

GOSPEL DOCTRINE LESSON 2 “THOU WAST CHOSEN BEFORE THOU WAST BORN”

(Abraham 3:11–12, 22–23, 24–28; Moses 4:1–4)

LESSON GOAL: To help us understand the doctrine of foreordination and our own responsibility to help build up the kingdom of God and bring souls to Christ.

Wendy W. Austin: Consider the differences between **predestination** and **foreordination**. Both teach that we have missions to fulfill while on earth and destinations at which to arrive. However, **PREDESTINATION** assumes that all is pre-planned from the very beginning, and **we have no real choice** in the matter. **FOREORDINATION**, on the other hand, is based upon **free will**. We have divine missions that we **CAN** fulfill, indeed, are entitled to fulfill while on earth, but **it is up to us to make the right choices, to map out the path by which we can accomplish these goals, in order to receive the heavenly reward that has been reserved for us.**

1. Abraham learns that in the premortal life many spirits were foreordained to their mortal missions.

Abraham 3:11-12: “Thus I, Abraham, talked with the Lord, face to face, as one man talketh with another; and he told me of the works which his hands had made; And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things, which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof.”

Abraham 3:22-23: “Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized

- A before the world was; and
- B among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;
- C And God saw these souls that they were good,
- D and he stood in the midst of them,
- E and he said: These I will make my rulers;
- D for he stood among those that were spirits,
- C and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me:
- B Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen
- A before thou wast born.”

Foreordination is God’s premortal ordination of his spirit children to fulfill certain missions during their mortal lives.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell: One must be especially careful about judging the limitations some have in this second estate, since these may reflect divine purposes we cannot understand. But as to callings, foreordination operates. More important than my words are the words of President Harold B. Lee. In his last general conference address in October 1973, he made this observation: “All these rewards were seemingly promised, or foreordained, before the world was. **Surely these matters must have been determined by the kind of lives we had lived in that premortal spirit world.** Some may question these assumptions, but at the same time they will accept without any question the belief that each one of us will be judged when we leave this earth according to his or her deeds during our lives here in mortality. Isn’t it just as reasonable to believe that what we have received here in this earth life was given to each of us according to merits of our conduct before we came here?” (*Deposition of a Disciple*, 44).

President Ezra Taft Benson: “God has held you in reserve to make your appearance in the final days before the second coming of the Lord. Some individuals will fall away; but the kingdom of God will remain intact to welcome the return of its head—even Jesus Christ. 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. ... 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**” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 104–5).

D&C 183:53-57: 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, including the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead, were also in the spirit world. **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.** 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. 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.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell: "Foreordination is like any other blessing — it is a conditional bestowal subject to our faithfulness. Prophecies foreshadow events without determining those outcomes, because of a divine foreseeing of that outcome. **So foreordination is a conditional bestowal of a role, responsibility, or a blessing that, likewise, foresees but does not fix the outcome**" (*Things as They Really Are*, 24).

D&C 58:27-28: "Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; **For the power is in them**, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward."

President Thomas A. Monson: "A patriarchal blessing is a revelation to the recipient, even a white line down the middle of the road, to protect, inspire, and motivate activity and righteousness. A patriarchal blessing literally contains **chapters from your book of eternal possibilities**. I say eternal, for just as life is eternal, so is a patriarchal blessing. What may not come to fulfillment in this life may occur in the next. We do not govern God's timetable. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Your patriarchal blessing is yours and yours alone. It may be brief or lengthy, simple or profound. Length and language do not a patriarchal blessing make. It is the Spirit that conveys the true meaning. Your blessing is not to be folded neatly and tucked away. It is not to be framed or published. Rather, it is to be read. It is to be loved. It is to be followed. **Your patriarchal blessing will see you through the darkest night. It will guide you through life's dangers.** Unlike the struggling bomber of yesteryear, lost in the desert wastes, the sands and storms of life will not destroy you on your eternal flight. **Your patriarchal blessing is to you a personal Liahona to chart your course and guide your way**" (*Ensign*, Nov 1986, 65).

2. Jesus Christ was chosen in the Council in Heaven to be our Savior; we chose to follow him. Lucifer (Satan) and the spirits who followed him were cast out of heaven.

Moses 4:1-4: And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and **I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost**, and surely I will do it; wherefore **give me thine honor**.

