



THE FORCES OF LIGHT AND DARK, BY WARREN LUCH, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM
PHOTOGRAPH OF SACRED GROVE BY TROY CORBETT



**By President
M. Russell
Ballard**

Acting President
of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

HOW THE LORD *Prepared the World* FOR THE RESTORATION

In countless ways, the Lord prepared the world for the Restoration of His gospel to bless individuals, families, communities, nations, and the world.

The Lord prepared the world for the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ long before the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820. In fact, the Lord’s preparation to restore the fulness of His gospel in the last days began before the earth was created.

In the October 1918 revelation known as Doctrine and Covenants section 138, received by President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918), we learn that the early leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and many “*other choice spirits . . .* were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:53; emphasis added).

President Smith saw “that they were also among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:55). He added that “they, *with many others*, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:56; emphasis added).

Following the creation of the earth, ancient “prophets since the world began” talked, sang, dreamed, and prophesied about the future “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21; see also Luke 1:67–75).

One of the most important ways the Lord prepared the world for the Restoration was a manuscript revolution that coincided with the invention and use of papyrus and parchment. Below: Papyrus page of oldest existing New Testament manuscript.

Speaking specifically about the first prophet of the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ, President Brigham Young (1801–77) observed, “The Lord had his eye upon [Joseph Smith], and upon his father, and upon his father’s father, and upon their progenitors clear back to Abraham, and from Abraham to the flood, from the flood to Enoch and from Enoch to Adam. He has watched that family and that blood as it has circulated from its fountain to the birth of that man. [Joseph Smith] was foreordained in eternity to preside over this last dispensation.”¹

As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the First Vision this year, it may be appropriate to remember the numerous women and men over the course of centuries who were inspired by the Lord as He prepared the world for the Restoration that began when the Father and the Son appeared to young Joseph Smith, who was seeking forgiveness and direction in 1820.

As we look back in history, we will discover

that many revolutions swept across the world preparing people for the Lord’s Church to be restored in the last days.²

THE MANUSCRIPT REVOLUTION

One of the most important ways the Lord prepared the world for the Restoration of His gospel was a manuscript revolution that grew out of the invention and use of papyrus and parchment.³

Parchment, made from animal skin, was used in ancient times and the early modern period as a writing surface.⁴ The earliest known copies of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and many important later copies of the Bible were preserved on parchment.⁵

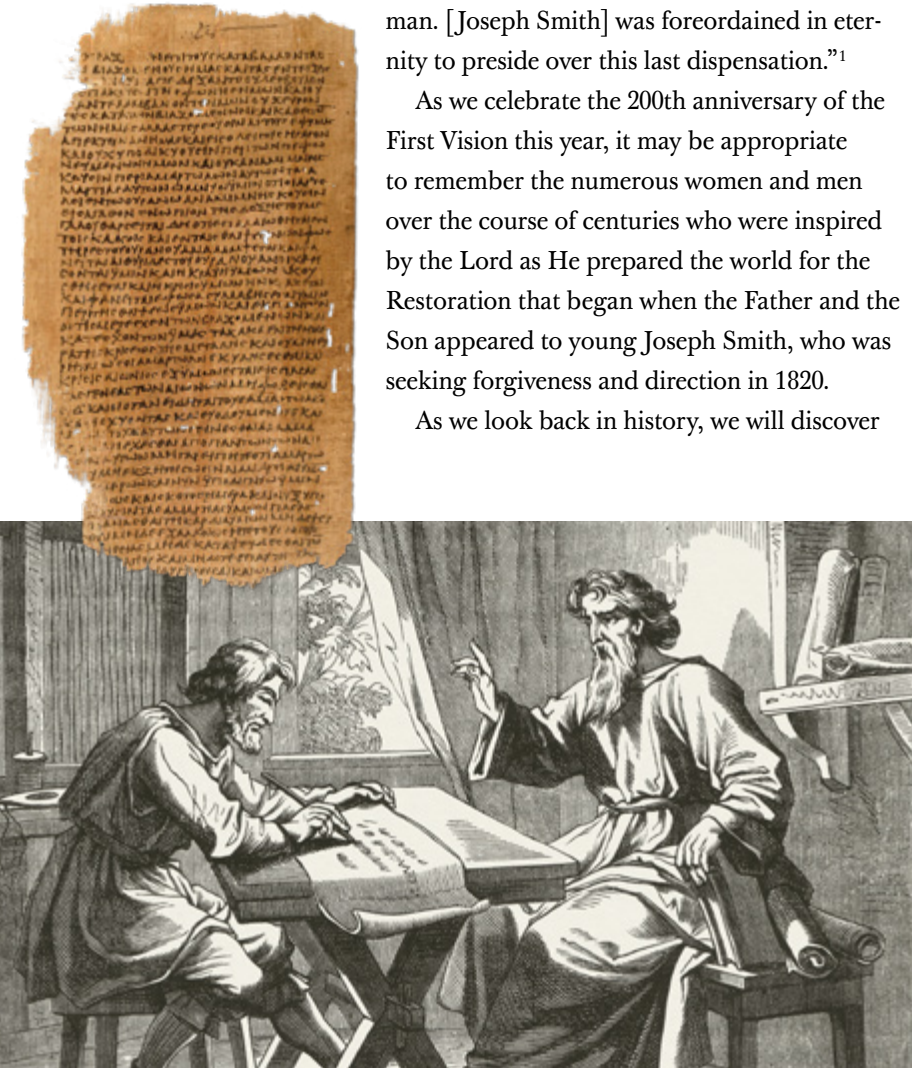
Papyrus, made from the pith of the papyrus plant, is another material used in ancient times as a writing surface. The earliest copies of the New Testament books are preserved on papyrus.

