

JOSEPH SMITH DID SEE GOD

We must each gain a testimony of the witness provided by the Prophet Joseph Smith.



By Elder Joseph F. Merrill (1868–1952)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Joseph F. Merrill was born on August 24, 1868, in Utah, USA. He was set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on October 8, 1931, and served in that quorum until his death on February 3, 1952. The following is an excerpt from a general conference address given in April 1947. For the full address, see Conference Report, April 1947, 132–37 (also available at scriptures.byu.edu).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . . is noted for many characteristic teachings, one of which is that Joseph Smith was divinely called, beginning with a most wonderful and glorious vision. Relative to this matter, a basic and fundamental question that every member of the Church may rightfully ask, as well as every honest investigator, is “Did Joseph Smith really see God?” . . .

Joseph Beheld Two Personages

All informed Latter-day Saints know the story of the First Vision as related by Joseph Smith. . . . In answer to the boy’s simple prayer, . . . he was enveloped in a pillar of brilliant light which descended from above. Looking up, he beheld two

personages standing above him, whose brightness and glory defied all description. One of Them, calling him by name and pointing to the other, said, “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” [Joseph Smith—History 1:17] and then Joseph heard the voice of Jesus Christ, the Son, and received instructions from Him.

. . . Joseph Smith, the fourteen-year-old lad, saw the Father and the Son and heard Their voices. So far as the records indicate, this was the most glorious vision ever given to mortal man. Never before had both Father and Son appeared simultaneously to any mortal man. I have called your attention to Joseph’s story because of its extreme importance to our faith. . . . So I ask again, did Joseph Smith really and in fact see God? . . .

Joseph Learned of Personal Beings

The implications of the affirmative answer are tremendously significant. Through misunderstanding and wrong interpretations, the world had lost the correct conception of the image and personality of God. To

restore the truth, a new revelation was imperative. Though from the beginning to its end, the Bible . . . teaches that God is a personal being in whose image we are made, and that the Father and the Son are two separate and distinct personalities, alike in image and attributes, yet the modern world, through ignorance and lack of understanding, denies these fundamental truths. And so important are these truths to a satisfying faith that, I think, they are absolutely basic. Without any concrete conception of the image of God, how can one develop the necessary faith of the kind that the Apostle James asserts is needed to get an answer to prayer? [see James 1:5–6]. Yes, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are personal beings in whose image man himself is made, so declared Joseph Smith. . . .

Joseph’s Works Evidence God’s Inspiration

Now, what evidence can we present of the truthfulness of Joseph Smith’s claims? . . . Jesus emphasized



the principle that a tree is judged by its fruits [see Matthew 7:16–20]. Can there be a more fair, just, and satisfactory basis of judgment than this? . . .

. . . Judged by modern standards, [Joseph Smith] was practically uneducated and untrained for leadership in any sphere of intellectual endeavor. . . .

But notwithstanding all the severely handicapping conditions from an economic and educational point of view, what did Joseph Smith become? . . .

. . . I recite [a] quotation from [a] writer in the *New York Times* of September 4, 1843: . . .

“It is no small thing, in the blaze of the nineteenth century, to give to men a new revelation, found a new religion, establish new forms of worship, to build a city with new laws,

institutions, and orders of architecture, to establish ecclesiastical, civil and military jurisdiction, found colleges, send out missionaries, and make proselytes on two hemispheres. Yet all this has been done by [Joseph] Smith, and that against every sort of opposition, ridicule, and persecution.”

In the short space of fifteen years, Joseph Smith, unschooled in the learning and the methods of the world, did all these important things. How was it possible? Does not the only rational explanation lie in the claim that he was God-taught? . . .

. . . It is very largely to the teachings and labors of the Prophet Joseph Smith that the modern world is indebted for a correct interpretation of the plan of life, salvation, and

exaltation that the Lord has provided for His children to follow if they would care to return to His presence.

. . . Joseph Smith, his claims, his teachings, and his achievements are so very remarkable in character that they challenge every . . . human being able to do so, to make an honest and thorough investigation of them. ■

Subheads added; capitalization and punctuation standardized.

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