

Waking Up To Secret Combinations: An LDS Perspective on Conspiracy

by Darren Andrews

Most of us seem content to accept the world largely in the way it is presented to us by what passes as the mainstream of society. Conspiracy, despite its overwhelming historical precedence, is often dismissed as non-existent or, at best, limited to small or foreign groups.^[1]

Consequently, when a discussion in a Church class arises upon the subject of secret combinations, such organizations as the Mafia, Ku Klux Klan and terrorist groups often end up on the blackboard.

While it is true, no doubt, that many of these groups conspire, and some do great evil, do they actually fit the full description of what we know about secret combinations?

In trying to answer this we need to understand what the scriptures tell us about such oath-bound societies and review the words of Church leaders on this issue.

What Do The Scriptures Teach Us About Secret Combinations?

Secret combinations existed both in the Old and New World in ancient times. Below is a list of some of the things we learn from the scriptures concerning the nature, purpose and methods of these secret combinations:

1. Cain founded the first secret combination and became known as Master Mahan.^[2] This title and the oaths and covenants were passed down to subsequent leaders of the secret combination (Moses 5: 31, 49; Helaman 6:30).
2. Secret combinations are “most abominable and wicked above all” in the sight of God (see Ether 8:18).
3. Secret combinations are Satanic in nature, receiving revelation from, and being founded and held up by, the devil (Moses 5:29-30; 2 Nephi 26:22; Helaman 6:26; 3 Nephi 6:28; Ether 8:16, 25) who transforms himself into an angel of light and stirs up men to contention whereby wickedness and thus secret combinations increase (2 Nephi 9:9; Helaman 6:21; 3 Nephi 7:7).
4. Secret combinations administer secret ancient oaths handed down from Cain (Ether 8:15-16), taken by swearing by the God of heaven, the heavens, the earth, the throat and the head (Moses 5:29-30; Ether 8:13-14).
5. The manner of their oaths and combinations are had among all people (Ether 8:20).
6. Secret combinations have secret signs and words (Helaman 6:22), protect one another (Helaman 6:21, 23), and mingle into society in a manner whereby they cannot be found (Helaman 1:12).
7. Members of secret combinations are punished by the combination if they reveal the wickedness of their co-conspirators (Helaman 6:24; Ether 8:14).

8. One of the purposes of secret combinations is to murder (Moses 5:31; Helaman 2:8); they also seek to murder the prophets of God (Alma 37:30). These combinations cause slaughter (3 Nephi 1:27, 2:11), war and millions of deaths; the Jaredites and Nephites being destroyed because of them (Helaman 2:13-14; Ether 8:21).

9. Secret combinations are established to rob and get gain (Moses 5:31; Helaman 2:8). They store up gold and silver in abundance and traffic in all manner of traffic (4 Nephi 1:46). The Book of Mormon refers to them as “robbers” over fifty times, which suggest that theft was their chief activity or the activity for which they were most notorious.

10. Gadianton Robbers prefer to plunder rather than working for themselves (3 Nephi 4:1-5).

11. Members of secret combinations regard each other as brethren and appear to have a communal attitude toward property (3 Nephi 3:6-7).

12. The teachings and practices of the robbers are tempting and corrupt the hearts of the people as they spread, eventually even seducing most of the righteous into believing in their works, partaking of their spoils, and even becoming involved in their secret murders and combinations (Helaman 6:38; Ether 9:6).

13. Pride, the desire for money, and seeking the praise of man make people susceptible to uniting with secret combinations; such go on to murder, plunder, and bear false witness against their neighbor (Helaman 7:21, 25-26).

14. Secret combinations help those who seek for power to gain power as well as to murder, plunder, lie and commit wickedness and whoredoms (Ether 8:16).

15. Secret combinations keep the people in darkness (Ether 8:16) and use fair promises to lead people away (Ether 8:17).

16. Secret combinations flourished first in the more settled parts of the land (Helaman 3:23) and among the wicked (Helaman 6:38; 4 Nephi 1:42).

17. One of the purposes of secret combinations is to gain power (Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:23, 11:15) by usurping power and authority over the people (Helaman 7:4). They seek to gain sole power over the government and, in the Book of Mormon, were successful in doing so (Helaman 6:39).

