

Brigham Young University 1981

Speeches

The Three Pillars of Eternity

BRUCE R. MCCONKIE

17 February 1981

speeches.byu.edu
(801) 422-2299

More than a thousand individual speeches downloadable for free.
Purchase books, DVDs, CDs, MP3CDs, and more
for your personal library. Also use our innovative custom features
for a collection or gift unique in all the world!

The Three Pillars of Eternity

BRUCE R. MCCONKIE

I know, as do we all, that the things of God can be understood only by the power of the Holy Spirit. And I pray that we may receive a mighty outpouring of that Spirit as we consider the three pillars of eternity—the three great eternal verities upon which salvation rests.

My purpose is to take the three greatest events that have ever occurred in all eternity and show how they are interwoven to form one grand plan of salvation.

If we can gain an understanding of them, then the whole eternal scheme of things will fall into place, and we will be in a position to work out our salvation. If we do not build our house of salvation on a true foundation, we will never make the spiritual progress that will prepare us to enter the Eternal Presence.

Three Great Events

The three pillars of eternity, the three events, preeminent and transcendent above all others, are the creation, the fall, and the atonement. These three are the foundations upon which all things rest. Without any one of them all things would lose their purpose and meaning, and the plans and designs of Deity would come to naught.

If there had been no creation, we would not be, neither the earth, nor any form of life upon

its face. All things, all the primal elements, would be without form and void. God would have no spirit children; there would be no mortal probation; and none of us would be on the way to immortality and eternal life.

If there had been no fall of man, there would not be a mortal probation. Mortal man would not be, nor would there be animals or fowls or fishes or life of any sort upon the earth. And, we repeat, none of us would be on the way to immortality and eternal life.

If there had been no atonement of Christ, all things would be lost. The purposes of creation would vanish away. Lucifer would triumph over men and become the captain of their souls. And, we say it again, none of us would be on the way to immortality and eternal life.

And so I now say: Come and let us reason together; let us reason as did righteous men of old that we may come to understanding.

Bruce R. McConkie was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 17 February 1981.

Come and hear us declare sound doctrine; let us declare it plainly and in power as do the angels of God in heaven.

Come and let us testify of those things which God has made known to us; let us testify as do those whose souls are afire with the Spirit and who know by revelation of the truth and verity of their spoken word.

The Atonement

Let us gaze first at a scene of sorrow and suffering in a garden called Gethsemane, the garden of the oil press. There, outside Jerusalem's walls, on the now sacred side of Olivet, we see eight of the Twelve huddled at the garden gate. Inside the garden are Peter, James, and John. It is night, and the eyes of all are heavy with sleep.

About a stone's cast removed from the three we see the Son of God in sorrow and agony beyond compare. He has fallen on his face. We hear his pleading words: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

We see great goutts of blood drop from every pore. An angel—surely it is mighty Michael himself—comes down from heaven and strengthens him. He trembles because of pain and suffers in both body and spirit. He comes off triumphant; and in a way incomprehensible to us, he bears the sins of all men on conditions of repentance.

Now let our gaze turn to Golgotha. There, at the place of a skull, we see him again, crucified between two thieves. It is noon, and his mangled and scourged body has already hung on that accursed tree for some three hours.

Again it is the hour of atonement. The sun is darkened; for three long hours there is "darkness over all the earth" (Luke 23:44), as all the agonies and sufferings of Gethsemane return. Then the victory is won; the ransom is paid; the atonement is accomplished.

Some thirty-eight or forty hours later—after three days as the Jews counted time—we see him by a garden tomb. He has risen in glorious immortality. Clothed with immortality and eternal life, he gently restrains one of the beloved Marys from embracing him with the same intimacy that had once prevailed.

Soon angelic choirs will fill the heavens as the redeemed sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

And thus it is that salvation is in Christ, that his atoning sacrifice is the heart and core and center of revealed religion, and that he—in Gethsemane of sorrowful memory and on the cross of Calvary—put into full operation all the terms and conditions of his Father's plan.

He is the resurrection and the life. He is the Redeemer of the world and the Savior of men. He "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). It was his work and his glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. And his is the only name given under heaven whereby man may be saved.

If there had been no atonement of Christ, there would be no resurrection, no breaking of the bands of death, no coming forth from the grave.

If there had been no atonement, there would be no remission of sins; no return to the presence of God; no salvation of any sort, kind, or nature; no eternal life; no exaltation; no continuation of the family unit in eternity.

If there were no atonement of Christ, all men would be subject to "that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment" (2 Nephi 9:19).

If there were no atonement of Christ, "our spirits" would have become "like unto" Lucifer's, "and we become devils, angels to a

devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself" (2 Nephi 9:9).

If there were no atonement of Christ, all men would be damned everlastingly, all would be sons of perdition, and the whole purpose of God and his eternal plan of salvation would utterly fail.

All things center in, revolve around, are anchored to, and are built upon the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no language given to men or angels to proclaim these truths with the power and verity and dignity that should attend them. Let it be blazoned in burning fire through all the sidereal heavens that salvation is in Christ and comes because of his atoning sacrifice.