These writing materials made it easy, compared to writing on stone or clay tablets, for scribes to record God’s words received through inspired prophets and apostles. Using these writing materials, many countless and unknown scribes diligently copied, transmitted, and preserved sacred writings in multiple copies so that the flames of faith were never extinguished.

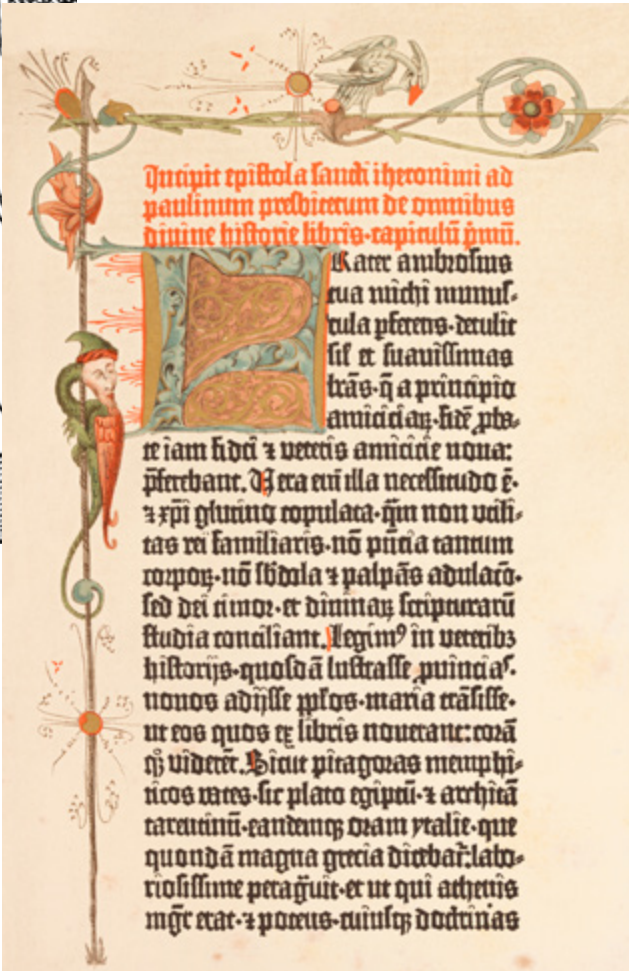
For example, I recently learned that “there are over one hundred manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew written in Greek,” with many other biblical manuscripts produced during the Middle Ages on parchment.⁶

THE PRINTING REVOLUTION

As I have often taught, the Lord inspired another monumental step in preparing the world for the Restoration of His saving gospel when a



Johannes Gutenberg was an instrument in the Lord's hand to increase knowledge, understanding, and religious faith in the world. Far right: Engraving page of Gutenberg Bible.



German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg, adapted printing technologies first introduced in China to produce the printing press in 1439 or 1440.⁷

Gutenberg was an instrument in the Lord's hand to increase knowledge, understanding, and religious faith in the world.⁸ His invention ignited a printing revolution that changed the world forever by facilitating the wide circulation of ideas and information that became "agents of change."⁹

Scholars estimate that about 30,000 books existed in Europe at the time Gutenberg published the Bible on his printing press. Within 50 years after his invention, more than 12 million books were found in Europe.