18. Secret combinations retain power so that they and their supporters may get gain and glory, and so that they may more easily steal, commit adultery, kill and do according to their own will (Helaman 7:5).

19. Secret combinations break the laws of God and the laws of their country (Helaman 6:23).

20. Secret combinations stir up rebellion (Ether 11:15) and dissent, and use lies and flattery to lead people to join with them (3 Nephi 1:28-29), targeting the rising generation (3 Nephi 1:29-30).

21. The members of secret combinations believe their secret works and society to be good (3 Nephi 3:9).

22. Secret combinations pretend to act on behalf of their people in reclaiming their rights (3 Nephi 3:10), believing they have been wronged and hating the righteous (3 Nephi 3:4).

23. Secret combinations seek to overthrow government (3 Nephi 7:6), establish kings - or oligarchies (see Mosiah 29:21-22) - and destroy the liberty of a republic (3 Nephi 6:30, 7:10); the king-men believe they have the blood of nobility (Alma 51:21).

24. Secret combinations, once in government, lay aside the commandments of God, corrupt righteous laws, and administer no justice to the people (Mosiah 29:22; Helaman 7:4), condemning the righteous for their righteousness, allowing the guilty to go free because of their money (Helaman 7:5).

25. Secret combinations shed the blood of the saints and oppress them (Helaman 6:39; 3 Nephi 6:29; Ether 8:22), threatening not only the rights and liberty of the people but also the Church (3 Nephi 2:12).

26. When any society has suffered such combinations to spread over them they will be destroyed (Ether 8:22).

27. One of the purposes of the Book of Mormon is to show us the work of ancient secret combination so that we may repent and suffer not that these same murderous combinations should get above us (Ether 8:23), and that we should awake to a sense of our awful situation when we see these things among us (Ether 8:24).

28. Speaking of a secret combination built up by the devil, the master of lies, in our day, the Book of Mormon tells us that those who build it up do so to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations and countries (Ether 8:25).

29. In the last days the gentiles shall build up secret combinations which shall spill the blood of the saints and seek to destroy the people (2 Nephi 26:22; Ether 8:25; Mormon 8:27).

30. Preaching the word of God destroys secret combinations (Helaman 6:37).

What Have Church Leaders Said About Secret Combinations?

What do we know about secret combinations from latter-day prophets, seers and revelators? It is interesting in reading these how they generally give a very different view than the one commonly held by members of the Church. The following selected quotations are in chronological order (titles added):

Secret combinations will barter away liberties of the U.S.

“I am sorry to see this murderous influence prevailing throughout the world, and perhaps this may be a fitting occasion to refer to some of these matters. The manifestations of turbulence and uneasiness which prevail among the nations of the earth are truly lamentable These feelings which tend to do away with all right, rule, and government, and correct principles are not from

God, or many of them are not. This feeling of communism and nihilism, aimed at the overthrow of rulers and men in position and authority, arises from a spirit of diabolism, which is contrary to every principle of the Gospel of the Son of God These things are beginning to spread among and permeate the nations of the earth. Do we expect them? Yes. These secret combinations were spoken of by Joseph Smith, years and years ago. I have heard him time and time again tell about them, and he stated that when these things began to take place the liberties of this nation would begin to be bartered away. (John Taylor, 1881, *Journal of Discourses* 22:142-3)

A secret band will sap the strength of America in the last days

“I have seen the end of this nation and it is terrible. I will tell you in the name of the Lord that a secret band will sap the life of this nation.”(Moses Thatcher, from an address given at Franklin Ward, Franklin, Idaho, June 16,1882 and entered into the historical record thereof).