Now this atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ—grand and infinite, glorious and eternal as it is—does not stand alone. It is not simply a sudden blaze of light in a universe of darkness and despair. It is not by itself alone a great sun rising in celestial splendor to dispel the gloom of endless night. It is not merely a manifestation of the grace of an infinite God toward his fallen children.

However much the atonement may be and is all these things—and more!—yet it does not stand alone. It is not a child born without parents. It has roots; it has a reason for being; it came because other events called it forth.

The Fall

The atonement is part of the eternal plan of the Father. It came at the appointed time, according to the will of the Father, to do for man that which could not have been done in any other way. The atonement is the child of the fall, and the fall is the father of the atonement. Neither of them, without the other, could have brought to pass the eternal purposes of the Father.

The fall of Adam and the atonement of Christ are linked together—inseparably, everlastingly, never to be parted. They are as much

a part of the same body as are the head and the heart, and each plays its part in the eternal scheme of things.

The fall of Adam brought temporal and spiritual death into the world, and the atonement of Christ ransomed men from these two deaths by bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. This makes the fall as essential a part of the plan of salvation as the very atonement itself.

There are, in fact, five things that came into being and continue to exist because of the fall. None of these things would have existed if there had been no fall, and all of them are essential parts of the divine plan of salvation. They are:

1. *Temporal death.* This is the natural death; it occurs when body and spirit separate; it results in corruption and decay. Because of the atonement of Christ all men will be raised from corruption to incorruption, from mortality to immortality, thence to live everlastingly in a resurrected state.

2. *Spiritual death.* This is death as pertaining to the things of the Spirit. It is death as pertaining to things of righteousness. It is to be cast out of the presence of the Lord. It is a way of life which is in opposition to that of the Father of us all. Because of the atonement, because the Lord Jesus bore our sins on conditions of repentance, we have power to gain eternal life, which is spiritual life, which is a life of righteousness, which is life in the presence of our God.

3. *Mortality.* Mortal life comes because of the fall. If there had been no fall, there would be no mortal life of any sort on earth. Mortal life is life where there is death. Death must enter the world to bring mortality into being.

4. *Procreation.* Before the fall there was no procreation. I repeat, for thus saith the Holy Word, before the fall there was no procreation. Adam and Eve, in their Edenic state, could not have children, nor, as we shall see, could any

form of life when first placed on the newly created paradisiacal earth.

5. *A probationary estate.* We are here to be tried and tested, to see if we will believe the truths of salvation and keep the commandments while we walk by faith. After the fall men became carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature, and the plan of salvation calls upon them to put off these worldly snares and to put on Christ.

Now, lest there be any sliver of misunderstanding about any of this, let us reason together on all these things as did they of old. Indeed, let us use the very words they used as they are found in the holy scriptures.

“Now is Christ risen from the dead,” Paul said as he testified of the atonement. “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” Adam brought death, and if he had not fallen there would be no death; and Christ brought the resurrection, and, if there had been no atonement, there would be no resurrection. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).

Moroni linked the fall and the atonement together in this way. God, he said, “created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ.” It is just that simple; the fall is the source and cause and reason for the atonement. “And because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man” (Mormon 9:12). Salvation is in Christ!

“And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ,” men “are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep” (Mormon 9:13).

What did the angel say to King Benjamin? He said, Christ’s “blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam” (Mosiah 3:11). We are descendants of Adam; we all have a common father.

He said, “As in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins” (Mosiah 3:16). The blessings of the fall have passed upon all men; all can be redeemed because Adam fell and Christ came.

He said, “Salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:18). There is no other source of salvation from the fall than that which comes through Christ.

He said, “The natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19).

Thus the natural man, which is Adam, is conquered by the perfect man, which is Christ; and thus “all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel” (Third Article of Faith). And now, what saith our great and good friend Lehi about all these things?

He saith that the Redeemer “cometh to bring salvation unto men. . . . And the way is prepared [for him] from the fall of man, and salvation is free” (2 Nephi 2:3–4). The fall is the foundation upon which the atonement rests.

He saith that “after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth” (2 Nephi 2:19). Their mortal probation and the trials and tests of mortality began after the fall.

He saith:

And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth. [2 Nephi 2:20]

Every living soul on earth is a descendant of Adam and Eve. God hath made of one blood all the nations of men.

He saith:

If Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. [2 Nephi 2:22]

If Adam had not fallen, he would be there today, six thousand years later, in all the glory and beauty of his immortal nature. Such is the word of holy writ.

And next—marvel of marvels and wonder of wonders—Lehi saith, “And all things which were created”—*all things* means all things; it includes animals and fishes and fowls and creeping things and plants; it includes dinosaurs and whales and ants; it means all things—

All things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. [2 Nephi 2:22]

There was, we repeat, no death in the world until after Adam fell. And there was, we repeat, no procreation until after the fall. And there was, we repeat, no mortality until after the fall.

And so Lehi continues, “And they”—Adam and Eve—“would have had no children” (2 Nephi 2:23).

