



Joseph Smith, Prophet of the Restoration

“I bear solemn testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith as the Lord’s anointed servant in these the latter days.”

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

Nancy Nowell, who was one of Howard W. Hunter’s paternal great-great-grandmothers, moved to Lapeer, Michigan, in the mid-1830s. In 1842 a missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to Lapeer from Nauvoo, Illinois. Nancy listened to his message, prayed about it, and received a testimony that he was teaching the truth. She went to Nauvoo to learn more about the Church, and in her journal she made this record of her experience:

“I went to hear the Mormon preacher [Joseph Smith] with great caution, hoping not to be deceived. His subject was the second coming of Christ. I had a testimony that he spoke the truth, and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, called and ordained of God to do a great work, because he had brought forth the truth as it was taught by Jesus Christ. I asked to be baptized.”¹

Like his great-great-grandmother Nancy Nowell, Howard W. Hunter had a sure testimony of Joseph Smith’s prophetic mission. Three weeks after becoming President of the Church, he traveled to Nauvoo to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. In a meeting held at the Nauvoo Temple site, President Hunter said:

“The responsibility I feel for the work the Prophet Joseph inaugurated fills me with a determination to do all I can in the time and season allotted to me. Surely Joseph was faithful and true to his time and season! . . . I bear solemn testimony of the Prophet Joseph



“Joseph Smith was not only a great man, but he was an inspired servant of the Lord, a prophet of God.”

Smith as the Lord's anointed servant in these the latter days. To his testimony of the divinity and reality of Jesus Christ I add my own."²

Later that day, in a meeting held beside the Carthage Jail, President Hunter testified, "Joseph Smith, who gave his life at this place, was the instrument the Lord used to restore the fulness of His gospel and the authority of His priesthood."³

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter

1830

God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith to initiate the Restoration.

Many times the gospel [has] been given to the world through the prophets, and each time [it has been] lost because of disobedience. In the year 1820 the silence was broken, and the Lord again appeared to a prophet. This prophet, Joseph Smith, could testify of his own positive knowledge that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, a Resurrected Being, separate and distinct from the Father. He did not testify as to what he believed or what he or others thought or conjectured, but of what he knew. This knowledge came to him because God the Father and the Son appeared to him in person and spoke to him.⁴

God . . . revealed himself [to Joseph Smith] as a personal being. Furthermore, the Father and the Son demonstrated the undeniable truth that they are separate and distinct personages. Indeed, the relationship of the Father and the Son was reaffirmed by the divine introduction to the boy prophet, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" [Joseph Smith—History 1:17].⁵

When men heard that young Joseph Smith was claiming God had manifested Himself to the boy, they mocked him and turned away from him, just as in the Christian era wise and able men in Athens turned away from a singular man ministering in their midst. Yet the fact remains that Paul, in that earlier experience, was the only man in that great city of learning who knew that a person may pass through the portals of death and live. He was the only man in Athens who could clearly delineate the difference between the

formality of idolatry and the heartfelt worship of the only true and living God. [See Acts 17:19–20, 22–23.]⁶

Those who rejected the Savior when he came to earth with the declaration that he was the Son of God said of him: “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:55.) When Joseph announced that he had seen a vision and had seen the Father and the Son, the query came to the minds and lips of the neighbors, the ministers, and the townspeople: “Is not this the farmer’s son?” Christ was persecuted and put to death, but time has been his vindicator. As with the carpenter’s son, so it has been with the farmer’s son.⁷

Joseph Smith was not only a great man, but he was an inspired servant of the Lord, a prophet of God. His greatness consists in one thing—the truthfulness of his declaration that he saw the Father and the Son and that he responded to the reality of that divine revelation. . . .

I testify . . . that the Father and the Son did appear to the Prophet Joseph Smith to initiate this great rolling forth of the latter-day work in our time.

I testify that the boy prophet, who in so many ways remains the central miracle . . . of this church’s experience, is living proof that, within God’s hands and under the direction of the Savior of the world, weak and simple things should come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones.⁸

2

**Jesus Christ reestablished His Church
through the Prophet Joseph Smith.**

On the sixth of April, 1830, . . . a group of men and women, acting in obedience to a commandment of God, assembled in the house of Mr. Peter Whitmer [Sr.] to organize The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . None of them laid any claim to special learning or significant leadership. They were honorable people and respectable citizens, but were virtually unknown outside of their own immediate neighborhood. . . .

