



The Prophet Joseph Smith, God's Instrument in Restoring the Truth

*Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, God restored
the gospel of Jesus Christ in its purity.*

From the Life of George Albert Smith

Near the 100th anniversary of the Prophet Joseph Smith's birth, Elder George Albert Smith traveled with President Joseph F. Smith and others to visit places of importance in the life of the Prophet. On the morning of December 23, 1905, a monument to Joseph Smith was dedicated at his birthplace in Vermont. It was a moving experience for George Albert Smith and those in his company to be in a place of such significance in the Restoration of the gospel. "Our tears flowed freely," he recalled. "Under the influence of the Spirit, every soul was humbled, every heart was melted, and we rejoiced in the blessings of our Heavenly Father."¹ George Albert Smith was asked to give the benediction at the dedicatory services. After summarizing the day in his journal, he wrote: "Thus ended one of the most eventful days of my life. I am thankful to be one of the few of our people to assist in the task just completed."²

They later went to the site of the First Vision, in Palmyra, New York. Elder Smith recalled: "We went into the grove where Joseph had knelt down and asked the Lord to inform him which one of the churches he should join. We were impressed to sing, in that hallowed place, the beautiful . . . hymn, 'Joseph Smith's First Prayer.'³

After visiting the Hill Cumorah, the Kirtland Temple, and other sites connected with the mission of the Prophet, the company was

called together by President Joseph F. Smith on the final evening of the trip. “After singing several of the songs of Zion, each member of the party was permitted to testify of the goodness and mercy of our Father unto us. The Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon us, and we shed tears of joy and happiness.”⁴ [See suggestion 1 on pages 42–43.]

Several years later, while George Albert Smith was serving as President of the Church, some books were published that attempted to defame Joseph Smith. In a general conference of the Church, President Smith boldly defended the Prophet, bearing testimony of his mission in these words:

“Many of the benefits and blessings that have come to me have come through that man who gave his life for the gospel of Jesus Christ. There have been some who have belittled him, but I would like to say that those who have done so will be forgotten and their remains will go back to mother earth, if they have not already gone, and the odor of their infamy will never die, while the glory and honor and majesty and courage and fidelity manifested by the Prophet Joseph Smith will attach to his name forever.”⁵

Elder Harold B. Lee, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was so impressed with this statement that he kept a clipping of it in his wallet and quoted it often, desiring that President Smith’s words “could be heard to all the ends of the earth.”⁶

Teachings of George Albert Smith

Joseph Smith’s First Vision demonstrated that the heavens are not sealed.

We believe that our Heavenly Father has spoken in our own day . . . , that he heard the humble prayer of a youth in Palmyra, and answered his prayer and blessed him with a knowledge of his personality, that all people might know the Lord, if they will.

It was a very natural thing that Joseph Smith should seek the Lord. He came of a . . . people who believed in our Heavenly Father, in the divine mission of the Savior, in the efficacy of prayer, and that God would hear and answer his people if they went before him with a

proper spirit. It was easy for this young man to believe, because he had been born and reared in a believing household; and when he went out into the woods in response to the injunction of the scripture (James 1:5): “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him,” he believed that his prayer would be answered, and our Heavenly Father has promised his children from the beginning, that, “by faith ye may know all things.”⁷

His faith in God led him away from the belief, common in his day, that the Bible contained all the revelation possible for men to receive, and that the heavens were sealed over his head. He prayed to the Lord, and his prayer was answered. He beheld the Father and the Son descending to earth surrounded with glorious light. He received an indisputable knowledge that they had tabernacles like men, and that they were material personages; they spoke to him and he heard their voices.⁸

The result [of Joseph’s prayer] was that wonderful manifestation, unlike any other that we have ever heard of in the history of the world. We have heard of instances where our Heavenly Father has manifested himself; we have read of instances where the Redeemer of mankind has manifested himself; but we have never read of any instance where the Father and the Son before have appeared to any living being and have spoken to that individual.

People of the world do not believe it. Men and women have been taught that the heavens are sealed . . . , and when this youth declared that in our day, at the very time when we needed light most of all, when men and women were running to and fro for the word of God and could not find it, as predicted by the old prophets [see Amos 8:11–12], the Lord had manifested himself, he [Joseph] was ridiculed. . . . His statement was rejected, and those who should have been his friends turned away from him and even said it was of the evil one. What was the boy’s testimony?

“ . . . I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling

me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it, at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation.” [See Joseph Smith—History 1:25.]⁹

In the year 1830, when this Church was organized, there was not upon the earth a church organization that would announce that they believed that God would reveal himself to the children of men. The teachings of the churches were all contrary to that, and our Father saw the futility of trying to save his sons and daughters until they could be inspired to come to him with the belief that he would hear and answer their prayers. When the boy prophet, in the woods of Palmyra, saw the Father and the Son, and realized that they were indeed personages, that they could hear and reply to what he said, it began a new era in this world, and laid a foundation for the faith of the children of men. They could now pray to our Father in heaven and realize that he could hear and answer their prayers, that there was a connection between the heavens and the earth.¹⁰ [See suggestion 2 on page 43.]

