



The Prophet Joseph Smith, *an Extraordinary Teacher*

BY ELDER JAY E. JENSEN

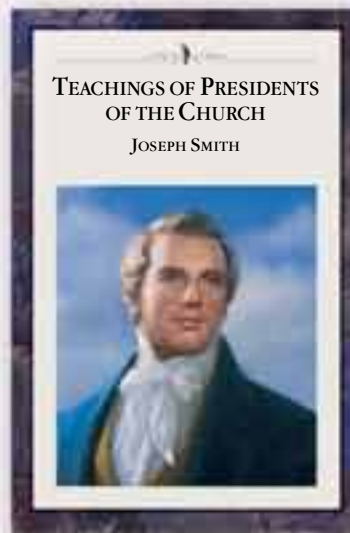
Of the Seventy
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While recovering from four gunshot wounds he received in Carthage Jail and no doubt filled with awe concerning his beloved martyred Prophet, President John Taylor (1808–87) wrote these inspiring words: “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (D&C 135:3).

Recently, President Gordon B. Hinckley testified: “The story of Joseph’s life is the story of a miracle. He was born in poverty. He was reared in adversity. He was driven from place to place, falsely accused, and illegally imprisoned. He was murdered at the age of 38. Yet in the brief space of 20 years preceding his death, he accomplished what none other has accomplished in an entire lifetime.”¹

Among Joseph Smith’s many accomplishments is laying the foundation of our latter-day doctrinal understanding. “This generation,” said the Lord to the Prophet Joseph, “shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10).

Joseph had little formal education, but the Master Potter molded him into a prophet of wisdom and intelligence and into an extraordinary teacher with inspired insight. Many of his teachings are now published in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*. This extraordinary new book offers members worldwide an unparalleled opportunity to



learn about the Prophet of the Restoration and his teachings.

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith taught hundreds of inspiring sermons while he was the Prophet and President of the Church. Unfortunately, only about 50 were written down. For the past several years, many people, including professionals and volunteers, have diligently searched historical records to compile and review the statements that have been attributed

to the Prophet. His teachings were carefully studied, authenticated, and compiled. The compilation was then approved by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Each statement in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* was thoroughly researched for accuracy. Extensive and painstaking effort was expended to check original sources. This effort was necessary because the way in which sermons were recorded in the Prophet’s day differed significantly from the way sermons of later Presidents of the Church were recorded. As explained in the new book: “During the lifetime of Joseph Smith, . . . shorthand was not in widespread use. Therefore, the sermons he delivered were recorded imprecisely in longhand, generally by scribes, Church leaders, and other Church members. Almost all of Joseph Smith’s addresses were given extemporaneously, without prepared texts, so the

Our lives can be enriched and our testimonies bolstered by taking time to contemplate the teachings and events depicted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*.

notes taken by those who listened to him constitute the only record of the discourses.”²