These humble, ordinary men gathered because one of them, Joseph Smith, Jr., a very young man, had set forth a most remarkable

claim. He declared to them and all others who would listen that he had received profound and repeated heavenly communications, including an open vision of God the Father and his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. As a result of these revelatory experiences, Joseph Smith had already published the Book of Mormon, a record of Christ's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of America. Furthermore, the Lord had commanded this young man, by now only twenty-four years of age, to reinstitute the Church that had existed in New Testament times and that in its restored purity should again be designated by the name of its chief cornerstone and eternal head, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Thus, humbly but most significantly was opened the first scene in the great Church drama that eventually would affect not only that generation of men but the entire human family. . . . A humble beginning, yes, but the claim that God had spoken, that Christ's Church was again organized and its doctrines reaffirmed by divine revelation, was the most outstanding declaration made to the world since the days of the Savior himself when he walked the paths of Judea and the hills of Galilee.⁹

Part of the divine revelation [Joseph Smith received] was instruction to reestablish the true and living Church, restored in these modern times as it existed in the day of the Savior's own mortal ministry. The Prophet Joseph Smith said the Church of Jesus Christ was "organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by Him to ourselves in these last days, as well as according to the order of the Church as recorded in the New Testament" [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 138]. . . .

. . . Those who were baptized into the Church on the sixth of April, 1830, believed in the existence of a personal God; they believed that his reality and the reality of his Son, Jesus Christ, constitute the eternal foundation upon which this church is built.¹⁰

Through [Joseph Smith] and by subsequent events, the priesthood and the gospel in its fulness were once more restored to the earth, never again to be removed [see D&C 65:2]. The Church of Christ, the kingdom of God on earth, was reestablished and destined, according to scripture, to roll forth and fill the whole earth [see Daniel 2:35].¹¹

Joseph Smith was a prophet, seer, and revelator.

The coming of the Prophet Joseph into the world was the fulfillment of a prophecy uttered many centuries ago by Joseph who was sold into Egypt:

“A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins. . . . And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father” (2 Nephi 3:6, 15).

Joseph Smith, Jr., was called after the name of Joseph of old who was carried captive into Egypt, and also after the name of his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., thus fulfilling this prophecy. He is known as the Prophet Joseph Smith and is called “Joseph the Seer.” He is often referred to as “prophet, seer, and revelator.”

The terms “Prophet” and “Seer” and “Revelator” are often used interchangeably and are thought by many to be one and the same thing. They are not the same, however, and these three terms have separate and distinct meanings.

[Elder] John A. Widtsoe defines a prophet as a teacher—one who expounds truth. He teaches truth as revealed by the Lord to man, and under inspiration explains it to the understanding of the people. The word “prophet” is often used to designate one who receives revelation and direction from the Lord. Many have thought that a prophet is essentially a foreteller of future events and happenings, but this is only one of the many functions of a prophet. He is a spokesman for the Lord.

A seer is one who sees. This does not mean that he sees through his natural eyes but rather through spiritual eyes. The seeric gift is a supernatural endowment. Joseph was like unto Moses, the ancient seer, and Moses saw God face to face, but he explains how he saw him in these words:

“But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him” (Moses 1:11).



The Prophet Joseph Smith's life "was led by revelation."

We should not suppose that to see spiritually is not to see literally. Such vision is not fancy or imagination. The object is actually beheld but not with the natural eyes. Each of us has spiritual eyes which are the counterpart of our natural eyes. We were first created spiritually and then our bodies were created as the covering of our spirit. We are told that in our first estate we walked by sight. This was through the vision of our spiritual eyes because we had not yet been given bodies with natural eyes. All men have spiritual sight but are not always privileged to use such sight unless quickened by the Spirit of the Lord. . . .

Joseph wept when he realized how the work of the Prophet Joseph would bless the earlier Joseph's numerous posterity.

We praise Joseph Smith, too, for his diligence and capacity to translate and to receive hundreds of pages of revealed scripture. He was the revealing conduit. Through him, it has been estimated, more marvelous pages of scripture passed than through any other human in history.

We praise Joseph not only for his capacity to endure but to “endure it well” (D&C 121:8). Early on, as a boy, there was the painful operation on his leg—without which surgery he could not have made the later arduous Zion's Camp march from Ohio to Missouri. During the march Joseph “walked most of the time and had a full proportion of blistered, bloody, and sore feet” [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 287]. Likewise, we praise him and Emma for enduring the sorrowful loss of six of their natural and adopted children to early death. Parents who have lost even one child are filled with empathy.

We praise Joseph for the capacity to endure persecution, including the long and severe deprivations in Liberty Jail. To so many, everything then seemed hopeless. Yet the Lord of heaven reassured imprisoned Joseph that “the ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name” (D&C 122:1). We live in a day where there is increased inquiry about Joseph Smith and the restored gospel.

Joseph has long since fulfilled his wish that he might hold “an even weight in the balance with” the ancients [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 230]. We can now sing of how Joseph has been “crowned in the midst of the prophets of old” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 27).