Combinations of labor and capital seek to overthrow government

Among the many signs of the times concerning which the prophets have spoken, there are none scarcely that are of a more threatening character than the combinations of various kinds which are being formed in the land. These combinations are ominous of evil. If they go on increasing as they have done for some years past, the consequences to our nation will be of a most serious, not to say dreadful, character. In Europe, a condition of feeling has arisen, among socialists, nihilists, anarchists, and people of this type, that is exceedingly threatening to the governments under which people of this description live. They are agitating, and plotting, and spreading dissatisfaction among all classes they become agitators of a dangerous character even in this country, where there are no monarchs or nobles. The leaven of discontent has gradually spread, until combinations of a most formidable character have been formed in this country This is a fearful picture, and we may know what the results will be, by reading the predictions of the prophets concerning the last days. Not only will these combinations of labor and capital spread, but combinations also of a political character, looking to the overthrow of

governments and to the introduction of anarchy. (George Q. Cannon, 1890, *Juvenile Instructor* 25:536)

We are in the midst of great propaganda and even the elect are being deceived

“We are in the midst of the greatest exhibition of propaganda that the world has ever seen. Just do not believe all you read or hear. The elect are being deceived.” (J. Reuben Clark, Conference Report, October 1941).

American Government is being undermined from within

“We again warn our people in America of the constantly increasing threat against our inspired Constitution and our free institutions set up under it. The same political tenets and philosophies that have brought war and terror in other parts of the world are at work amongst us in America. The proponents thereof are seeking to undermine our own form of government and to set up instead one of the forms of dictatorship now flourishing in other lands. These revolutionists are using a technique that is as old as the human race — a fervid but false solicitude for the unfortunate over whom they thus gain mastery, and then enslave them. They suit their approaches to the particular group they seek to deceive . . . Latter-day Saints cannot be true to their faith and lend aid, encouragement, or sympathy to any of these false philosophies. They will prove snares to their feet.” (First Presidency, General Conference, April 1942).

A global tyranny to be established by stealth in the last days

"Satan...[plans] to destroy liberty and freedom ~ economic, political, and religious, and to set up in place thereof the greatest, most widespread, and most complete tyranny that has ever oppressed men. He is working under such perfect disguise that many do not recognize either him or his methods." (First Presidency, General Conference, October 1942).

Modern-day Gadiantons being blindly elected/appointed to government

"The Gadianton Robbers from the Book of Mormon are loose among us. The King-men, and women, are running our government. And, worst of all, we are blindly electing them, or

appointing them so they can continue to destroy the things we cherish most." (John Widtsoe, General Conference, April 1944).

Government & Church to suffer "vacant places" due to the Conspiracy

"If the conspiracy comes here it will probably come in its full vigor and there will be a lot of vacant places among those who guide and direct, not only this government, but also this Church of ours." (J. Reuben Clark, Conference Report, April 1944).

Satan has control now and is guiding the governments of the world

"Satan has control now. No matter where you look, he is in control, even in our own land. He is guiding the governments as far as the Lord will permit him. That is why there is so much strife, turmoil, confusion all over the earth. One master mind is governing the nations. It is not the President of the United States...it is not the king or government of England or any other land; it is Satan himself." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 3, pp. 314-315).

Socialism-communism is a conspiracy

"...we should accept the command of the Lord and treat socialistic communism as the tool of Satan. We should follow the counsel of the President of the Church and resist the influence and policies of the socialist-communist conspiracy wherever they are found--in the schools, in the churches, in governments, in unions, in businesses, in agriculture." (Ezra Taft Benson, Conference, October 1961).

A vast, world-wide secret combination to seek to overthrow all lands

"Concerning the United States, the Lord revealed to his prophets that its greatest threat would be a vast, worldwide 'secret combination' which would not only threaten the United States but also seek to 'overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations and countries.'(Ether 8:25)...One of the most urgent, heart-stirring appeals made by Moroni as he closed the Book of Mormon was addressed to the gentile nations of the last days. He foresaw the rise of a great world-wide secret combination among the gentiles...

He warned each gentile nation of the last days to purge itself of this gigantic criminal conspiracy which would seek to rule the world. " (Ezra Taft Benson, Conference, October 1961).

A deliberate conspiracy to destroy the U.S. Constitution exists

“And do not think that these usurpations, intimidations, and impositions are being done to us through inadvertence or mistake. The whole course is deliberately planned and carried out; its purpose is to destroy the Constitution and our constitutional government; then to bring chaos, out of which the new Statism with its slavery is to arise, with a cruel, relentless, selfish, ambitious crew in the saddle, riding hard with whip and spur, a red-shrouded band of night riders for despotism.” (J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Church News*, September 25, 1949; as quoted by Ezra Taft Benson, Conference, October 1966).