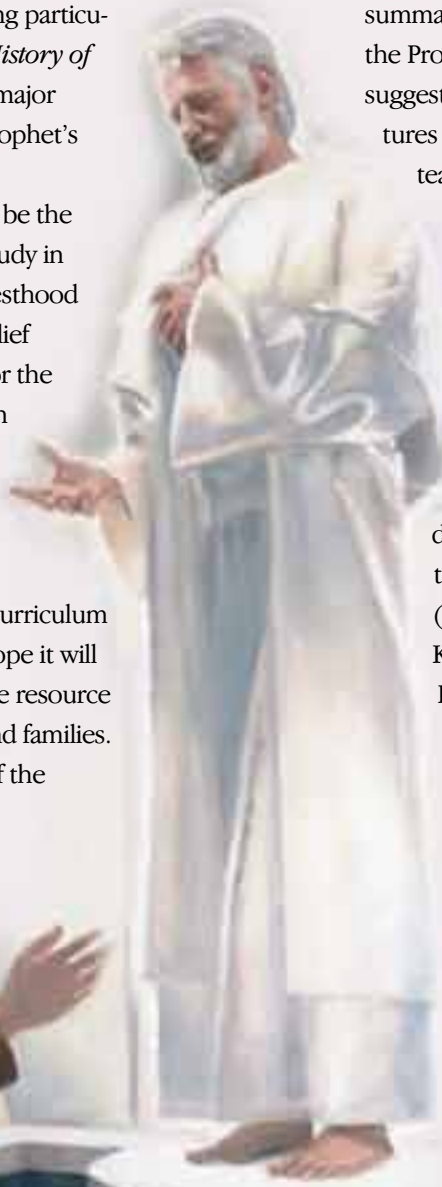
This new book contains inspiring statements from Joseph Smith on more than 125 gospel topics. The book’s index will help us more easily find the Prophet’s statements on those topics. The notes at the end of each chapter provide detailed information regarding the sources for the Prophet’s statements. In addition, an appendix provides explanations of the sources, giving particular attention to *History of the Church*, the major source for the Prophet’s teachings.

The book will be the text for gospel study in Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Society classes for the next two years on the second and third Sundays of each month. As the Executive Director of the Curriculum Department, I hope it will become a favorite resource for individuals and families. Every member of the

Church, 18 years and older, will receive a copy. It stands next to the other books in the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series, becoming an integral part of a library for personal and family gospel study.

This book is similar in style and format to the other books in the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series. Like others in the series, it contains an introduction that provides helpful tips for learning and teaching, a historical summary, an essay on the life and ministry of the Prophet, and, at the end of each chapter, suggestions for study and teaching. These features can enhance our ability to learn and teach about Joseph Smith and his prophetic statements.

Students and teachers will also benefit from the visuals and introductory material in each chapter. There are more than 140 photos, paintings, and illustrations—including artwork that has never before been published. The new art depicts such inspirational moments as the baptism of the Prophet’s father (chapter 7); Elijah appearing in the Kirtland Temple (chapter 26); the Prophet creating peace among angry militiamen with his congenial personality (chapter 29); the electrifying moment in the jail at Richmond, Missouri, when Joseph, bound in chains with a few of his faithful brethren, rose to his feet to rebuke the foulmouthed guards (chapter 30); and the miraculous healing of Elijah Fordham in Commerce, Illinois (chapter 33). Our lives can be enriched and our testimonies bolstered by taking time to contemplate



ELIJAH APPEARING IN THE KIRTLAND TEMPLE, BY DANIEL LEWIS; JOSEPH SMITH PREACHING IN NAUVOO, BY PAUL MANN

THE PROPHET AS A TEACHER

The Prophet Joseph Smith was a remarkable gospel teacher, in part due to his thirst to learn. He could hold the attention of thousands for hours while he preached the truths of the restored gospel. President Brigham Young (1801–77) described the Prophet's inspired teaching ability: "He took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth, brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God. . . . Did not Joseph do the same to your understandings? Would he not take the Scriptures and make them so plain and simple that everybody could understand?"¹

Elder Parley P. Pratt (1807–57) recorded an occasion when the Prophet's extraordinary teaching ability influenced thousands in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: "A very large church was opened for him to preach in, and about three thousand people assembled to hear him. Brother Rigdon spoke first, and dwelt on the Gospel, illustrating his doctrine by the Bible. When he was through, Brother Joseph arose like a lion about to roar; and being full of the Holy Ghost, spoke in great power, bearing testimony of the visions he had seen, the ministering of angels which he had enjoyed; and how he had found the plates of the Book of Mormon, and translated them by the gift and power of God. He commenced by saying: 'If nobody else had the courage to testify of so glorious a message from Heaven, and of the finding of so glorious a record, he felt to do it in justice to the people, and leave the event with God.'"