The Protestant Reformation utilized Gutenberg's invention to spread its ideas and to bring the Bible to the common people in ways that no one of an earlier generation ever could have imagined.

THE LITERACY REVOLUTION AND THE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

The printing revolution fed and was fed by an increase in literacy and a growing thirst among the common people of Europe to read the sacred words of scripture in their own languages.

The Latin Bible, translated from Greek and Hebrew in the fifth century AD, had been the official Bible of the western Catholic church for 1,000 years.¹⁰ For centuries many Europeans learned about the Bible mainly through sermons given by priests.

But in the 15th and 16th centuries, religious reformers created new Bible translations in the common languages of Europe, such as German, Italian, English, Spanish, and French. These translations were typically based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts—not on the Latin Bible. They enabled tens of thousands of readers to experience the stories and teachings of the Bible in their own language.

Martin Luther, born in 1483, was one of the leaders in publishing the Bible in the language of his day. His German translation was published in

ILLUSTRATION OF 16TH-CENTURY PRINTING HOUSE, FROM GETTY IMAGES
BIBLE PAGE FROM GETTY IMAGES

1534—a pivotal year in the history of western Christianity.¹¹ Luther’s belief in the power of the scriptures helped fuel the Reformation. Other reformers promoted universal education so that everyone could have the opportunity to read the scriptures for themselves.

Some religious leaders were concerned that widespread reading of the Bible would lead to heresies, the undermining of the church’s authority, and even civil unrest. They responded by imprisoning, torturing, and even putting to death many who were discovered translating the Bible into the common language of the day or owning common-language translations of the scriptures.

William Tyndale, born about 1494, came upon the scene during Martin Luther’s courageous work on the German translation of the Bible.¹² While still a young man, Tyndale conceived the idea of making a new and better

English version of the Bible based on the original languages of Hebrew and Greek.

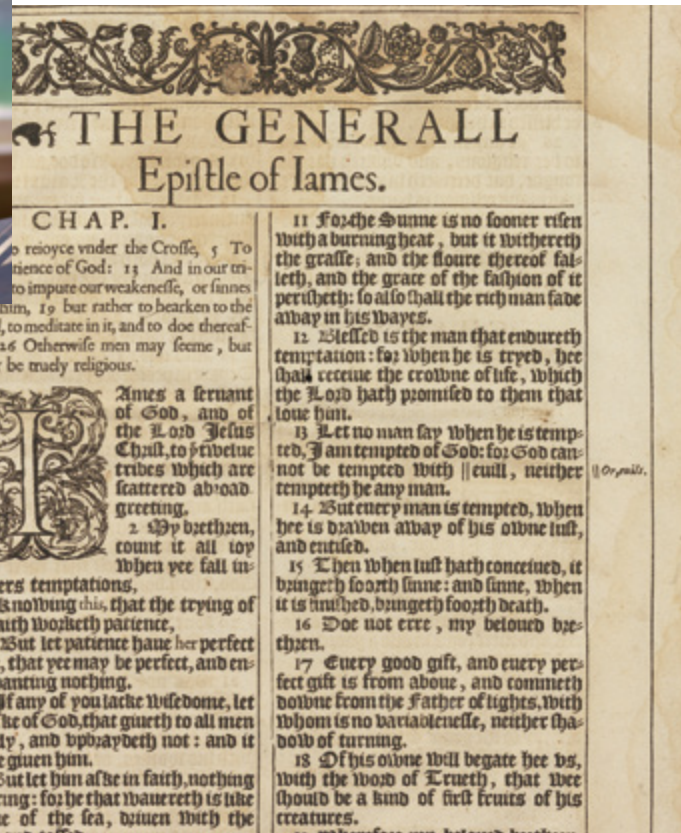
About 1523 he sought help and encouragement from the Catholic bishop of London to produce such a version but was vigorously rebuffed. Because a prohibition against translating the Bible had been passed by the convocation of Oxford in 1408, Tyndale needed official permission to proceed without interference.