Socialist-communist conspiracy at work both at home and abroad

"Our priceless heritage is threatened today as never before in our lifetime: from without by the forces of Godless Communism, and at home by our complacency and by the insidious forces of the Socialist-Communist conspiracy, with the help of those who would abandon the ancient landmarks set by our fathers and take us down the road to destruction. It was Alexander Hamilton who warned that 'nothing is more common than for a free people, in times of heat and violence, to gratify momentary passions, by letting into the government, principles and precedents which afterwards prove fatal to themselves.' (Alexander Hamilton and the Founding of the Nation, p. 462.)" (Ezra Taft Benson, General Conference, April 1968).

There is no conspiracy theory in the Book of Mormon

“This most correct book on earth states that the downfall of two great American civilizations came as a result of secret conspiracies whose desire was to overthrow the freedom of the people. ‘And they have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking,’ says Moroni, ‘and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.’ (Eth. 8:21.) Now undoubtedly Moroni could

have pointed out many factors that led to the destruction of the people, but notice how he singled out the secret combinations, just as the Church today could point out many threats to peace, prosperity, and the spread of God's work, but it has singled out the greatest threat as the great conspiracy. There is no conspiracy theory in the Book of Mormon --it is a conspiracy fact. And along this line I would highly recommend to you the book *None Dare Call It Conspiracy* by Gary Allen." (Ezra Taft Benson, General Conference, April 1972; book recommendation added by Ezra Taft Benson during talk after he discovered a Russian delegation was in attendance. Not included in the prepared or text archives of the talk).

Modern founders of secret works arose about same time as Restoration

"It is well to ask, what system [referring to Isaiah 29:15-16] established secret works of darkness to overthrow nations by violent revolution? Who blasphemously proclaimed the atheistic doctrine that God made us not? Satan works through human agents. We need only look to some of the ignoble characters in human history who were contemporary to the restoration of the gospel to discover fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. I refer to the infamous founders of Communism and others who follow in their tradition..." (Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning*, Conference, October 1979).

Gadianton robbers fills the seats in many governments

"Gadianton robbers fill the judgement seats in many nations. An evil power seeks to overthrow the freedom of all nations and countries." (Bruce R. McConkie, Conference, April 1980).

We must recognize, address and quit building up secret combinations

"...the Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Ne. 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our

time...Now, we have not been using the Book of Mormon as we should. Our homes are not as strong unless we are using it to bring our children to Christ. Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat falsehoods in socialism, rationalism, etc...The situation in the world will continue to degenerate unless we read and heed the words of God and quit building up and upholding secret combinations, which the Book of Mormon tells us proved the downfall of ancient civilizations." (Ezra Taft Benson, First Presidency Message, *Ensign*, January 1988).

A specific secret combination is increasing its global dominion

"[Wickedness] is more highly organized, more cleverly disguised, and more powerfully promoted than ever before. Secret combinations lusting for power, gain, and glory are flourishing. A secret combination that seeks to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries is increasing its evil influence and control over America and the entire world." (Ezra Taft Benson, *I Testify*, Conference, October 1988).

Modern-day Gadianton Robbers seek to bring down the Church, woo the people with sophistry and take control of society

"It is the terrorist organizations that must be ferreted out and brought down. We of this Church know something of such groups. The Book of Mormon speaks of the Gadianton robbers, a vicious, oath-bound, and secret organization bent on evil and destruction. In their day they did all in their power, by whatever means available, to bring down the Church, to woo the people with sophistry, and to take control of the society. We see the same thing in the present situation." (Gordon B. Hinckley, General Conference, October 2001).

Evil schemers promote heavy taxation, false promises, loose morals, war

"The Book of Mormon narrative is a chronicle of nations long since gone. But in its descriptions of the problems of today's society, it is as current as the morning newspaper and much more definitive, inspired, and inspiring concerning the solutions of those problems. I know of no other writing which sets forth with such

clarity the tragic consequences to societies that follow courses contrary to the commandments of God. Its pages trace the stories of two distinct civilizations that flourished on the Western Hemisphere. Each began as a small nation, its people walking in the fear of the Lord. But with prosperity came growing evils. The people succumbed to the wiles of ambitious and scheming leaders who oppressed them with burdensome taxes, who lulled them with hollow promises, who countenanced and even encouraged loose and lascivious living. These evil schemers led the people into terrible wars that resulted in the death of millions and the final and total extinction of two great civilizations in two different eras." (Gordon B. Hinckley, First Presidency Message, *Ensign*, August 2005).

