

Joseph Smith offered unique, radical solutions to the Christian conundrum of how a good God could create evil and how, in the end, evil shall be subdued.

EVIL'S ORIGINS AND EVIL'S END IN THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION OF GENESIS

By Kathleen Flake

INTRODUCTION

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE REASON WE ARE SO interested in the origin of evil is that we are trying to figure out how to end it. We ask “What causes evil?” and “Why is there evil?” so that we can figure out how to make it go away. When Latter-day Saints ask such questions, we tend to turn to 2 Nephi 2 for answers, especially Lehi’s statement that “there is an opposition in all things” (2 Ne. 2:11). This is the phrase that many Sunday School teachers have used to make the point that without evil there would be no good, and since we need good, we have to put up with evil. In short, evil originates as part of the plan to enable us to choose good. This reasoning is at best a slippery slope, though we seldom have to admit the downward slide. Sunday School class is over too quickly, and not until later, in the personal experience of evil, do we find ourselves sprawled in a ditch, wondering how a benevolent God could be responsible for the evil that has come upon us. Only then do we rage: how can this be necessary, much less constructive of what I am to become?

Today, having a bit more time than in a Sunday School lesson, I want to consider three questions. What is the origin of evil? What is the nature of evil? And how will evil be put to an end? I introduce my remarks with two caveats. First, these are hopelessly deep questions, and I don’t presume to be able to make definitive statements in answer to them. I can only offer a few thoughts that have come to me as a result of time spent in the above-mentioned ditch. Second, my remarks are based almost exclusively on scriptural text, and, therefore, I have a problem that I admit at the onset: these texts are extremely androcentric. For some, that does not pose a problem;

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you will be able to identify easily with the narratives and what I say about them. Others will find these texts ironically exemplary of an evil that oppresses them day and night. This will challenge your capacity to trust both these narratives and what I argue they teach us about evil. Therefore, I ask you—especially those who find “oppressive patriarchy” a redundancy—to “willingly suspend” your disbelief (as Coleridge says) in order to receive what these texts have to teach us. You will need to do so to determine if something of worth is in what these stories have to say notwithstanding that not one single woman or, for that matter, person of color is among their heroes. I know that is a lot to ask. I like Alma’s invitation in such matters: “awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words . . .” (Alma 32:27). I prefer his invitation to Coleridge’s phrase because it admits the importance of retaining one’s critical faculties and experimental—or “experiential”—capacities to judge among competing truth claims; or, in this case, to ascertain the possible existence of a righteous patriarchy and an evil imitation thereof. So, let us turn to the texts.

EVILS ORIGIN

Joseph Smith’s addition to Genesis reveals that God is not the creator of evil.

A CLOSER look at Lehi’s sermon on agency—without the expectation of finding in it traditional Christian notions of “original sin”—reveals that to Lehi the existence of “opposition in all things” is good. It is what prevents us from “remain[ing] as dead . . .” (2 Ne. 2:11). If, he says, things were not “a compound in one” but, instead one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death . . . it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been

no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God." (2 Ne.2: 11–12)

In other words, without such opposition in all things, God could not bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of his children; God could not make us like God and, therefore, would cease to be what we understand a god is. Thus, *that* we and everything else are necessarily "a compound in one" is *not* how evil originates. Rather, it is a source of life, even the potential for divine life in us. This is strong doctrine, but no stronger than that found in Doctrine and Covenants 93, which teaches that each of us was "also in the beginning with God. [As] Intelligence, or the light of truth, [which] was not created or made, neither indeed can be. . . . [And therefore each is] independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold here is the agency of man. . . ." (D&C 93:29–31.) Thus, Latter-day Saint theology places the highest possible premium on agency. It is the source of our progressive capacity; to lose it would be to die or to be damned. We can see this in the first story God tells us about ourselves.

