The Importance of Always Seeing the Big Picture  

Course Introduction

Guiding Questions

You should be able to answer these questions after reading through this assignment:

- What is the ultimate purpose of a dispensation of the fulness of times?
- Why do those of past dispensations of the gospel look forward with “joyful anticipation to the dispensation in which we live”?
- What are we taught about those held in reserve to come forth in the latter-days? Why is this important to know?
- What is meant by “the big picture”?
- Why is it important to always keep in mind?

Introduction

“We are making our appearance on the stage of mortality in the greatest dispensation of the gospel ever given to mankind,” declared Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “and we need to make the most of it.” (“Preparing for the Second Coming,” New Era, Dec. 2013, 2)

Elder David A. Bednar, of the Twelve Apostles, explained why this dispensation is “a truly distinctive dispensation.” The name given this is dispensation is “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Jacob 5:71-75; D&C 27:13; 4328-30; 128:18; 138:53). What does this name imply? The answer requires that we first understand what a dispensation is and what is the goal of a dispensation. Elder Bednar explained:

A gospel dispensation is a period of time in which the necessary priesthood authority, ordinances, and doctrinal knowledge are found on the earth to implement the Father’s plan of salvation for His children.

Under the direction of God’s authorized servants the gospel is dispensed to Heavenly Father’s children on earth. The first fruit of the gospel is personal salvation from the burden of sin. This is attained by adherence to the first principles and ordinances of the gospel by which the atoning powers of Jesus Christ are accessed. This is only the beginning. The greatest fruits of the gospel is the creation of Zion—a celestial community—which is first created within the basic unit of God’s kingdom, marriage and family, and, second, the uniting together of families in a Zion community where people live together in love, unity, and harmony. Like the power to help us overcome sin is attained through the atonement, so the power we need to become a Zion community also comes through Christ’s atonement made available through temple ordinances. Zion is the ultimate objective of a gospel dispensation.

Beginning with Adam there have been several gospel dispensations: Adam, followed by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, and many others.

Apostasy from the truth occurred in each previous dispensation. However, the work of salvation that was commenced but not completed in those earlier eras continues into the final dispensation. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that for this reason, the rolling forward of the latter-day glory, even the dispensation of the fulness of times, “is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; it is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [2007], 186; emphasis added)

Thus, the dispensation of the fulness of times will bring to a fulfillment what all other prior dispensations began. Further, those in all prior dispensations will be joined together with the Zion created in our dispensation forming one community of Zion—the family of God! Elder Bednar stated

In this greatest and last of all gospel dispensations, “a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. (From “To Sweep the Earth as With a Flood,” delivered on August 19, 2014, during Campus Education Week at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. lds.org/prophets-and-apostles; emphasis added)

This last dispensation of the gospel began with the restoration of the gospel through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805-44) and will continue through the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the end of the Millennium. The work of this dispensation will take place in two phases: the first phase is to get a people ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the Millennium which will follow. This is achieved by gathering Israel to the gospel where they can obtained spiritual rebirth and create Zion community—a world wide Zion! Then, during the Millennium the second phase begins with the primary objective of getting Zion ready for the celestial kingdom where they will dwell in the presence of Heavenly Father and Mother.

What will be achieved during the final dispensation is nothing short of miraculous. To the Church in his day, Joseph Smith, the head of this last dispensation, addressed the magnitude of this great work in these words:

The work of the Lord in these last days, is one of vast magnitude and
almost beyond the comprehension of mortals. Its glories are past description, and its grandeur unsurpassable. It is the theme which has animated the bosom of prophets and righteous men from the creation of the world down through every succeeding generation to the present time; and it is truly the dispensation of the fullness of times, when all things which are in Christ Jesus, whether in heaven or on the earth, shall be gathered together in Him, and when all things shall be restored, as spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began; for in it will take place the glorious fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers, while the manifestations of the power of the Most High will be great, glorious, and sublime. 

... The work which has to be accomplished in the last days is one of vast importance, and will call into action the energy, skill, talent, and ability of the Saints, so that it may roll forth with that glory and majesty described by the prophet; and will consequently require the concentration of the Saints, to accomplish works of such magnitude and grandeur. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [2007], 512-3; emphasis added)

In order to better understand the purpose of the dispensation of the fullness of times, our day must be seen in light of the “the great plan of the Eternal God” (Al. 34:9). Further, it helps to see what happened in prior dispensations. In other words, we must be able to see “the big picture” and what our role is in this picture.

The focus of this reading assignment concerns the importance of always seeing the big picture of Heavenly Father’s plan. Further, the necessity of know what has already happened and what is yet to happen to bring about Heavenly Father’s purposes in the end.

Spirits Held in Reserve for the Last Dispensation

Before examining the importance of seeing the big picture it is important to know that those in this dispensation were held in reserve to come forth at this time to carry on the remarkable work that will be achieved in this dispensation. Consider the following statements:

President Joseph F. Smith (1838-1918)

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 fullness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work... (D&C 138:53)

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899-1994)

For nearly six thousand years, God has held you in reserve to make your appearance in the final days before the second coming of the Lord. . . While our generation will be comparable in wickedness to the days of Noah, when the Lord cleansed the earth by flood, there is a major difference this time. It is that God has saved for the final inning some of His strongest children, who will help bear off the kingdom triumphantly. That is where you come in, for you are the generation that must be prepared to meet your God. ...

