

# THE *Articles of Faith* AND THE LIFE OF *Joseph Smith*

*The Articles of Faith can help us—and especially our children and grandchildren—see the Prophet Joseph Smith’s life in a meaningful framework.*



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**I**N PONDERING HOW I might make the history of Joseph Smith come to life for my grandchildren, the thirteen Articles of Faith came to mind as a helpful connector. It soon became exciting to see how well the Articles of Faith brought to light the main stages in Joseph Smith’s prophetic mission and inspired life.

Especially for children, who know these crystal clear declarations of belief, the Articles of Faith provide a familiar framework within which to understand Joseph Smith’s labors between 1820 and 1842, the year he wrote the Articles of Faith in his famous Wentworth Letter.<sup>1</sup>

In that letter, the Prophet looked back over his remarkable life and summarized the rise and progress of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the Articles of Faith, which close the letter, he summarized some key doctrines of the restored gospel—doctrines that we can associate with certain events in his history. Consider some ways in which the Articles of Faith and the life of Joseph Smith are aligned.

**1.** We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

**2.** We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

**3.** We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

## 1820

Joseph's mission as a prophet began in the spring of 1820 in a grove near his family's log home, south of Palmyra, New York, USA. There, filled with the Holy Ghost, he plainly learned that the Father and the Son are separate beings. It is no surprise that the Articles of Faith also begin where Joseph began.



THE FIRST VISION, BY GARY L. KAPP, MAY NOT BE COPIED

**With the First Vision, Joseph Smith learned the true nature of the Godhead.**

In the next several years, Joseph dealt with some ordinary follies of youth; he also learned some extraordinary lessons about accountability, especially when Martin Harris lost the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript and, as a result, the power to translate was taken from Joseph for a season. Through these experiences, he learned firsthand the foundational principles of agency, choice, and accountability.



**In translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith learned more about Christ's Atonement.**

**Martin Harris mortgaged his farm (right) to print the Book of Mormon. During this time he also learned a lot about repentance.**



THE MARTIN HARRIS FARM, BY AL ROUNDS © 1984

## 1829



FIRST FRUITS, BY JEFFREY HIEN

After obtaining the Lord's forgiveness, Joseph was again blessed to translate the Book of Mormon. He learned from its pages the plan of salvation and the true doctrine of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Around the time when the printing of the Book of Mormon was getting under way in the summer of 1829, Joseph received a sublime revelation directed to Martin Harris and containing the words of Jesus Himself regarding His eternal sacrifice, which opens the powers of the Atonement to all: "For behold, I God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent" (D&C 19:16).

**4.** We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

**5.** We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

**6.** We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.

1829



DETAIL FROM THE BIBLE AND THE BOOK OF MORMON TESTIFY OF CHRIST, BY GREG K. OLSEN

From the teachings of the Book of Mormon, Joseph also came to know the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. These elements are consistently grouped together in the Book of Mormon. For example, to the people gathered in the land Bountiful the resurrected Lord testified: “I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved. . . . [And the Father] will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 11:32–33, 35).

As he translated 3 Nephi 11:21–27, Joseph learned how Jesus gave his disciples the authority to baptize and taught them the words that needed to be used in the baptismal prayer. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, who was acting as scribe, immediately realized that they had not been baptized in this manner or by such authority. They went out into the woods near Joseph and Emma’s home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where they had been working. There, on May 15, 1829, John the Baptist appeared, laid his hands on them, and in the name of Christ conferred upon them the Priesthood of Aaron, giving them the authority to baptize. Soon after, as they translated 3 Nephi 18:36–37, they further learned that the Lord had given His disciples a second power, namely the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. Peter, James, and John soon came to ordain Joseph and Oliver to the higher Melchizedek Priesthood.



THE RESTORATION OF THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD, BY LIZ LEMON SWINDLE, MAY NOT BE COPIED

1830

With power and authority, Joseph Smith next organized the Church, following the same pattern that existed in the ancient Church. This process began in Fayette, New York, at the Peter Whitmer home on April 6, 1830, and it continued as the offices and quorums of the priesthood were organized, especially during the first five years of Joseph Smith’s time in Kirtland, Ohio, between 1831 and 1836.



**After the priesthood was restored (left), Joseph could organize the Church (above).**





**7.** We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.

**8.** We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

**9.** We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

## 1835

In Kirtland, the Saints were blessed repeatedly with tremendous outpourings of the gifts of the Spirit. All of those gifts that are mentioned in the seventh article of faith were seen in rich abundance in Kirtland, especially as the Saints prepared for and experienced the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in April 1836.

***At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple (below) there was a great outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit.***

Also in Kirtland and in nearby Hiram, Ohio (mainly from 1831 to July 2, 1833), the Prophet worked on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, reinforcing his belief in the Bible as the word of God and deepening his understanding of the importance of having the Bible translated correctly. Going hand in hand with the Bible, the Book of Mormon had also been accepted as the word of God, and in 1832 the Saints were commanded to remember the Book of Mormon, which they were reprimanded for treating lightly (see D&C 84:54–58). Also at this time the administration of the Church continued to put into practice numerous teachings and instructions in the Book of Mormon,<sup>2</sup> and in 1837 the second edition of the Book of Mormon was published.