First stories are very important. They are the ones we go back to again and again to understand the present and to envision future possibilities. Consider where you choose to begin to tell the tale of life. Do you begin at your birth? Maybe. More likely, you start your story more purposefully with beginning school, going on a mission, getting married, birthing a child, or converting to a church. You may find beginnings in reversals of each of these experiences as well. Beginnings of histories are not a given. They are a function of making meaning out of the past to explain the present and to construct a future. In Latter-day Saint scripture, God begins the narrative of our history by telling Moses of a meeting prior to the creation of this world. The first words spoken in this first story are: "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. . ." (Moses 4:1).¹

You recognize these strong words, no doubt. They are spoken by Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, or Satan, he who was cast down and out of God's presence because he said these words. They stand in powerful contrast to the first event and first words in traditional Christianity's cosmic history: "Let there be light . . ." says God over a perfect creation, into which evil has yet to appear and, when it does, comes as a result of human action (Gen. 1:1). Consequently, for the rest of the Christian world, God has power on earth over evil because evil is subordinate to—or comes after and independent of—God's fundamentally good creation. As stated by one philosopher,

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the intent of the traditional Christian account of the Fall "is to set up a *radical* origin of evil distinct from the more *primordial* origin of the goodness of things."² In contrast, Joseph Smith's addition of the Council in Heaven to the traditional Genesis narrative teaches that the option of evil existed, as did we, *primordially*—prior to earthly creation. The Book of Abraham speaks more obliquely, but to the same point and more broadly applied. "Whom shall I send?" God asks, "And one answered like unto the Son of Man. . . . And another answered. . . . 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." (Abr. 3:27–28.) Thus beginning history with the events of the Council of Heaven establishes in LDS theology that evil no more originates than good originates; they are always potential to the act, as choice, of the uncreated person. In the words of Sterling McMurrin, for Latter-day Saints, "[m]oral evil . . . exists not because of God, but in spite of him and notwithstanding his struggle to destroy it."³

We see this abstract theological statement brought to life in Enoch's question to God: "How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains? . . . How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?" (Moses 7:28–29.) This suffering, weeping god of Mormonism is not the man Jesus upon the cross. He is the eternal god of heaven and earth who cries for his antediluvian children, bound by Satan who "had a great chain in his hand and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced"—and God wept (Moses 7:26). What is this evil that exists "in spite of [God] and notwithstanding his struggle to destroy it"?

A DEFINITION OF EVIL

Lucifer's great lie is that the object of existence is to gain power over others.

ON their face, the words that make Lucifer into Satan do not appear to us particularly objectionable: "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. . ." (Moses 4:1.) Isn't this what God should have wanted? Maybe the sweet reasonableness of Lucifer's words make it necessary for the narrative to expressly stipulate the reasons why God rejected Lucifer's alternative: "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, . . . the father of all lies. . ." (Moses 4:3). Thus, Lucifer's plan came after and in contradic-

tion to the presentation by God of his own plan. This Son of the Morning had become rebellious, ambitious, and destructive. But, just what was so threatening about him and his offer that it galvanized all present into conflict and resulted in Lucifer's being damned? I would argue that Lucifer's action created a unique crisis because it threatened the life of all present, even God. Lucifer sought his father's power—God's "own power"—by destroying its source, and in doing so, he threatened the life of all present, even God. Remember, the first chapter of the Joseph Smith Translation has already explained that "bringing to pass" eternal life is not only God's "work" but also his "glory," or power (Moses 1:39). Thus, because Lucifer's plan would have destroyed human agency—the source of our progressive capacity—it would have also destroyed God's power. Here is where Lehi's words are relevant:

all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death. . . . it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God. (2 Ne. 2: 11–12)

Lucifer's plan to be "the one" was ultimately an attempt at regicide, even patricide, at unraveling the order by which life is engendered. For this evil, he is cast out of God's presence.

In the Council in Heaven narrative, then, we are given the two definitive characteristics of evil that take it beyond the juridical notion of sin or of a transgression of law. First, evil seeks to destroy the power of others. Second, it does so for the purpose of augmenting its own power. In the words of Cain, who later accepts Lucifer's plan, evil is the conviction that "I may murder and get gain" (Moses 5:31)—or, that I may empower myself by destroying others. This is what makes evil the opposite of order as defined by who God is. As discussed, Lucifer's plan was an evil one because it attacks what makes God what he is, a parent. We call God "father" because he is defined by his capacity to engender the quality of his own life in others through the operation of their agency. This order of being by which life is engendered is exemplified by the Only Begotten of the Father and, thus, it bears his name: "the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God" (D&C 107:3). The true attributes of this order are set out in section 121, and its promise includes "thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (D&C 121:46). We see this principle of non-compulsory dominion in Christ's asking that we obey out of

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love and follow him by imitation, not force. We see it in the Holy Spirit's "filling," not "possessing," us.

