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 PRONENESS OF MANKIND TO GO ASTRAY

REMARKS BY ELDER GEORGE A. SMITH, DELIVERED IN THE OLD TABERNACLE,  
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Reported by David W. Evans

In the dealings of God with the children of men, in almost every age of which we have any account, we find that a certain weakness of the human heart has ever manifested itself—that is, its proneness to stray from the Lord. On almost every occasion when the children of Israel began to get prosperous and wealthy, they forgot their duty and strayed from the Lord. After Joshua had led them across the Jordan, subdued their enemies, and placed them in possession of Canaan, he called the people together *en masse*, and exacted of them a covenant that they would serve the Lord, who had brought them out of Egypt and had wrought so many miracles in their favor; and it is recorded of that generation that they served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the Elders who outlived Joshua. This is about as long a time as Israel ever did abide by the law of the Lord. In reading the Book of Mormon this same trait of character is very noticeable in the history of the Nephites and Jaredites. When the Elders were stirred up to preach and prophesy to the people, or when, through the scourging of the Almighty, they were brought to repentance and to the knowledge of their fathers, it would be but an incredibly short time—a few years of peace and industry with their attendant blessings—before they would again go astray from God, follow new doctrines and

forms of worship designed by men, and wickedness would soon again overspread the land. This was repeated time and again by the Nephites from the time they separated from the Lamanites until their final destruction. It is remarkable, however, in the history given in the Book of Mormon, that after the mission of the Savior to this continent, and the reception of the gospel by the whole of the Lamanites and Nephites, that for several generations they remained faithful to its precepts and principles, and walked before the Lord with such a degree of humility and thanksgiving that they were prospered and blessed in all things. This is the longest period of peace, and the most like a millennium that we have any account of in any of our records where time is given to us. It is true that Enoch and his followers were more faithful than this, for it is said that he walked with God three hundred and sixty-five years; but, as we have no detailed account of the transactions in his cities, or of the regulations in Zion under his direction, we are not prepared to use the short account we have of him and his people by way of comparison.

All these lessons taught in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and by our own experience are to warn us of the danger of going astray, and to show us how prone we are to lust after the leeks and onions of Egypt,