Elder Pratt continued: "The entire congregation were astounded; electrified, as it were, and overwhelmed with the sense of the truth and power by which he spoke, and the wonders which he related. A lasting impression was made; many souls were gathered into the fold."²

On at least one occasion, the Lord performed a miracle so the people could hear the Prophet teach. Amasa Potter was present during a sermon Joseph Smith gave near the Nauvoo Temple in April 1844. Of that experience, Brother Potter recorded: "When he had spoken about thirty minutes there came up a heavy wind and storm. The dust was so dense that we could not see each other any distance, and some of the people were leaving when Joseph called out to them to stop and let their prayers ascend to Almighty God that the winds may cease blowing and the rain



stop falling, and it should be so. In a very few minutes the winds and rain ceased and the elements became calm as a summer's morning. The storm divided and went on the north and south of the city, and we could see in the distance the trees and shrubs waving in the wind, while where we were it was quiet for one hour, and during that time one of the greatest sermons that ever fell from the Prophet's lips was preached on the great subject of the dead."³

The Prophet Joseph Smith was eager for Latter-day Saints and others to receive all they could, and he tirelessly tried to teach them what God had so liberally revealed to him. In a June 1839 discourse at Commerce, Illinois, the Prophet taught, "God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them."⁴ During another discourse in April 1843, he said: "It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I shall make the Saints of God comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind. Oh! how I would delight to bring before you things which you never thought of!"⁵

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 344–45.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 150.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 494.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 268.
5. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 520.

the events depicted in these visual representations.

The introductory section of each chapter, titled “From the Life of Joseph Smith,” presents a view of the Prophet’s life and the major events of the Restoration. We’ll read about his roles as husband and father, his relationships with friends, and his encounters with enemies. We’ll read about his success as a leader and his sorrow from persecution. Our affection and appreciation for him will increase as we read and ponder his personal experiences. Our knowledge and testimonies of Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration, will be fortified. Let’s consider just a few of the inspired teachings this new publication contains.

The First Vision

The first chapter of this remarkable new book begins, as did the Restoration, with the First Vision. The humble prayer of Joseph Smith, a 14-year-old boy in 1820, parted the veil of silence that had covered the earth for centuries. The occasion was of such significance that Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to young Joseph. He

became a firsthand witness of the reality of God and His Son. Toward the end of his life, the Prophet taught: “I am going to inquire after God, for I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him. . . . You will then know that I am His servant.”³ The contents of chapter 1 allow us to study and ponder the Prophet’s personal account of his miraculous vision.

The Book of Mormon

In parts of six chapters, this new book also emphasizes the importance of the Book of Mormon by retelling the events surrounding its coming to light and its translation and printing. Of his experience translating the prophetic writings, the Prophet later declared, “By the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation.”⁴ The historical accounts of the coming forth of the Book



of Mormon contained in this new book are accompanied by the Prophet's teachings on subjects such as the scriptures, repentance, prayer, personal revelation, and the organization of the Church.

This new publication includes the oft-quoted promise by the Prophet: "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."⁵ Experience teaches us that those who read the Book of Mormon often and apply its teachings will enjoy heaven's inspiration along life's trying path.

By pondering and praying as we read the Book of Mormon and what Joseph Smith taught about it, we can come to know that the Book of Mormon was not the product of a nineteenth-century farm boy—or of any other person of that time. We will realize with each new reading that it was a gift from God, written and compiled by earlier disciples, preserved through centuries of time, and translated by the mighty seer Joseph Smith. It is tangible evidence of Joseph Smith's calling as the Prophet of the Restoration.

