

REALITY AND SCRIPTURAL HISTORY

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No nation has been more greatly blessed than has the United States. We live in a land which has been called choice above all other lands by divine pronouncement. The Lord has watched over it with a jealous care and has commanded its people to serve him lest his wrath be kindled against them and his blessings be withdrawn. Our government came into existence through divine guidance.¹

—Joseph Fielding Smith

Every blessing is founded upon obedience to a particular law (D&C 130:20–21) and in order to retain that blessing, there are always responsibilities required of the recipient. This is seen throughout the scripture in phrases such as “it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor” (D&C 88:81). Another verse often quoted is, “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3). Responsibilities exist for all blessings obtained from God, and the concepts of freedom that are inherent within the human mind and heart exist because man was created in the image of God. It is requisite that *faith* and *freedom* exist hand in hand, thus each would require individual effort, energy, and responsibility to ensure the freedoms that make a chosen faith possible. All faiths require certain freedoms to be maintained to exist. It seems for the most part that history chronicles the details of wars between nations, resulting with restricted freedoms. For liberty to continue to exist, history books should be searched for the examples of faith, freedom, and revolution to give hope to the future.

The Past, Present, and the Future

History is the only clear and faithful judge of the future. Often intellectuals or the educated have noble ideas of what is best for the common man who might not have the time or money to dream of a perfect Utopian lifestyle and community. These utopians, thinking they know and understand better often neglect the voices from the past. Dreamers have visions of the future while ignoring or forgetting the lessons of history. The realist must look at the past to get direction and guidance for the future. The scriptures tell the history of fallen people to provide a hope of a better future—not by the unconscious dream, but a conscious recognition of the attitudes and character of man. The faults and failings of man must first be understood before the modifications needed might take place.

¹ Joseph Fielding Smith. “Blessed Is the Nation Whose God Is the Lord,” *Improvement Era* (May 1943) 46:274–75, 312–13; also in *Conference Report* (April 1943) 11–16.

The history of the individual is almost never a political history. However, the enduring changes are often made by an unsatisfied person or remnant group objecting to the injustice perpetrated by governments on the common man, as in the case of the Revolutionary War with England.

The individual is fraught with the ‘crisis of reality’ rather than abstract thoughts and dreams of a ‘Utopian’ existence like Shangri-La. Few know more about the realities of life and faith than those who struggle for the necessities of survival each day. Man was cast out of the Garden of Eden and confined to deal with the realities of life ‘in sorrow, by the sweat of his brow...all the days of his life’ (Moses 4:23–25). The lone and dreary world forces all people into survival mode. The federally-funded ‘*think tanks*’ seek to create a new ‘Garden of Eden’ for mankind, where man can rely on the false god of government to provide ‘free fruit’ from every tree for everyone to partake, without any responsibility to ‘dress and keep it.’ From such idealistic dreaming come the theories of communism and socialism, where decisions are made not to help and teach man how to produce more, but instead the government-sponsored dreamer devises schemes to *take* from the individual what he produces (thus destroying his desire to be more productive) to fund the promised yet impossible dreams of this Utopian state.

The “reality of life” is the struggle to survive while seeking a means to acquire food, shelter, and safety for one’s self and family. The first man Adam was told as he was forcibly driven from his blissful lifestyle where all his needs were met, that it was for “his sake” and for his benefit that life would be difficult, and that hard work would be required to survive the fall from Eden into mortal telestial life. Today, this is the reality of life, from the steel mills and factories of the metropolis to the family farms of suburbia and beyond.

The comforting promise that temporal life would not last forever and that man would eventually be released from it, was revealed to Adam as he left the Garden of Eden. This promise is found in the words “dust thou wast, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Moses 4:25). Man has known from the beginning that there will be an eventual and inevitable surrender of mortality. Death is a release, because death is an event we live through. How true ring the words of the LDS hymn as we sing, ‘and should we die before our journeys’ through, oh happy day, all is well.’

The release and retirement of the crisis of life is often fearfully postponed as long as possible. However, death is inevitable.