In sum, what makes Lucifer's plan definitive of evil? As I read the text, there are two problems. First, Lucifer wanted a monopoly on God's honor and glory, but God wanted all to share in his glory—to be "joint heirs." Second, Lucifer intended to accomplish his plan by means of compulsion—which was inherently destructive of others, including God himself. To redeem by force is an impossibility, and, hence, Lucifer's offer was a lie. We are made independent in that sphere in which God has placed us. To lose that agency would be to lose that sphere of life to which we had progressed; it is to be damned. Lucifer's plan was antithetical to God's plan, which was designed

to endow us with the quality of his own life. Lucifer's order was an anti-order. It was designed to take life. The story of the serpent in the Garden illustrates this point. Thus, the snake serves as the transition figure in the narrative's turn from the events at the Council to those of the Garden: "Satan put it into the heart of the serpent, (for he had drawn many away after him,) and he sought also to beguile Eve, *for he knew not the mind of God*, wherefore he sought to destroy the world" (see Moses 4:6, *emph. added*). Here, to Satan's grandiosity and malevolence is added the additional problem of ignorance, e.g., he knows not "the mind of God." In the JST, Satan is not only displaying malice but also a fundamental misunderstanding about the way life works when he says, consistent with the King James Version: "Ye shall not surely die . . . ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Moses 4:10–11). With the benefit of the Council narrative, we see that Satan's approach has not changed. As spoken by the serpent, the object of existence is power, to "be as gods." Moreover, he continues to advance his will by deception. Of course, Adam and Eve would "die" through partaking of the fruit, but just as significantly, this was not the way to know good from evil. Such knowledge would come only by their experience. And, finally, the knowledge of good and evil is not the means of becoming "as gods." Rather, it is the knowledge of God that makes one like God, as the Savior says: "This is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Indeed, their transgression distanced them from this knowledge. Satan is, as God says in the Council narrative, "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" (Moses 4:4).

Cain however believed Satan. His first words in the narrative are "Who is the Lord, that I should know him?" (JST Gen. 5:4; Moses 5:6). Even Cain's offering to the Lord of the first fruits of his field is a response to Satan's command. When the

Lord rejects this offering and accepts Abel's, Cain is "very wroth" notes the KJV, and the JST adds: "Now Satan knew this, and it pleased him" (JST Gen. 5: 8; Moses 5:21). The addition of the character of Satan to this story is characteristic of Joseph Smith's translation of Genesis. Moses, too, encounters the devil, as does Enoch. In each instance in which he appears, the character of Satan is a foil who offers his own and opposite covenant in direct imitation of God's. Joseph adds eight verses where the KJV suffices with one reference to Cain's killing Abel. These new verses provide motive for the crime. Cain, we are told, "listened not any more to the voice of the Lord" and "loved Satan more than God" (JST Gen. 5:13, 11; Moses 5:26, 18) As a consequence, Satan invites Cain to enter into a secret covenant "that he would do according to [Satan's] commands" in exchange for "this great secret, that I [says Cain] may murder and get gain. . . . and he gloried in his wickedness." (JST Gen. 5:14, 16; Moses 5:30, 31.) This is Lucifer's great lie that he spoke in the Council, in the Garden, and now in the field to Cain: that the object of existence is power over others and that this is "gain" and autonomy, even freedom. This is the lie that stands in opposition to truth, the knowing of which "will make you free," according to Jesus (John 8:32). The contrast is given voice when Cain exults over the body of his brother, Abel: "I am free; surely the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands" (JST Gen. 5:18; Moses 5:33).