But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—**Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever**. Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down; And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.

Abraham 3:24-28: "And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, **to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them**; And they **who keep their first estate shall be added upon**; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and **they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever**. And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. And **the second was angry, and kept not his first estate**; and, at that day, many followed after him.

Why did so many (a third part: D&C 29:36; Rev. 12:4) follow Satan? Consider the following:

Robert J. Matthews: "When we talk about our relationship to the Savior and our redemption, we must begin with the premortal life. I think we often miss the real issue of the contention in the spirit world that eventually led to the War in Heaven. We talk about it as though Lucifer were going to force everybody to obey. **Most people don't want to be forced**. As I see it, the real issue is that Lucifer would guarantee their salvation. **He promised salvation without effort, without excellence, without hard work, without individual responsibility**. That's the lie that he promulgated in the pre-earth councils. **That so-called shortcut to salvation captivated many gullible and lazy spirits. They wanted something for nothing. We have certain aspects in our life today where things are awkward. Something for nothing—a free lunch**, we sometimes call it—with certain kinds of subsidies which promise to guarantee the reward without the effort. On that basis Lucifer led away many spirits" ("The Price of Redemption," *The 11th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium—New Testament*, January 29, 1983).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: "A parable illustrates this understanding [that we are to become followers of the Savior and become like Him.] A wealthy father knew that if he were to bestow his wealth upon a child who had not yet developed the needed wisdom and stature, the inheritance would probably be wasted. The father said to his child: "All that I have I desire to give you—not only my wealth, but also my position and standing among men. That which I *have* I can easily give you, but that which I *am* you must obtain for yourself. You will qualify for your inheritance by learning what I have learned and by living as I have lived. I will give you the laws and principles by which I have acquired my wisdom and stature. Follow my example, mastering as I have mastered, and you will become as I am, and all that I have will be yours." (Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32).

Elder Elray L. Christiansen: "God has created us and has made possible this earth life. But here and now, you and I are in the process of molding the future, and in that sense **we are our own creators**. My friends, **what you are to be, you are now becoming**. What you do here actually determines what you will be there. You, then, have had a divinely-planned beginning. **You may, if you will meet the conditions prescribed by God, obtain a divinely-designed and glorious destiny"** (BYU Speeches of the Year - 1964, 7).

3. We choose to follow Jesus Christ

Russell Osguthorpe: "The Savior's life on earth was short, but **He was always reaching out in love** every step of the way. **He helped** so many while He was on His way to help someone else. **He noticed** what others needed, reached out to them, and helped them—sometimes in simple ways and other times in miraculous ways. **Every miracle He performed, every word He spoke, He did out of love**. He loved those He taught. He cared for their spiritual well-being, but He also cared for their temporal needs. When they were hungry, He fed them with five loaves. When their souls hungered, **He inspired them** with the truths of His gospel. **He cared for those who lost their way**. He cared enough to find them and bring them home. He never forgot one of His own. **He loved the young. He loved the rich. He loved the poor. He loved the sick. He loved the sinner**. He loved all of God's children. When He saw them suffering, He healed them. When He saw them sorrowing, He lifted them up. When He saw them in pain, He comforted them. **His life on the earth was an example of what it means to do good. But it was also a singular example of what it means to do good for the right reason. Every act of the Savior on earth was done out of love.** ("What If Love Were Our Only Motive?," BYU Devotional, March 8, 2011)

How do you feel, knowing that foreordination places specific responsibilities upon you?

- The three-fold mission of the Church
 1. Proclaim the Gospel
 2. Perfect the Saints
 3. Redeem the Dead
- Patriarchal blessing help guide you through your responsibilities
- Knowing the Lord has confidence you to fulfill responsibilities even when you feel inadequate or discouraged
- Knowing you are truly a free agent, and God will not force you to follow Him
- Knowing Jesus Christ volunteered to be Our Redeemer

How does it help you in knowing that you chose to follow Jesus Christ in the Council in Heaven?

- This knowledge will guide you in your daily choices
- This knowledge will give you courage to choose Him and His ways again, in spite of every obstacle.

A More Determined Discipleship by Elder Neal A. Maxwell (Excerpts)

Of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy—Address delivered at BYU, 10 October 1978

... I have come today to say to you that God, who foresaw all challenges, has given to us a precious doctrine, which can encourage us in meeting all challenges.