Death is promised to all as a welcome release from the daily concerns of life. It is the great equalizer of all humanity which respects no individual and which no common or royal blood can escape. The spirit is eternal and cannot cease to exist; therefore, death is an event that we live through as we move from the realities of life into the true and actual reality of eternity. As the ancients understood the fact that God exists, they recognized that a *true reality* can only exist in the realm of the sacred—in this life or the next. It is the religious life, the recognition of the sacred, the spiritual being who has contact and commitment with deity, that lives in the *true reality*. Faith in a ‘sacred reality’ will give an understanding and purpose that will give reason and meaning to this temporal life, as well as meaning to the next adventure we embark upon—death. An understanding and freedom to express one’s relationship with the *true reality* of the sacred provides the answers needed to make the realities of life bearable. Regardless of denomination, the reality of faith (the existence of God) and religion becomes a key factor for all action and all freedoms hoped for by the individual, which freedoms should be protected by the state.

Realities of Life

The intellectual has time to dream, formulating visions of what is not only better—but best—for all. One of the great thinkers of our time, Whittaker Chambers, has written about the basic and fundamental issues that should be the primary concern of the individual and the state:

The vision inspires. The crisis impels. The working man is chiefly moved by the crisis. The educated man is chiefly moved by the vision. The working man, living upon a mean margin of life, can afford few visions—even practical visions. An educated man, peering from the Harvard Yard, or any college campus, upon a world in chaos, finds in the vision the two certainties for which the mind of man tirelessly seeks: *a reason to live and a reason to die*. No other faith of our time presents them with the same practical intensity. That is why Communism is the central experience of the first half of the 20th century, and may be its final experience—unless the free world...overcomes its crisis by discovering, in suffering and pain, a power of faith which will provide man's mind, at the same intensity, with the same two certainties: *a reason to live and a reason to die*' *If it fails, this will be the century of the great social wars. If it succeeds, this will be the century of the great wars of faith.*²

Chambers recognizes that a reason to live and a reason to die are answers that must be discovered if individual faith and freedom are to exist. The reasons to live and the reasons to die can only be founded in a faith based in “the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12). Failure is the only option if the individual or culture place their faith in the intellectual abilities of man, forcing an absence of faith in God. It is upon the power of man—rather than God—upon which Communism, Marxism, and Socialism are founded, taking away any reason for a life beyond survival only (like an animal). Any program, platform, or organization that poses a threat to the recognition and existence of God and the sacred has proven in the past to take away the fundamental freedoms to exist—a reason to live and a reason to die beyond the survival of the fittest.

There is “no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9); therefore, history holds the answers and judgments of faith, socioeconomic policies, and governments. The first is the individual and his faith which might reside in either man or God. The second is the individual and his community of interaction, securing his survival and the survival of those around him. The last, the political machine which guarantees and protects the freedoms necessary for the other two to exist in a free society. One need only look to history to see what works and what does not. One sure thing that history teaches best is that “there has never been a society or a nation established without God; but history is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that became indifferent to God, and then died.”³

History

There are those who seek to close the history books of man's experiences—his successes and shortcomings, the adventures and embarrassments, the good and the evil he has done, even his inhumanity to man. If these things are forgotten, man is destined to repeat the grossest failures of the past that he implacably seeks to forget. It is a guaranteed failure in the prospect to change the future for the better if an individual, group, or nation wants to ignore the most violent past of man. Every age and every culture has within itself accepted and unaccepted cultural mores. These mores and morals might be admired or abhorred by another people or in a different time. There is no reason to strike the undesired record from the history books or classroom for the sake

² Edwin J. Feulner Jr., *The March of Freedom*, [Dallas:Spence Publishing Company, 1998], 229.

³ *Ibid*, 235.

of being politically correct or masking historical intolerance. To hide the prejudices of history displays an unscrupulous and immoral concern for the future. Wisdom is a bi-product of experience, and experience can only be acquired by personally feeling the pain and suffering connected to the realities of life. These realities are visible only by recognizing and remembering the successes and failures of our own mortality, and those of history.

The full understanding of history—in its context and in all its glory or depredation—can only accomplish the desired change of the futurist thinker. That which ignites the kindling of change is the perpetual flame of history. This change may only take place if real history is viewed through the lens of a moral respect for the liberties and freedoms of the individual. Real freedom and liberty is like the concept and doctrine of agency described in the scriptures.