In all ages prophets have looked down through the corridors of time to our day. Billions of the deceased and those yet to be born have their eyes on us. Make no mistake about it-you are a marked generation. There has never been more expected of the faithful in such a short period of time than there is of us. Never before on the face of this earth have the forces of evil and the forces of good been as well organized. Now is the great day of the devil's power. But now is also the great day of the Lord’s power, with the greatest number ever of priesthood holders on the earth. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson [1988], 104-5)

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972)

Our young people are among the most blessed and favored of our Father's children. They are the nobility of heaven, a choice and chosen generation who have a divine destiny. Their spirits have been reserved to come forth in this day when the gospel is on earth, and when the Lord needs valiant servants to carry on his great latter-day work. (Conference Report, Apr. 1970, p. 6)

Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

• You are one of God’s noble and great spirits, held in reserve to come to earth at this time. (See D&C 86:8—11.) In your pre mortal life you were appointed to help prepare the world for the great gathering of souls that will precede the Lord’s second coming. (See 1 Ne. 15:18; 3 Ne. 20:25.) (“Choices,” Ensign, Nov. 1990, p. 7)

• A true millennial is a man or woman whom God trusted enough to send to earth during the most compelling dispensation in the history of this world. (Stand as True Millennials,”Ensign, Oct. 2016, 24)

In a talk given in the priesthood leadership session (the session for general authority and other invited leaders) of April 1984 General Conference of the Church, Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926-2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of the difficult age experienced by the reserved spirits coming in the present age of the world:

We have long heard, and believed, that the Lord has reserved special spirits to come forth in the last days of the last dispensation. The Church’s rising generation of young men and women are a part of that vanguard. Reserved by the Lord for this time, they must now be preserved by parents and prepared for their special moment in human history! They have been held back to come forth at this time, but now they need to be pushed forward to meet their rendezvous. . . . this rising generation is the first generation to be reared in a time when society’s other institutions, previously supportive of certain moral standards, have been largely neutralized, or worse, secularized. This rising generation, shorn of such external support systems, must therefore believe “because of the word” and behave because they believe! (See Alma 32:13—14.) (“Unto the Rising Generation,” Ensign, Apr. 1985, 8; underling added)

The Necessity of Seeing the Big Picture

Elder Maxwell concluded the above quote with the statement that we must “believe ‘because of the word.’” We see in the present age of the Church a “sifting” that is occurring. President Benson saw this happening in the Church in his day and foresaw it increasing in our day:

There is a real sifting going on in the Church, and it is going to become more pronounced with the passing of time. It will sift the wheat from the tares, because we face some difficult days, the like of which we have never experienced in our lives. And those days are going to require faith and testimony and family unity, the like of which we have never had. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson [1988], 104-5)

Holding fast to the iron rod or the word of God is necessary to withstand the winds of adversity. And that word always is taught within the context of the “great plan of the Eternal God.” Alma taught that when Adam and Eve were first taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it was within the context of the plan of salvation.

Read Alma 12:28-32. Watch for the word “plan.” What did the angels of God teach Adam and Eve before they were given commandments to follow that would qualify them to come back into the presence of God?

God, who both “know[s] the end from the beginning” (Abr. 2:8) and has “Declared the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10), has also said, “I would that ye should . . . walk uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation” (D&C 46:7; emphasis added). Through latter-day prophets, we have learned that “end of
According to verse 56, what did Adam tell those who had gathered to this very important meeting?

- The Vision Given Enoch

In the meeting at Adam-ondi-Ahman, a young man was present who was forordained to play an important role in Heavenly Father’s plan. His name was Enoch. He was given a gospel dispensation that resulted in translation of his city, the city of Enoch. During His ministry, Enoch was shown a “big picture” vision.

*Scan and Read Moses 6:35-36 then 7:2-67. Can Make a list of each major event Enoch was shown. Enoch lived about 3000 B.C. Try to make a brief time line of the events shown Enoch?

- The Big Picture Discourse Given to the Nephites

In 3 Nephi, Mormon gives an account of the Savior’s appearance over a three day time period to the ancient descendants of Lehi in Bountiful. Included in this account are some extremely important teachings—these are found in 3 Nephi 11-25. Upon the conclusion of these teachings, the Savior then explained the “big picture” to the Nephites:

*Read 3 Nephi 26:1-6. What events did Christ tell them of according to verse 3? Then, according to verses 4-5, what did events did He tell them of?

To the Nephites, the Savior quoted passages of scripture from many different books in the Bible teaching them what was to come. In fact, Mormon summed up how the Savior taught in this way:

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had expounded all scriptures in one, which they had written, he commanded them that they should teach the things which he had expounded unto them. (3 Nephi 23:14)

“All the scriptures in one.” Mormon does not expound what this fully means. However, in this course, we using passages of scripture from all four standard works, as well as the teachings from latter-day prophets, we will study the big picture of God’s eternal plan—it will all be put “in one” that we might understand our role in this last dispensation in preparing the world for the coming of Jesus Christ.