We praise Joseph for enduring bitter and repeated betrayals and disappointments. Thus, he went to Carthage “like a lamb to the slaughter,” “calm as a summer's morning,” and “void of offense towards . . . all men” (D&C 135:4). He did not go to Carthage bitterly. He did not go to Carthage complainingly. What a marvelous capacity to endure well!

Joseph knew which way he faced. It was toward the Savior Jesus Christ to whom he listened ever since our Heavenly Father first

instructed young Joseph, saying, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” [Joseph Smith—History 1:17].¹³

5

**The life and mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith
help us turn to the paths that lead to eternal life.**

I am grateful for this man, for his teachings, for his revelations, for what he has left for us, for it was through him that the gospel was restored to the earth. I think there is no more beautiful story in all of history than the simple, sweet story of the lad who went into the woods near his home, kneeling in prayer and receiving heavenly visitors.

Now we look into his life and into his works. Many have pried into them to find the mystery of it all behind the written word, but there is no mystery. . . . There was a simple faith, the faith of a young boy who was to be trained in the things that pertained to God. And as time went by, this young man, without scholarly achievements and without education, was educated by the Lord for the things which should come.

Now we have been given intelligence and a mind. We only need to train and cultivate it as the Lord instructed Joseph and have a simple faith as he had and be willing to follow simple instructions. When we do so and follow the path that [the Lord] would have us follow and learn the lessons that He would have us learn, we find that our lives are purged of all things which are contrary to the purposes of God, and so it was with Joseph. He came to be a man nearer perfection, for he had cleansed his soul and his mind and lived close to the Lord and could talk with Him and hear Him speak the things which he has left for us through his revelations. Through his spiritual eyes he has been able to see that which has passed and that which lies ahead, and we have had proof of the truthfulness of that which he has seen. . . .

I am grateful for my membership in the Church, and my testimony of its divinity hinges upon the simple story of the lad under the trees kneeling and receiving heavenly visitors—not one God, but two separate individual personages, the Father and the Son,

revealing again to the earth the personages of the Godhead. My faith and testimony hinges upon this simple story, for if it is not true, Mormonism falls. If it is true—and I bear witness that it is—it’s one of the greatest single events in all history.

It is my prayer [that] as we commemorate this great prophet and reflect upon his life, that we have gratitude in our hearts for the things which have come into our lives by reason of his seership and his revelation to us—a choice seer, raised up by the Lord to guide us in these latter days, that we might turn our footsteps back to those paths which will lead us to exaltation and eternal life.¹⁴

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- Ponder President Hunter’s teachings about Joseph Smith’s First Vision (see section 1). How has your testimony of the First Vision influenced you? Why is it vital for Latter-day Saints to have a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God?
- What are your impressions as you review President Hunter’s teachings about the organization of the Church? (See section 2.) What blessings have come to you and your family through the restored Church of Jesus Christ?
- Why is it helpful to understand the meanings of the titles *prophet*, *seer*, and *revelator*? (See section 3.) How have you been blessed by prophets, seers, and revelators?
- In section 4, President Hunter outlines some of the reasons we praise Joseph Smith. How do these teachings increase your appreciation for the Prophet Joseph? What can you learn from Joseph Smith’s example?
- Review President Hunter’s teachings about Joseph Smith’s faith, spiritual education, and obedience (see section 5). How do these teachings apply to us? How can we show gratitude for the blessings that have come to us through the Prophet Joseph Smith?

Related Scriptures

Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:25–33; Daniel 2:44; Ephesians 2:19–22; 4:11–14; D&C 1:17–32; 5:9–10; 122:1–2; 135; Joseph Smith—History

Study Help

“As you feel the joy that comes from understanding the gospel, you will want to apply what you learn. Strive to live in harmony with your understanding. Doing so will strengthen your faith, knowledge, and testimony” (*Preach My Gospel* [2004], 19).

Notes

1. In Eleanor Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter* (1994), 7; see also page 6.
2. “The Temple of Nauvoo,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1994, 63–64.
3. “Come to the God of All Truth,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1994, 73.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 100–101.
5. “The Sixth Day of April, 1830,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 64.
6. “The Sixth Day of April, 1830,” 63.
7. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 228.
8. “The Sixth Day of April, 1830,” 64–65.
9. “The Sixth Day of April, 1830,” 63.
10. “The Sixth Day of April, 1830,” 64.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 101.
12. “Joseph Smith the Seer,” in *The Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons*, 2 vols. (1966), 2:193–94.
13. “The Temple of Nauvoo,” 63–64.
14. “Joseph Smith the Seer,” 2:197–98.