The exiled Cain will teach his secrets to certain of his children, and they, too, will enter into a covenant with Satan. "[A]nd their works were abominations, and began to spread among all the sons of men" (JST Gen. 5:39; Moses 5:52). Thus, in Latter-day Saint theology, Adam and Eve introduce death into God's creation, and Cain introduces evil. While the potential for evil is coexistent with existence itself, Cain makes the potential real in this world when he chooses Lucifer's plan. The contest between order and anti-order, between priesthood and priestcraft, between those who would be fathers and those who would be rulers, between engendering life and taking life—this contest is one of the greatest themes in all of scripture. Ether explains the destruction of the Jaredite nation in these terms. He writes: "there arose a rebellion among the people, because of that secret combination which was built up to get power and gain. . . ." (Ether 11:15). Mormon, too, tells a similar story in his description of the role of the Gadiantons in the destruction of his people (Heb. 7:18–21). And we are told that also in Enoch's day, "Satan had great dominion among men, and raged in their hearts. . . . and a man's hand was against his own brother, in administering death, because of secret works, seeking for power" (Moses 6:15). In this descrip-

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tion of the antediluvians, we see the classic characteristics of evil: a Satan-inspired administration of death for the purpose of obtaining power that makes chaos out of God's order. Of them, God says: "among all the workmanship of my hands there has not been so great wickedness. . . . [They do not] choose me their Father. But, behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood. . . . [Therefore] Satan shall be their father. . . . and the whole heavens shall weep over them. . . ." (Moses 7: 36, 33, 37.) As you know, "Father" Satan will be so successful in replacing the order of Father God with his own anti-order that God will have to start his plan over again with Noah and his family. But first, God calls Enoch, Noah's grandfather, to attempt to reestablish a righteous order. Enoch's story is the largest single addition (128 verses) that Joseph Smith makes to the King James Version; it constitutes the

most complete answer in all of scripture to our third question: How can evil be brought to an end.

EVIL'S END

The uncoerced choice of God and the return of good for evil.

ONE way to use the story of Enoch to answer our question is to talk about the attributes of Zion. As you know, Enoch "built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even ZION" (JST Gen. 7:2; Moses 7:19). The people were also called Zion "because they were of one heart and of one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18). In short, the story of Enoch tells of a community that experienced the end of evil: no one attempted personal gain at another's expense. Not only did Enoch's people banish evil from their own relations, but also they could protect themselves from the evil of others:

all nations feared [Zion] greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him. . . . [And] so great was the fear of the enemies of the people of God, that they fled and stood afar off and went upon the land which came up out of the depth of the sea. And the giants of the land, also, stood afar off. . . . but the Lord came and dwelt with his people." (Moses 7:13–16, emphasis added)

Notice that the citizens of Zion did not destroy their enemies. They were able to cast evil out of their midst and cause their enemies to flee and stand afar off, even cast them out as God had done Satan. What was this power that enabled them to do so? What was this word of Enoch and the "power of language which God had given" his people that their enemies stood afar

off? This is where I would like to focus our attention, though there is much else in the narrative that also deserves it. This is a part of the JST text we seldom emphasize but which contains the most specific instruction in the means by which evil ends. Here is where God answers Enoch's question: "How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?" (Moses 7:29).

After Enoch asks this first question, he is shown the Flood and the prison prepared for these followers of Lucifer's plan. In contrast to his initial shock that the Lord would mourn such as these, Enoch now "refuse[s] to be comforted" (v. 44) and obtains a promise from God that the earth will never be covered by flood again and a righteous remnant would remain. The record states: "the Lord could not withhold; and he covenanted with Enoch, and sware unto him with an oath, that he would stay the floods; that he would call upon the children of Noah . . ." and that he would preserve a righteous remnant of Enoch's seed on the earth (Moses 7:51–52). Here we see Enoch the father obtaining a blessing on behalf of his posterity. It is not enough that his island of peace called Zion would escape the chaos. The earth who remains mourning over the wickedness of her children cannot be abandoned. This would thwart God's plan to give life to his children. Rather, in some way the righteous power, which had accomplished God's plan in what we call the City of Enoch and cast out evil, must remain to give the earth her rest in glory. No doubt Enoch thought this initial covenant would solve the problem of evil. The vision continued, however, and revealed that murder-for-gain would triumph again. This time, Enoch saw the Messiah put to death and realized that "mother" earth still would not rest. And "again Enoch wept and cried unto the Lord," obtaining a second promise:

for asmuch as thou art God, and I know thee, and thou has sworn unto me, and commanded me that I should ask in the name of thine Only Begotten; thou has made me, and given unto me a *right* to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own *grace*; *wherefore I ask thee* if thou wilt not come again on the earth? (Moses 7:59, emphasis added)

Enoch is not merely asking for information when he asks this question. And this is one of the most powerful messages of Joseph Smith's revelatory reworking of the Genesis narrative and the answer, I think, to the power of Enoch and his peoples' language. God heard the words of Enoch's mouth and was bound by covenant to respond. It would be in his own way and in his own time, but God would act in response to Enoch's words.

