

Death AND Life

PIONEER PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESURRECTION

As early Church converts journeyed to the western United States to gather with the Saints, they encountered death but were bolstered by their new faith in the restored gospel. Following are excerpts from pioneer accounts that show the Saints' hope in the Resurrection, together with comforting teachings from the first five Church Presidents.

An account of an unnamed Scandinavian Latter-day Saint father whose young son died on the journey from New York to Utah in 1866:

“With the help of a friend the little grave was dug and the remains placed therein. The child dying from a contagious disease, there were no assembled mourners, no formal ceremony, no floral emblems, no spiritual song, no word of eulogy. But ere the bereaved father departed he uttered a brief dedicatory prayer in his native language (Danish) as follows: . . .

“Heavenly Father: Thou gavest me this little treasure—this darling boy, and now thou hast called him away. Wilt thou grant that his remains may lie here undisturbed until the resurrection morn. Thy will be done. Amen.’

“And rising from the ground his parting words were:

“‘Farewell, my dear little Hans—my beautiful boy.’ Then with drooping head and aching heart he stoutly bent his way to his camping ground.”¹

President Joseph Smith (1805–44):

“How consoling to the mourners when they are called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child, or dear relative, to know that, although the earthly tabernacle is laid down and dissolved, they shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die any more, but they shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.”²





Joseph Watson Young (1828–73), nephew of Brigham Young, traveled from England to the United States in 1853:

“It was a mournful scene to consign a fellow creature to the silent deep at the dead hour of the night with only a few lonely witnesses. . . . He had no relative on board or anyone in particular to mourn him except a fellow servant. These are the fondest hopes of human nature blasted in a moment. This young man had forsaken all to go into Zion, and his heart burned with lively anticipations of the future, little thinking that he was to consign his earthly body to the hungry wave. However, he died not as those who have no hope, for his peace was made with his God, and he had the full assurance of a glorious resurrection in the morning of the just.”³



Right: President Brigham Young. Above: Joseph Watson Young.

President Brigham Young (1801–77):

“What a dark valley and a shadow it is that we call death! To pass from this state of existence as far as the mortal body is concerned, into a state of inanition [emptiness], how strange it is! How dark this valley is! How mysterious is this road, and we have got to travel it alone. I would like to say to you, my friends and brethren, if we could see things as they are, and as we shall see and understand them, this dark shadow and valley is so trifling that we shall turn round and look about upon it and think, when we have crossed it, why this is the greatest advantage of my whole existence, for I have passed from a state of sorrow, grief, mourning, woe, misery, pain, anguish and disappointment into a state of existence, where I can enjoy life to the fullest extent as far as that can be done without a body.”⁴



INSETS: BRIGHAM YOUNG, BY JOHN WILLARD CLAWSON; PHOTOGRAPH OF JOSEPH WATSON YOUNG, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY; PHOTOGRAPH OF DAN JONES © IRI; JOHN TAYLOR, BY A. WESTWOOD, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM



Dan Jones (1811–62), Welsh convert who, with Mrs. Williams and other Church members, sailed to the United States in 1849:

“Mrs. Williams, of Ynysybont near Tregaron [Wales], is worsening fast, and signs are that she will not live long. . . . She said that the greatest honor she had ever received was to be able to become a member of the true church of the Son of God, that there was no fear in her breast concerning the other life and that her religion now proved its strength more than ever before. . . . She solemnly counseled her sons to continue faithful until death so that they would obtain with her a better resurrection. . . . She continued lucid through the night, and at a



Right:
President John Taylor. **Above:**
Dan Jones.

quarter past four the next morning her spirit departed in peace, leaving a smile on her lips.”⁵

President John Taylor (1808–87):



“How consoling it is to those who are called upon to mourn the loss of dear friends in death, to know that we will again be associated with them! How encouraging to all who live according to the revealed principles of truth, perhaps more especially to those whose lives are pretty well spent, who have borne the heat and burden of the day, to know that ere long we shall burst the barriers of the tomb, and come forth living and immortal souls, to enjoy the society of our tried and trusted friends, no more to be afflicted with the seeds of death, and to finish the work the Father has given us to do!”⁶

Andrew Jenson (1850–1941), Danish immigrant who traveled in the Andrew H. Scott wagon company from Nebraska, USA, to Utah in 1866:

“When we witnessed their [our fellow travelers’] earthly remains deposited in mother earth, in the wilderness, we all wept, or felt like weeping; for the thought of burying dear ones in this manner, when friends and relatives must immediately hasten away, without hopes of ever visiting the resting places of their dead again, was sad and trying indeed. . . . But their graves will be found when Gabriel sounds his trump in the morning of the first resurrection. These departed ones thus laid down their bodies as they were marching towards Zion. The Lord called them home before they reached their destination; they were not permitted to see Zion in the flesh; but they shall receive glory

and rejoice hereafter; they died while endeavoring to obey God and keep his commandments, and blessed are they who die in the [Lord].”⁷

President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98):

“Without the gospel of Christ the separation by death is one of the most gloomy subjects it is possible to contemplate; but just as soon as we obtain the gospel and learn the principle of the resurrection the gloom, sorrow and suffering occasioned by death are, in a great measure, taken away. . . . The resurrection of the dead presents itself before the enlightened mind of man, and he has a foundation for his spirit to rest upon. That is the position of the Latter-day Saints today. We do know for ourselves, we are not in the dark with regard to this matter; God has revealed it to us and we do understand the principle of the resurrection of the dead, and that the gospel brings life and immortality to light.”⁸



Right: President Wilford Woodruff.
Above: Andrew Jenson.



For readability, some spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been standardized.

NOTES

1. Robert Aveson, “Leaves from the Journal of a

Boy Emigrant,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 12, 1921, 4:7; available at lds.org/churchhistory/library/pioneercompanysearch.

2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 52.

3. Joseph W. Young, *Journal*, Mar. 6, 1853, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah; available at mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu.

4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 273.



William Driver (1837–1920), pioneer who traveled from England to New York, USA, in 1866:

“Willie, my dearest child, was very ill all night until 7:30 a.m., when he was released from his sufferings. God bless his dear soul. How he suffered. He came to his death through Mr. Poulter’s cart breaking on St. Ann’s Hill, Wandsworth, Surrey, England. Oh, how I mourn this great affliction. O Lord, help me by thy power to bear it as from thy hand and stimulate me to more nobly and faithfully serve Thee, and may I live to prepare to meet him in



Right: President Lorenzo Snow. Above: William Driver.



a happier and better world with his dear sister, Elizabeth Maryann, and at the resurrection of the just may I be there to meet them.”⁹

President Lorenzo Snow (1814–1901):

“In the next life we will have our bodies glorified and free from sickness and death. Nothing is so beautiful as a person in a resurrected and glorified condition. There is nothing more lovely than to be in this condition and have our wives and children and friends with us.”¹⁰ ■

5. “A Letter from Capt. D. Jones to the Editor of *Udgnorn Seion*,” in Ronald D. Dennis, *The Call of Zion: The Story of the First Welsh Mormon Emigration*, vol. 2 (1987), 164–65; available at mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu.

6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* (2001), 50–51.

7. Andrew Jenson, Journal, Aug. 20, 1866, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Oct. 8, 1866, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, 6; available at lds.org/churchhistory/library/pioneercompanysearch.

8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church:*

Wilford Woodruff (2004), 82–83.

9. Frank Driver Reeve, ed., *London to Salt Lake City in 1866: The Diary of William Driver* (1942), 42; available at mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu.

10. Lorenzo Snow, in Conference Report, Oct. 1900, 63.