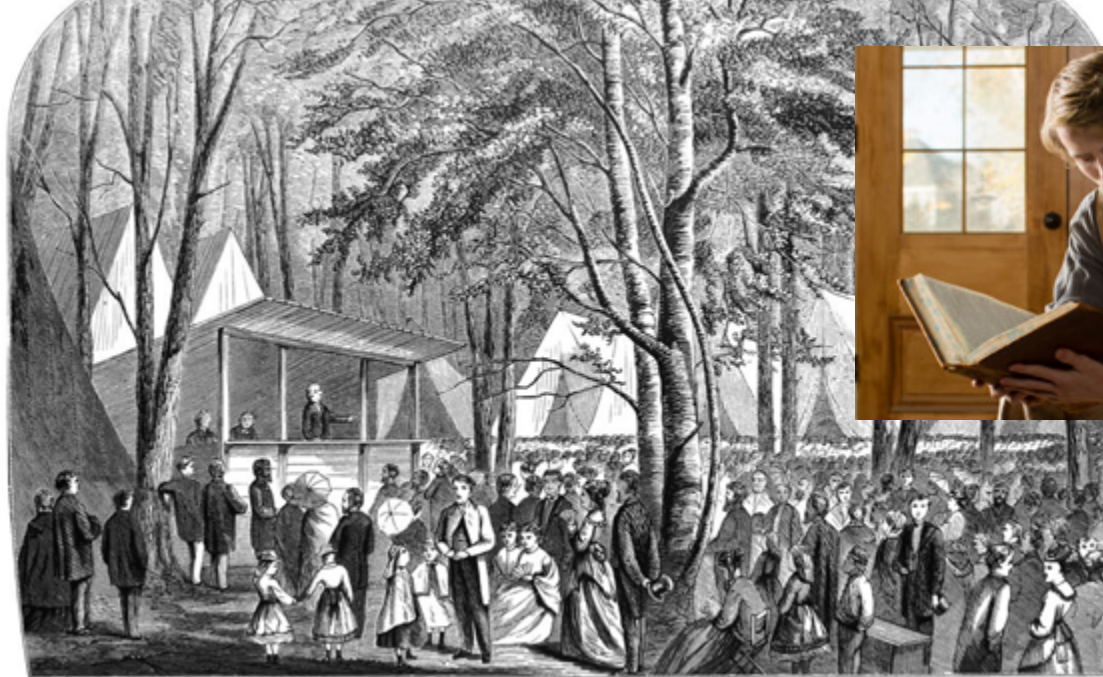
Dedicated to the task of translating the Bible into English, Tyndale secretly began his work and finished translating the New Testament in 1525. Printed in Cologne, Germany, Tyndale’s translation was smuggled into England, where it was being sold in early 1526.

Eventually, Tyndale, like many other men and women who were put to death for wanting the common people to have access to the scriptures



Eventually, William Tyndale, like many other men and women who wanted the common people to have access to the scriptures in their own language, was put to death for the cause of Jesus Christ. Right: Page from the original King James Bible.





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in their own language, was strangled while tied to the stake in early October 1536.¹³ Nevertheless, his English translation lived on as his words and phrases and entire sections of his translation were incorporated into the King James Version.¹⁴

The King James Version, published in 1611, was officially adopted by the Church of England and later influenced the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in several significant ways.¹⁵ It was the most widely read English Bible at the time of Joseph Smith's birth in 1805. By then most families, including that of Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith, owned a Bible and read from it on a regular basis. In fact, many people learned to read by hearing it read at home and by studying it themselves.

THE POLITICAL AND COMMUNICATION REVOLUTIONS

The printing, translation, and literacy revolutions prepared the way for political and technological revolutions that swept across Europe and the Americas between the 17th and 19th centuries. The changing political climate in Europe and America gave people greater freedom to choose their own religious path. Religious freedom was one of many results of the political revolutions that occurred during this period.

The Lord also began to “pour out [His]

spirit upon all flesh” (see Joel 2:28; Joseph Smith—History 1:41), including on those who were prepared to dream of new transportation and communication technologies that would move His Restoration forward in dramatic ways.

As the Lord raised up His Prophet, He inspired men and women to invent technologies, such as canals, telegraphs, railroads, and steam engines, so the gospel could go forth to all the world.

In countless other ways, the Lord prepared the world for the Restoration of His gospel to bless individuals, families, communities, nations, and the world.

GUIDING THE SMITH FAMILY

As we consider how the Lord prepared the world for the Restoration, we should always remember that much of what He accomplished was through the lives of individuals—ordinary men and women who, in some cases, accomplished extraordinary things.

Many individuals and families in countries around the world were prepared to receive the message of the Restoration. These included the Prophet's parents, Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith, two deeply spiritual individuals who were raised in a culture that taught them to love Jesus Christ and study the Bible.