Is History An Accident?

Accidentalism is the view of history taught today in most schools. This portrays history as largely a series of unrelated events. Another view, and one posited in this pamphlet, is what has been called the conspiratorial view of history. This latter teaches that history is largely a series of related events. Today many people view conspiracy as something strange, on the fringe or to be dismissed, and that those who speak of conspiracy must be a little crazy or extreme. This is a very perplexing viewpoint because it is a matter of historical record that conspiracy has been with us from the beginning. Plots, intrigues and secret combinations have plagued governments and societies at large from the beginning of time. Small groups or families conspired in ancient Rome, they conspired among the city-states of Renaissance Italy and in the churches and towers of medieval Europe. Plays, movies and books have been made about them. Nations, and civilizations, have risen and fallen due to the events enacted by such conspiratorial groups.

As Latter-day Saints we do not subscribe to accidentalism. We believe that the hand of Providence has helped shaped our world and that, among other things, the Lord guided the events on this earth to bring about the circumstances whereby religious freedom was sparked and led to a free nation under God wherein the

Restoration could begin. However, it is sometimes harder for some to believe that the non-accidental view of history also includes events inspired of the devil such as the Great Apostasy. We should not be oblivious to, or stand in denial of, such a view of history, or of the existence, purpose and nature of secret combinations. We need to, as Moroni put it, wake up to our awful situation.

So How Do We Wake Up?

It has been said that the revelations of God provide the answer to all questions. We often forget this and are quick to base our views purely upon what the world teaches us about history, politics, science and other important subjects.

With this in mind, we should prayerfully read and ponder what the scriptures and Church leaders have said touching on the topics of liberty, government, agency, secret combinations, and so forth. The amount of material on these topics may surprise you if you have not looked into it before. As far as talks by leaders of the Church are concerned, you might want to start by visiting www.ldsfreedomportal.net which lists (and links to) many important addresses by Church leaders on these issues.

If you really want to look into things a bit deeper then I would recommend the following books for your primer reading list - most of which have been recommended by Church leaders:

None Dare Call It Conspiracy (Gary Allen)
(Not an LDS book but recommended in Conference by Ezra Taft Benson)

The Naked Communist (W. Cleon Skousen)
(Recommended in Conference by David O. McKay)

The Naked Capitalist (W. Cleon Skousen)
(Important sequel to *The Naked Communist*)

The 5000-Year Leap (W. Cleon Skousen)
(Perhaps the most well-read LDS work on liberty)

The Elders of Israel and the Constitution (Jerome Horowitz)
(Recommended in Conference by Ezra Taft Benson)

The Book of Mormon and the Constitution (H. Verlan Andersen)
(LDS General Authority and very close friend to Ezra Taft Benson)

The Moral Basis of a Free Society (H. Verlan Andersen)

An Enemy Hath Done This (Ezra Taft Benson, compilation of political speeches)

The Law (Frederic Bastiat)
(Not an LDS author but quoted heavily by Ezra Taft Benson)

End Notes

[1] Doctrine & Covenants 38:28-29 appears to refer to this preconception.

[2] The word Mahan is of uncertain origin but the footnotes to Moses 5:31 suggest that the root of the word (“maha”) can be rendered as “mind”, “destroyer”, or “great one”. Matthew M. Brown favours the “destroyer” meaning (see *Girded about with a Lambskin*, Journal of Book of Mormon Studies: Volume - 6, Issue - 2, Pages: 124-151, Provo, Utah: Maxwell Institute, 1997). Depopulation, through various means, seems to be a strong theme in conspiratorial agendas. Joseph Smith, commenting on government and tyrants, once said that “the greatest acts of the mighty men have been to depopulate nations and to overthrow kingdoms; and whilst they have exalted themselves and become glorious, it has been at the expense of the lives of the innocent, the blood of the oppressed, the moans of the widow, and the tears of the orphan.” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Section Five, 1842-43, p.248). This gives even more weight to the meaning of Mahan as “destroyer”.

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