The exalting power of agency is founded in the law of opposition. Agency or liberty can exist “only in the opportunity for doing good, but this is so only when it is also an opportunity for doing wrong.”⁴ Exaltation is a function of agency—that of choosing to do good in the presence of evil without coercion toward one or the other. Satan presented a plan which would leave no one without exaltation. But this plan was founded on destroying the “agency of man” (Moses 4:3), his freedoms, and his liberties. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches that ‘without freedom and agency there is no existence’ (D&C 93:30–31). Too often man seeks to limit this agency and liberty with intentions that might be for the better or for the worse. These limitations of liberty can only be founded upon one’s judgment of another’s choice. F.A. Hayek wrote:

How we value another person will necessarily depend on what his values are. But believing in freedom means that we do not regard ourselves as the ultimate judges of another person’s values, that we do not feel entitled to prevent him from pursuing ends which we disapprove so long as he does not infringe the equally protected sphere of others.⁵

Those who might seek to sever their own culture and society from its founding roots and traditions for the sake of an ‘abstract efficiency or equality’ will eventually obliterate the source and sense of loyalty to a country founded on the principles of freedom.⁶ We *cannot* forget this nor *should* we forget. This is why the history of Lehi leaving Jerusalem with the eventual inheritance of the promised land, and the promises about that land, are discussed throughout this thousand-year history. This book of scripture begins with destruction and ends with destruction. The prophets of the Book of Mormon felt that people—both in antiquity and in the future—should know these things for *both* their spiritual and temporal welfare. The people who would live on the same land as Lehi would have the same issues of faith, family, and freedom. The Book of Mormon, written by inspiration, was not preserved by the power of God only to be read as a gospel primer, or as a collection of stories on faith. It is a divine handbook for a true and meaningful relationship with God, containing instructions for the freedom and peace for those privileged to receive the book and the land. And, as discussed, privileges come with responsibilities.

Technology and invention have done nothing to change the “realities” of life that are permanently at the top of the list of things to do. No modern convenience—as exciting as it may be, and no matter how digital and advanced we might become—can invalidate the intrinsic

⁴ *Ibid*, 74.

⁵ *Ibid*, 74.

⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

realities of mankind. Lying at the core or the center of the soul are freedom, individuality, the sense of community, the sanctity of the family, the health and supremacy of the conscience, and faith (or the spiritual view of life and death).⁷ These are concerns that have existed in man in every age, despite what some might consider the conveniences of civilization (such as computers, communication, commerce and transportation). What could be done without these amenities? How could people live without them? What did people *do* before cell phones, texting, and e-mail? These are modern-day major concerns of youth and—to an extent—a clueless society. The technologies of today are but fleeting moments of sophistication that will, sooner than later, fill our landfills like the once-cherished black and white TV, the transistor radio, the rotary phone, and 8-track tapes.

Humanity with its divine blessings can only begin when the answers to those questions that affect the realities of life are seriously sought. The matters of lasting importance have always been those of freedom, faith, and family, each indelibly connected to the other. These should always be the matter at hand for the individual and the government that rules him. Like a paradox, when a government rejects the faith in God upon which its freedom is founded, the spiritual and temporal stability and security of the family is in peril, which will consequently affect the stability of the government, and the freedoms it should protect. History has proven that governments, national charters, and constitutions cannot exist very long unless they are founded upon the principles that protect individual freedoms, including those of faith and religion. Any government (such as communism) that is not founded on faith and freedom can only exist by becoming a military state where the enforcement of law and belief must be accomplished under the threat of violence and repercussion.

Spiritual sobriety is a result of one's ability to constantly focus on the serious concerns of faith and life. "That we do always remember him" (Moroni 5:2) is our weekly covenant, yet the drunken stupor and attraction to technology can leave one wanting. Like drugs that are used take one's psyche off reality, the presumed 'civilized' recreations—such as Ultimate Fighting, games of competition, reality shows, and the spiritual anesthesia of prime-time TV and entertainment—may leave one's mind and soul bereft of the spiritual realities of life. The excitement of 'virtual eavesdropping' and 'cyber gossip walls' lure minds of all ages to be in constant contact with everyone for no apparent reason or purpose other than the supposed need to be constantly communicating. The Lord warned parents of this dispensation that there are more important things for all to think about as "their children are also growing up in wickedness; they also seek not earnestly the riches of eternity..." (D&C 68:31). Many individuals have made the choice to live without essential religious direction, wandering through life as a spiritual zombie. History is full of examples of the 'Day(s) of the Dead,' describing those who become spiritual zombies, obsessed with the flesh of entertainment and recreation. The fall of cultures and nations, as history and scripture so poignantly describe, is a result of the important realities of faith, freedom, and family being forgotten by those who stare blindly in the Zoramite mirror. Alma described in seven words the very purpose of life. Leaving no time to waste, he explained that *this life is "a time to repent and serve God"* (Alma 42:4). If this life is a probationary state, and a time to prepare to meet God, then the misuse of time is sin.