Though young and inexperienced, Joseph Smith was called to restore the true Church of Jesus Christ.

Faith prompted Joseph to seek God in prayer and ask which church he should identify himself with. What was the response? Did the Lord say, “My boy, they are all good, they are all striving to keep my commandments, the men who are leaders of all these churches are approved of me, any church will do, they will all lead you back into the presence of our Heavenly Father?” The boy might have expected such an answer from the conditions that existed. But he wanted to know what to do, and he had full faith that the Lord would tell him. So when he prayed, he asked which of the churches he should join, and I presume he was astonished when [he was told], “Join none of them; they teach for doctrine



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the commandments of men; they draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me; they have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof." [See Joseph Smith—History 1:19.] Think of a boy fourteen years of age arising from his knees in the woods near his home and announcing to the world such a message as that! Can you imagine that a youth would have dared to do such a thing as that? But with the witness that had been given unto him by his Heavenly Father, with that commandment from the Lord himself, dared he do anything else than make the announcement that the Lord had spoken to him?¹¹

Joseph Smith was only a boy when the hands of Peter, James and John were laid upon his head and he was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood,—he and Oliver Cowdery. A little later Joseph Smith was directed to organize a Church. He was only a young man, but he organized it under the direction of the Redeemer of mankind. And it is patterned after the Church which was organized by the Savior when he was upon the earth. I have no doubt there were many who looked upon this young man as an upstart, and thought it was ridiculous that one who had not been educated to become a leader should presume to lead. But he was like the other servants of our Heavenly Father who have lived upon the earth, who have been called by the Lord to perform a special labor, and the lack of knowledge pertaining to the things of this world did not preclude the possibility of the Lord's giving unto him information that made him equal and even superior in many respects to those who had possessed great earthly opportunities that were denied him.¹²

Abused and misrepresented though he was, despised by those who should have been his friends, opposed by the learned and scholarly men of the time, he succeeded in restoring the Gospel of life and salvation and establishing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

While the powers of evil were ever active for his destruction, he was preserved by the Lord until his work was finished and all the keys and ordinances necessary for the salvation of the human family had again been delivered to men.¹³ [See suggestion 3 on page 43.]

**The truths restored through Joseph Smith bring peace
and joy to those who accept them.**

From that boy who, at fourteen years of age, beheld the Father and the Son, there came that wonderful message that our Father in heaven and his Son Jesus Christ are glorified men; that the Savior of the world had been resurrected from the dead. That youth beheld what the world had known, but for some reason had forgotten, and he began bearing witness of it to the children of men.¹⁴

[In the early 1800s] there were few people in the world who believed in a personal God with a body. But a manifestation came at that time to the Prophet Joseph Smith, when he was only a boy, not yet fifteen years of age, and he saw the Father and the Son and so testified. He also received visitations from other heavenly beings, and the Lord, through them gave him additional information for the children of men, and he, in his own way, gave to us, or to those who preceded us in the Church, an understanding of the purpose of life. . . . His description of heaven inspires us with a desire to be worthy of a home there when our earthly lives are finished. A literal resurrection and a description of heaven and hell are made so plain that, to use a scripture, “a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.” [See Isaiah 35:8.]¹⁵

Through him was revealed temple building, the eternity of the marriage covenant, and salvation for the dead, bringing unspeakable joy to thousands of our Father’s children.

The eternal truths enunciated by him are finding their way among the peoples of the earth, bringing peace and contentment to those who accept them.¹⁶

Our Heavenly Father knew what was coming when in this latter day he restored the gospel in its purity. He knew of the apostasy in the world among his children, and that they had departed from the plain truth, and in his great mercy, he revealed this latter-day work. From the country he chose a boy from among the people, and inspired him to begin the work that was destined to revolutionize the religious world. He knew that the world was groping in darkness, and in mercy restored the light. There is no other way that happiness may be enjoyed by the children of men but by lives of righteousness, and people cannot live righteous lives and be out of harmony with truth. There was much truth in the world but it was so mixed with error that the Lord himself told the Prophet Joseph Smith that the men who were the teachers and instructors in the churches taught for doctrine the commandments of men, and warned the boy that he was not to be identified with them. He then restored the gospel, the power of God unto salvation, unto all those who will believe and obey it.¹⁷



“I say to all men everywhere, examine the teachings of the Gospel of our Lord as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, search them prayerfully.”

I say to all men everywhere, examine the teachings of the Gospel of our Lord as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, search them prayerfully, and you shall find the panacea for the ills of this world, and it will be discovered in no other way.¹⁸ [See suggestion 4 on page 43.]

Joseph Smith was willing to give his life for his testimony.

As had been the case with prophets whom the Lord had raised up before, it seemed necessary in this case that the testimony of His servant should be sealed with his life's blood. No more [poignant] page will be found in the history of the world than that upon which is inscribed the last sayings of our beloved Prophet Joseph Smith. He knew that his time was near at hand; he realized that his life's mission had been fulfilled. . . . And when the time came that he was face to face with death, he said, "I am going like a lamb to the slaughter, but I am calm as a summer morning. I have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward all men. If they take my life, I shall die an innocent man, and my blood shall cry from the ground for vengeance, and it shall yet be said of me, 'He was murdered in cold blood.'" [See D&C 135:4.]

