of President Grant, JD, 4:135)

D&C 138:36-37

36 Thus was it made known that our Redeemer spent his time during his sojourn in the world of spirits, instructing and preparing the faithful spirits of the prophets who had testified of him in the flesh;

37 That they might carry the message of redemption unto all the dead, unto whom he could not go personally, because of their rebellion and transgression, that they through the ministration of his servants might also hear his words.

What did Christ do during the three days that His spirit was separated from His body?

(instructing and preparing the faithful spirits... That they might carry the message of redemption unto all the dead)

D&C 138:31-34

31 And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel.

32 Thus was the gospel preached to those who had died in their sins, without a knowledge of the truth, or in transgression, having rejected the prophets.  
33 These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands,  
34 And all other principles of the gospel that were necessary for them to know in order to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.  
35 And so it was made known among the dead, both small and great, the unrighteous as well as the faithful, that redemption had been wrought through the sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross.

Why is it essential that the spirits in prison be taught the fullness of the gospel?

(to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit)

Amplifying what Peter taught, “that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

George Q. Cannon

"He descended into [the spirit world], and He there, doubtless, chose His ministers, the men who had the authority of the Holy Priesthood, and set them to the same labor that was commenced on the earth, the labor of preaching His everlasting Gospel to all the spirit world, to the millions of spirits who had died either in disobedience to the Gospel of Christ, or in ignorance of that Gospel, never having heard the sound of it... In the authority and power of the everlasting Priesthood the servants of God have been calling upon the inhabitants of that world to repent and believe in Jesus... [and] be willing to obey every ordinance and every law that is necessary, and say in the spirit, 'Oh, if I were in the flesh I would be baptized for the remission of my sins; I would have hands laid upon me for the reception of the Holy Ghost; I would be willing to obey every law of God, my Eternal Father, if I had the opportunity in the flesh of doing so.'" (JD, 26:77)

D&C 138:58-59

58 The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,  
59 And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation.

What you think it means - “after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions”?

Dallin H. Oaks

"Of course, we know from the scriptures that after our bodies die we continue to live as spirits in the spirit world. The scriptures also teach that



this spirit world is divided between those who have been 'righteous' or 'just' during life and those who have been wicked. They also describe how some faithful spirits teach the gospel to those who have been wicked or rebellious. Most important, modern revelation reveals that the work of salvation goes forward in the spirit world and although we are urged not to procrastinate our repentance during mortality we are taught that some repentance is possible there." (CR, Oct. 2019)

### Pre-Ordained to Do the Work

D&C 138:53-56

53 The Prophet Joseph Smith, and my father, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and other choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work,

54 Including the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead, were also in the spirit world.

55 I observed that they were also among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God.

56 Even before they were born, they, with many others, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men.

What does this teach us about the pre-existence?

Russell M. Nelson

"Before the foundation of the world, each of us existed as spirit children with our Father in Heaven. Among us were noble and great men foreordained to bear the priesthood. Abraham, Jeremiah, Joseph Smith, and others were destined to become prophets of God. Also foreseen was that the blood of prophets would be shed in this holy cause. The manner of conferring the priesthood was to come down from the fathers 'from the beginning of time,... even... before the foundation of the earth.' (Abr 1:3.)" (CR, April 2002)

Peter M. Johnson

"We are 'choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work.' President Russell M. Nelson declared: 'You were taught in the spirit world to prepare you for anything and everything you would encounter during this latter part of these latter days.' That teaching endures within you!" (CR, Oct. 2019)

D&C 138:57

57 I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those

who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead.

What is the work of the faithful members of this dispensation, in this life and the next?

Dallin H. Oaks

"What we do know about the spirit world is that the Father's and the Son's work of salvation continues there. Our Savior initiated the work of declaring liberty to the captives and that work continues as worthy and qualified messengers continue to preach the gospel, including repentance, to those who still need its cleansing effect....

"The duty of each of us is to teach the doctrine of the restored gospel, keep the commandments, love and help one another, and do the work of salvation in the holy temples." (CR, Oct. 2019)