The "Keystone"

What are the responsibilities of the Latter-day Saint with respect to their freedom, faith, and family? A concern and question that should be addressed first is, 'what is the attitude of the

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Latter-day Saint in respect to their life and their community?’ At the center of the Mormon culture is the ‘Church,’ and the activities that keep its members close to the Church. Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon was the “keystone to our religion.” If this is true, it must then be asked, ‘is the Book of Mormon the “keystone” of our life?’ The Prophet continued his statement about the Book of Mormon by adding that “a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book.”⁸

The Book of Mormon addresses the attitudes that will exist in our day, as Nephi spoke of those in the last days who consider and call themselves Zion. Nephi concluded that the proclamation that “all is well in Zion,” and “yea, Zion prospereth, all is well” (2 Nephi 28:21) is the harbinger of apostasy. This apostate declaration of the spiritual prosperity of Zion might be declared personally, within one’s family, or in the community. The greatest power of evil lies in the indifferent heart and mind that think or declare, ‘All is well in my own Zion.’ The Lord declared, “I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and *not individually*” (D&C 1:30).

The apathetic sense of temporal and spiritual security will definitely result in the loss of freedoms that threaten captivity and serve to control. The irrevocable law of freedom is one of responsibility. In Jeremiah 7, the prophet Jeremiah taught about this same false security to the people of Judah, who felt protected in their religious and political apathy by declaring ‘all is well in Zion’ because there was a temple in their midst. This false sense of security was founded upon their pride, which itself was based upon their knowledge that they were the children of Abraham—the chosen people—and they had a temple nearby. It was this spurious spiritual and temporal security that initiated the Lord to lead Lehi and his family away from both the Temple and Jerusalem, which was also the city of Jeremiah. Lehi fled from the false sense of security found in the spiritual Babylon of Jerusalem.

To aid and help us resist this same Babylon in the last days, the Book of Mormon was forged on the very gold ore found in the promised land, and its plates filled by divine revelation with details of the events from history that would mirror the future. The golden plates were then buried in the earth from which they came until a chosen servant of the Lord was prepared to translate and teach a people who had come out of captivity seeking religious freedom. Along with the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the record describes in detail with many historic examples that shout loudly how not to be taken captive spiritually or temporally by the wickedness found in spiritual Babylon.

The Book of Mormon opens and closes with destruction perpetrated by the spiritual captivity of that same Babylon which Lehi fled for the safety of his faith, family, and freedom. The Nephites cry from the dust of history to those Latter-day Saints who ‘hath an ear to hear,’ as their words and lives explain, in a historical context, how to secure the spiritual and temporal protection of the essential freedoms espoused by the Title of Liberty. ‘Out of the dust,’ and for a “wise purpose,” it serves as a handbook—explained by scriptural history—on how to avoid the same wickedness and sorrowful end of those who once “knew of Christ” (Jacob 4:4). This is the hope of the future to the alert and faithful reader.

There is no security in the future unless we understand the past, and our hope lies in the message that speaks loudly from the dust as delivered by the fathers. It is a natural tendency to reject this unpopular and painful message of the Book of Mormon by assuming that we are members of the true church and therefore a chosen and righteous people. The Doctrine and Covenants warned of

⁸ *TPJS*, 194.

this sense of security, as it declared that “there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God; Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:32–34). The wake-up call has been issued by the Book of Mormon, and part of this ‘call’ is a non-denominational message that needs to be delivered to all those who are living in the promised land. This can only be done by those who know what that message is, and who understand that this Book of Mormon is truly the keystone of the spiritual and temporal security for our faith, freedoms, and families.