The doctrine of God's foreordination is one of the doctrinal roads "least traveled by." Yet it clearly underlines how very long and how perfectly God has loved us and known us with our individual needs and capacities.

Yet, **though foreordination is a difficult doctrine**, it has been given to us by the living God, through living prophets, for a purpose. **It can actually increase our understanding of how crucial this mortal second estate** is and can further encourage us in good works. This precious doctrine can also help us go the *second* mile because we are *doubly* called.

In some ways, our second estate, in relationship to our first estate, is like **agreeing in advance to surgery**. Then the anesthetic of forgetfulness settles in upon us. Just as doctors do not de-anesthetize a patient in the midst of authorized surgery to ask him again if the surgery should be continued, so, **after divine tutoring, we agreed to come here and to submit ourselves to certain experiences; it was an irrevocable decision.**

Of course, when we mortals try to comprehend, rather than accept, foreordination, the result is one in which finite minds futilely try to comprehend omniscience. A full understanding is impossible; we simply have to trust in what the Lord has told us, knowing enough, however, to realize that we are *not* dealing with *guarantees* from God but *extra opportunities*—and *heavier responsibilities*.

Foreordination is like any other blessing—it is a conditional bestowal, subject to our faithfulness. Prophecies foreshadow events without determining the outcome, because of a divine foreseeing of outcomes. So foreordination is a conditional bestowal of a role, a responsibility, or a blessing which, likewise, foresees but does not fix the outcome.

The doctrine pertains not only to the foreordination of prophets, but to God's precise assessment, beforehand, as to each of those who will respond to the words of the Savior and the prophets. From the Savior's own lips came these words, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). Similarly the Savior said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Further, he declared, "And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts" (D&C 29:7).

Once the believer acknowledges that the past, present, and future are before God *simultaneously*—even though we do not understand how—then the doctrine of foreordination may be seen somewhat more clearly.

"But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home" (*Gospel Doctrine*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, 13–14; italics added).

What a vastly different view of life the doctrine of foreordination gives to us! Shorn of this perspective, others are puzzled or bitter about life. Without gospel perspective, life is like trying to play a game of billiards on a table with a ruffled cloth, with a crooked cue, and an elliptical billiard ball. Perhaps the moral of that analogy is that we should stay out of pool halls! Anyway, **pessimism does not see life or the universe as these things "really are."**

The disciple will be puzzled at times, too. But he persists. Later he rejoices and exclaims over how wonderfully things fit together, realizing, only then, that **with God—things never were apart!**

Jacob said the Spirit teaches us the truth "of things as they really are, and ... really will be" (Jacob 4:13)

When we have been weighed and found wanting, let us remember that we were measured before and were found equal to our tasks; and therefore, let us continue but with a more determined discipleship.

When we feel overwhelmed, let us recall the assurance that God will not overprogram us; he will not press upon us more than we can bear (see D&C 50:40).

The doctrine of foreordination is, therefore, not a doctrine of repose; it is a doctrine for the second-milers; it can draw out of us the last full measure of devotion.

It is a doctrine of perspiration—not aspiration. It is a doctrine for the deep believer and will only bring scorn from the skeptic.

When, as President Joseph F. Smith said, we "catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul," let us be quietly grateful. **When of great truths we can say, "I know," that powerful spiritual witness may also carry with it the sense of our having known before!** With *rediscovery*, we are really saying "I know—again!" No Wonder so often real teaching is reminding.

You have been measured and found adequate for the challenges that will face you as citizens of the kingdom of God; of that you should have a deep inner assurance. Be true to that trust, as all of us must, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

An assignment I give you with great love. I plead with you to see the all-new art exhibition now open November through May at the Brigham Young University Museum of Art: **Sacred Gifts: The Religious Art of Carl Bloch, Heinrich Hofmann and Frans Schwartz.** These paintings of Christ come from Denmark, and the exhibit is free to the public. However, you must make reservations. The email address is

sacredgifts.byu.edu/

At the bottom left of the Home Page, you will see the green box labeled "Reserve Tickets." Make your reservations. When you go, be sure to rent an iPad. The commentary on the paintings is well worth the \$3.00 rental fee.