JOSEPH TRANSLATING THE BIBLE, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT © 1982



Throughout the Kirtland experience, the heavens resounded with the outpouring of visions and revelations, many of which were published in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. The ninth article of faith reflects this experience of continuing revelation and looks forward as Joseph received instruction from the Lord to leave Kirtland early in 1838.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IS ORGANIZED, 1830, BY JOSEPH BRICKEY, MAY NOT BE COPIED



**10.** We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

**11.** We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

**12.** We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

## 1838

Next, Joseph Smith and his followers moved west early in 1838 to Missouri. There the Saints hoped to lay a foundation for the establishment of Zion. They expected Christ to reign on the earth, and they sang fervent hymns of hope that the earth would be renewed and would again be a garden place. At Far West, Missouri, on April 11, 1838, the Lord called David W. Patten of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to prepare to go forth “to testify of my name and bear glad tidings unto all the world” (D&C 114:1), expanding missionary work worldwide in gathering and restoring the tribes of Israel.



HURRAH, HURRAH, HURRAH FOR ISRAEL, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT, MAY NOT BE COPIED

**Leaving for a mission to England in the fall of 1839, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, though ill, waved to their families and shouted, “Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah for Israel!” The gathering of Israel greatly expanded during this time.**



Joseph and the Saints soon learned that conflicts in Missouri would violently interfere with their exercise of religious freedom. The Saints were driven at gunpoint from Missouri in the bitter cold of winter in 1839, while Joseph was imprisoned in Liberty Jail for more than four unimaginably brutal months. In Illinois, the Saints established Nauvoo as a place of religious liberty and tolerance, with all people in the city being protected by a city ordinance passed on March 1, 1841, guaranteeing that people of all faiths would have “free toleration, and equal privileges, in this city.”<sup>3</sup>

## 1840

Even though their Missouri land rights had been trampled upon and their civil liberties flagrantly abridged, Joseph and the Saints did not strike back. They believed in the rule of law and trusted that it would lead to the best result. As they moved to Nauvoo, they petitioned the president of the United States for redress, worked through legal channels to purchase new land, and established the city of Nauvoo with its charter issued by the state legislature. They followed the law in submitting to federal judges and state magistrates, even at great cost and personal risk.

**Through their experiences in Missouri (below) the Saints knew the importance of religious freedom for all.**



LEAVING MISSOURI, BY C. A. CHRISTENSEN



**13.** We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

1842

There in Nauvoo, the Prophet rejoiced in the noble values of Christian life. These are the principles upon which the city of Nauvoo was founded. Indeed, he could also say that he and the Saints had followed the admonition of Paul and prophetically looked forward to yet further trials and trails of tears moving westward, hoping to be able to endure all things. In all of this, and in the highest ambitions of the building of the City Beautiful, with the construction of the splendid Nauvoo Temple already under way, Joseph concluded these Articles of Faith with a declaration of the ideals that would bring thousands of converts to the gospel of Jesus Christ.



JOSEPH SMITH AT THE NAUVOO TEMPLE, BY GARY E. SMITH © 1975

**Joseph Smith wrote the Articles of Faith while the Nauvoo Temple was under construction. He and the Saints had endured many things to get to that point.**

JOSEPH IN NAUVOO, 1840, BY THEODORE S. GORKA



IN FEBRUARY 1842, as Joseph ended his letter to John Wentworth with the list we now call the Articles of Faith, he summarized not only the points in that landmark letter but also in his dedicated life. In the letter, he had just told Wentworth about his First Vision in 1820 and about the Book of Mormon’s coming forth to be “united with the Bible.” He had then spoken of those who were “called and ordained by the Spirit of revelation and prophecy . . . to preach as the Spirit gave them utterance” and about the many who were thus “brought to repentance, were immersed in the water, and were filled with the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.” He had told of the organization of the Church as taught in ancient times by our Savior and of the many who had seen “visions and prophesied” and who had healed the sick “by the laying on of hands.” Ultimately he had spoken about the many hardships the Saints had “had to endure,” and he had fervently testified that this “persecution has not stopped the progress of truth, but has only added fuel to the flame,” and that it would “go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the Articles of Faith are not abstract, theoretical, or theological propositions. They reflect real life. They crystallized out of the daily efforts and yearly struggles of faithful men, women, and children to do the will of God and to build His kingdom here on earth. Gems like these, strung together on the tether of eternal life, can be fully appreciated only in that same way, by being hearers and doers of the word and following the pathways of righteous living. ■

#### NOTES

1. The Prophet wrote what came to be known as the Wentworth Letter in response to a request from John Wentworth, a newspaper editor, and George Barstow, a lawyer and historian. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 435–47; see also *History of the Church*, 4:535–41.
2. See John W. Welch, “The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration,” in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (2011), 15–57.
3. *History of the Church*, 4:306.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 441, 442, 444.