The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods

The new book briefly tells of the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and their keys. The Prophet testified of receiving the authority and keys of the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist. "Suffice it to say," he declared, "I went into the woods to inquire of the Lord, by prayer, His will concerning me, and I saw an angel [John the Baptist], and he laid his hands upon my head, and ordained me to a Priest after the order of Aaron, and to hold the keys of this Priesthood."⁶ A few weeks later, the Apostles Peter, James, and John appeared and conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery the Melchizedek Priesthood and its keys. Ten years after these miraculous appearances, the Prophet testified, "We believe that no man can administer salvation through the gospel, to the souls of men, in the name of Jesus Christ, except he is authorized from God, by revelation, or by being



ordained by some one whom God hath sent by revelation."⁷

Today we humbly proclaim that God authorized Joseph Smith through divinely appointed ministers and that the Prophet extended that authority to others by conferring upon them the priesthood and its keys. With gratitude, we declare that there has been an unbroken chain of conferals and ordinations since that time to the present day.

Temple Ordinances

"In the spring of 1836, after three years of work and sacrifice," we read in chapter 26, "the Kirtland Saints finally saw their beautiful temple complete, the first temple in this dispensation."⁸ Hundreds of people gathered for the dedication. We can read of the glorious manifestations that occurred at the dedication, as well as what Joseph Smith taught about the power to seal families together forever. The Prophet reiterated the importance of temples when he taught in June 1843, "There are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose."⁹

Since 1836 more than 120 temples have been built and dedicated to the Lord. Through temple ordinances, individuals are endowed, families are sealed, saving ordinances for deceased ancestors are performed, covenants are made, and lives are blessed. All this became possible because of the Lord's work through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Continuing Revelation

Some of Joseph Smith's most profound teachings on revelation, living prophets, and the consequences for rejecting living prophets can be found in chapter 16. The Prophet once declared, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded upon direct revelation, as the true Church of God has ever been, according to the Scriptures."¹⁰

Since the time of Joseph Smith, revelation has come through men called as prophets to lead the Lord's Church. The Lord has not left His servants, His Church, or His people alone. We affirm that He grants divine guidance to those He calls to administer His kingdom.

Family

The Prophet's counsel and wisdom regarding the importance and eternal nature of the family are highlighted in chapter 42. Parley P. Pratt once noted, "It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter."¹¹ The Prophet's personal journal records a touching entry about his gravely ill father: "Waited on my father again, who was very sick. In secret prayer in the morning, the Lord said, 'My servant, thy father shall live.' I waited on him all this day with my heart raised to God in the name of Jesus Christ, that He would restore him to health, that I might be blessed with his company and advice, esteeming it one of the greatest earthly blessings to be blessed with the society of parents, whose mature years and experience render them capable of administering the most wholesome advice."¹²

An Accessible Source

This new Church publication presents the Prophet's inspired gospel teachings on missionary work, obedience, death, adversity, unity, leadership, apostasy, forgiveness, friends, and many more gospel topics. In an unprecedented way, Joseph Smith's teachings are now accessible to Church members all around the world through this

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS BOOK

- Priesthood and Relief Society leaders should ensure that every member 18 years and older receives a copy of this new Church publication.
- All of us as gospel learners can read, study, and ponder each chapter before class and go prepared to share our insights and testimonies during the class discussion.
- The suggestions in the introduction can help teachers focus on the contents of the book rather than supplement it with other resources.
- Parents and children can develop family home evening lessons by using the pictures, stories, quotations, and questions in the book.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ISRAEL ANTUNES VIEIRA

book. Never before have so many of God's children had such access to his prophetic statements.

What began with a single soul in a solitary place in the spring of 1820 has become a family of millions who seek to follow Jesus Christ. To the heart and soul of each faithful member, the Holy Ghost bears testimony of a humble and seemingly ordinary boy whom the Lord molded into an extraordinary prophet and teacher. We can keep the fire of that testimony kindled by learning and living the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith as now published in this extraordinary new book. ■

NOTES

1. "Joseph Smith Jr.—Prophet of God, Mighty Servant," *Liabona and Ensign*, Dec. 2005, 4.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 558.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 38.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 60.
5. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 64.
6. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 85.
7. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 110.
8. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 307.
9. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 416.
10. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 195.
11. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 481.
12. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 483.