And then, on the foundation so laid, while filled with light and guided by the Spirit, Lehi acclaimed:

Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy.

And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. [2 Nephi 2:25–26]

Truly, as Enoch said:

Because that Adam fell, we are; and by his fall came death; and we are made partakers of misery and woe. . . .

And men have become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and are shut out from the presence of God. [Moses 6:48, 49]

Truly, as Mother Eve said:

Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth to all the obedient. [Moses 5:11]

Truly, salvation comes because of the fall, and it is just as important to believe in the fall as it is to believe in the atonement, and, indeed, it is not possible to believe in the atonement without believing in the fall.

The Creation

Now, even as the atonement grows out of the fall, so the fall grows out of the creation. If all things had not been created in the very way in which they were created, there could have been no fall. If created things were to fall, they must be created in a higher state than the state they would be in after the fall. To fall is to go downward or forward, not upward.

And so it is that the revealed accounts of the creation of this earth and all things on the face thereof are accounts of the paradisiacal creation. They speak of the immortal state in which all things were first made; they are telling of created things in the day before death entered the world.

Our Tenth Article of Faith says: “We believe . . . that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.” When the Lord comes and the millennial era commences, there will be new heavens and a new earth; the earth will be renewed; it will become new again; and it will return to its paradisiacal state; it will become as it was in the Edenic day. And once again death as we know it will cease.

The accounts of the creation in Genesis 1 and Moses 2 are accounts of the paradisiacal or

Edenic creation. They are descriptive of a creation that antedated death and mortality and the fall. They speak of a creation in which—again these are Lehi’s words—

All things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. [2 Nephi 2:22]

That is, they would have so remained if there had been no fall.

Recapitulation

Now, we are speaking of the three pillars of heaven, of the three greatest events ever to occur in all eternity, of the three doctrines that are woven inseparably together to form the plan of salvation. We are speaking of the creation, the fall, and the atonement. And these things are one. And, be it noted, all things were created; all things fell; and all things are subject to the redeeming power of the Son of God.

I am not conscious of expressing a single thought or concept that has not already been said by the Brethren who have gone before. Almost every sentence I have uttered is a quotation or a paraphrase of something said by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Joseph F. Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith, Orson Pratt, or some other of the great theologians of our dispensation.

Many among us have no difficulty envisioning that the atonement is infinite and eternal and applies to all forms of life. They know that the revelations say in so many words that all forms of life both lived as spirit entities and will be resurrected—animals, fowls, fishes—all things are eternal in nature.

But some among us have not yet had it dawn upon them that all things fell and became mortal so they could be resurrected.

The early Brethren of our dispensation wrote these words:

The word atonement signifies deliverance, through the offering of a ransom, from the penalty of a broken law. . . . As effected by Jesus Christ, it signifies the deliverance, through his death and resurrection, of the earth and everything pertaining to it, from the power which death has obtained over them through the transgression of Adam. . . . Redemption from death, through the sufferings of Christ, is for all men, both the righteous and the wicked; for this earth, and for all things created upon it. [Compendium, pp. 8–9, cited in *Mormon Doctrine*, B. R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), pp. 64–65.]

Three Glorious Beings

When we speak of the creation, the fall, and the atonement, we are speaking of the works of Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael. We are talking of the doctrines which are stated or are implicit in our first three Articles of Faith. We need to come to a unity of faith as to the labors of each of these glorious beings.

Who is Elohim? He is God the Eternal Father. He is a glorified and exalted personage. He has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s. In the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He knows all things and has all power—not simply as pertaining to us or in some prescribed sphere or realm—but in the absolute, eternal, and unlimited sense. In the ultimate sense, he is the Creator. And anything you may have heard to the contrary, whether in the creeds of Christendom or the mouthings of intellectuals who, in their own eyes, know more than the Lord, is false.

Who is Michael? He is a spirit son of the great Elohim. Under Christ he led the armies of righteousness when there was war in heaven. Our revelations say that he “was the son of God” (Moses 6:22), that he was “the first flesh [the first mortal flesh] upon earth, the first man also” (Moses 3:7), and that he was “the first man of all men” (Moses 1:34). He is Adam our father; he is the presiding high priest over all

the earth. Under Christ, who is "the Holy One," he holds "the keys of salvation" (D&C 78:16). He is the only one by whom the fall came. And anything you may have heard to the contrary, from whatever source, is false.

Who is Jehovah? He is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Firstborn of the Father, the Savior and Redeemer. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He is the Only Begotten in the flesh, the only person ever born with a mortal mother and an immortal Father. He worked out the infinite and eternal atonement, ransomed men and all forms of life from the fall, and made the purposes of creation operative. Salvation is in him and comes to those

who believe and obey. And anything you may have heard to the contrary is false.

The truths relative to Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael are the greatest of all eternal verities. They wrap the creation, the fall, and the atonement into one grand plan of salvation. They are the gospel of God who is the Father. And of their truth the Holy Ghost bears witness.

God grant that we may all believe and know and understand the great eternal verities by which salvation comes and that, believing and knowing and understanding, we may so live as to gain eternal life. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.