GOD'S ORDER

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Looking at the record more closely, we see that Enoch spoke these words by right obtained by grace, by his "right to [God's] throne" which God had given him. God's order operates upon the principle of empowering persons on earth with rights to access the powers of heaven (D&C 121:36). We are told many are called to receive these rights, but few are chosen because they do not understand that these earthly rights are inseparable from heavenly held powers. Instead, they aspire to earthly powers by claiming heavenly rights. They seek gain at the expense of the agency of others. They gratify pride or ambition and hide their sin. They have their version of Cain's claim: "Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret . . ." (Moses 5:31). In contrast to the many, Enoch exercises earthly rights to heavenly powers to ensure the operation of those powers to benefit, even redeem, others. He en-

sure God's life-giving influence in the world by desiring it to be so and exercising his God-given priestly/patriarchal rights to engender life in others. Again, the Lord cannot withhold and swears an oath that he will return when chaos again "in the days of wickedness and vengeance" threatens to destroy the plan of salvation. He will come, he says, "to fulfil the oath which I have made to you," Enoch (Moses 7:60). In the latter days, there shall be "great tribulations . . . but my people will I preserve; and righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth . . . to gather out mine elect" (Moses 7:61–62). Unlike the workings of Satan's anti-order, this is no secret. Moreover, it is a gathering, not a forced march. Remember, God's dominion flows to him without compulsory means. He saves by empowering others with his own powers, not by stripping them of their own. In this story of Enoch's wrestling with God to obtain blessings for the rest of the human family, we see a complete pattern of what appears partial in other narratives: Adam, Noah, Jacob, Nephi, Enos, and of course even Jesus, as evidenced in John 17. This is God's order, and it is the means of the end of evil. It engenders life, not death. Its power over others is based upon the uncoerced desires of those who choose God to be their father and return good for evil, thereby banishing evil and ensuring the success of God's plan to bring to pass immortality and eternal life.

CONCLUSION

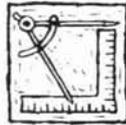
THUS, evil lies in the opposition among and between us; not in Lehi's doctrine of the "opposition in" us, which makes us a compound in one, makes us alive. Evil lives in the will to power "over," not power on "behalf of,"

another. Evil will end when we banish it by no longer desiring it and obtain by covenant access to heavenly power to cast it out from among us. Meanwhile, we can know that God has the power to heal us from the effects of the evil that is done to us, if we do not fight fire with fire. As was said to another who would yet suffer physical death at the hands of evil doers: "Hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do. . . ." (D&C 122:9.) I believe this is what is meant when we are assured that the wisdom of the Lord is greater than the cunning of the devil. This is the moral of our first story as given in the Council of Heaven narrative

and played out in the rest of our history. God cannot destroy the will to evil without ceasing to be who he is. He is who he is (he is God), however, because of his power to save and to heal and his power to engender in us the power to cast evil out of our midst. 

NOTES

1. The Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price is the part of the Joseph Smith Translation [JST] that is canonized as LDS scripture.
2. Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 233.
3. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 99.



DREAM HOME

for Linda Sillitoe

Last night, wandering through
my childhood farmhouse,
I found a whole wing
undiscovered, unthought, unused.

Recurring over years,
this dream opens with light
I must squint to endure,
a multitude of windows,

light slanting down corridors,
across expansive halls.

Stirred by wandering,
I find more than I left,

I find doors, bathed in light,
all white with glass knobs.
Where they might lead,
a quickening in my chest.

I awaken slowly,
pulling apart the breastbone of night,
trying to reconstruct the house,
knowing more than I dare express.

—ANITA TANNER