He was not afraid to stand before the pleasing bar . . . and answer for the deeds done in the body. He was not afraid to meet the charge that had been made against him, that he was deceiving the people and dealing unjustly with them. He was not afraid of the result of his life's mission, and of the final triumph of the work which he knew was of divine origin, and for which he gave his life. Yet the people of the world, as before, judge this work by the spirit of man. They do not have the Spirit of God, which would enable them to understand that it came from our Father in heaven.¹⁹

This youth was so sure of the revelation that he had received, and was so anxious that his Father's children, all of them, should know of the truth, that from the time he received the plates of the Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni he devoted his entire life to the organization of the Church and disseminating the truth. . . . There was burning in his soul a knowledge such as Stephen had [see Acts 7:54–60], such as the Redeemer had, that our Heavenly Father was at the helm, that it was his work that was upon the earth, that it was his power that would eventually control, that this life was but a part of eternity. He was prepared to give up a part of his earth-life, if need be, in order that he might enjoy eternally the companionship that he so sincerely loved, and the association

of good men and women who have and do dwell upon the earth, and will again dwell upon the earth when it becomes the celestial kingdom.²⁰

Joseph Smith taught that he knew there was a hereafter, and that he knew that God lived, and that God knew that he knew that God lived. He was willing to give his life in order that you, my brethren and sisters, might have your faith strengthened and that your confidence in him might not be shaken. He knew the purpose of this life. He knew that we were here to prepare for the future and a more glorious existence. And he was willing, if need be, to give his own life, not simply that he might lose it, for our benefit, but because he knew that the Father had said that he who would save his life should lose it, but he who would lose his life for His sake should find it, even life eternal [see Matthew 16:25]. It was this knowledge that made it possible for the Prophet and [the] Patriarch of the Church [Hyrum Smith] in early days to [leave behind] loved ones, to be incarcerated in prison, and to give all that they had in this world, that men can give for their brethren—their mortal life.²¹

In the year 1830, the Church was organized with six members. The adversary of all righteousness has from that day to the present sought to impede its progress and destroy it. I wonder if that great man, Joseph Smith, who gave his life that the Church might be organized and carried on as the Lord intended, can see the Church as it exists today, with its branches established in all parts of the world, and realize that each day since he was martyred, since he laid down his life and sealed his testimony with his blood, the Church has become stronger than the day before.²² [See suggestion 5 on page 43.]

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages v–vii.

1. Think about the experiences President Smith describes in the first three paragraphs of “From the Life of George Albert Smith”

(pages 33–34). What experiences in your life have strengthened your testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith? As you read this chapter, identify statements from President Smith’s teachings that strengthen your testimony, and consider sharing them with members of your family, priesthood quorum, or Relief Society.

2. Review the first section of teachings (pages 34–36) and review Joseph Smith’s own account of the First Vision (see Joseph Smith—History 1:10–19). How has the First Vision influenced your faith in God? How have you seen it influence the faith of others?
3. Study the section that begins on page 36 and read Doctrine and Covenants 1:17–19. What can we learn about service in the Church from Joseph Smith’s example? Think of a time when you were given an assignment from the Lord and did not feel qualified. How did the Lord help you?
4. What are some of the truths that the Lord revealed through Joseph Smith? (For some examples of these truths, see the section that begins on page 38.) How has your life been blessed because you know these truths?
5. As you ponder the last paragraph of teachings (page 42), consider what you can do to help the Church continue to become stronger.

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 29:13–14; 1 Corinthians 1:26–27; 2 Nephi 3:5–9, 11–15; Doctrine and Covenants 135

Teaching help: “To encourage discussion, use the questions at the end of the chapter. . . . You could also develop your own questions especially for those you are teaching. For example, you could ask participants how they can apply President Smith’s teachings in their responsibilities as parents or as home teachers or visiting teachers” (from page vi of this book).

Notes

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1906, 54.
2. Journal entry dated Dec. 23, 1905, George Albert Smith Family Papers, University of Utah, box 73, book 2, page 160.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1906, 56.
4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1906, 57–58.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1946, 181–82.
6. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1947, 67.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 158–59.
8. “The Latter-day Prophet,” *Millennial Star*, Dec. 7, 1905, 822.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 159–60.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1917, 37.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 159–60.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1927, 83.
13. “The Latter-day Prophet,” 823.
14. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 160.
15. In Conference Report, Apr. 1934, 26.
16. “The Latter-day Prophet,” 823.
17. In Conference Report, Oct. 1916, 46–47.
18. In Conference Report, Oct. 1931, 121.
19. In Conference Report, Apr. 1904, 63–64.
20. In Conference Report, Oct. 1927, 48.
21. In Conference Report, Apr. 1905, 62–63.
22. In Conference Report, Oct. 1945, 18.