For years, Joseph and Lucy had experienced financial, health, and other setbacks in New England, in the northeast corner of the United States. By 1816, when they lost their crops because of the worldwide climate change caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, Joseph and Lucy had little choice but to give up on New England and make a courageous decision to leave the safety net of family, friends, and community.

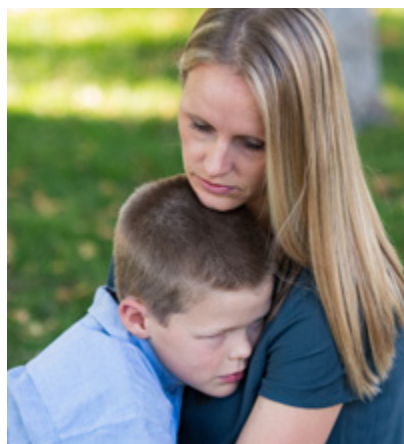
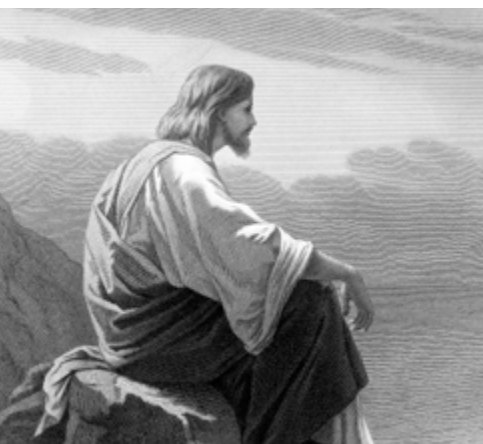
As volume 1 of the new history of the Church states: “Joseph Sr. loved his wife and children dearly, but he had not been able to provide them

much stability in life. Bad luck and unsuccessful investments had kept the family poor and rootless. Maybe New York would be different.”¹⁶

In many ways, the Smith family’s failures in New England pushed them to western New

York, where religious excitement increased and inspired Joseph Smith Jr. to seek the Lord in his quest for forgiveness and direction. It was also where the gold plates lay hidden, waiting for him to locate, translate, and publish them.

personal life histories can provide a lens to see how the Lord’s hand is manifest in our lives. In a revelation given in 1831, the Lord warned the world, “And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save



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RECOGNIZING THE LORD’S HAND IN OUR LIVES

As the Lord did with the Smith family failures, He is also able to make us strong, teach us new lessons, and prepare us through failures and setbacks for a much different future than we imagine.

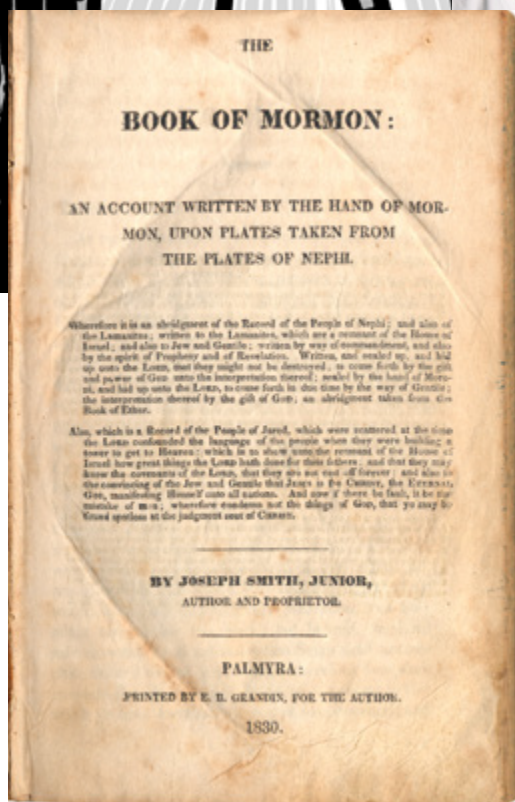
As we consider how the Lord’s hand was manifested in the lives of the Smith family, we need to recognize that His hand is also manifested in each of our lives. Looking for the hand of the Lord in our lives takes spiritual sensitivity and, in many cases, time and perspective. Fortunately, patriarchal blessings, personal journals, and

those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:21).

Our willingness to obey the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially the two great commandments to love God and our neighbor as ourselves, will be enhanced as we look for and acknowledge the hand of the Lord in our lives and His hand in preparing the world for the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is “a marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 25:17).

The Lord is now preparing the world for His Second Coming, just as He prepared the world for the Restoration of His eternal gospel. Again, His hand is visible not only in the events of historical change but also in the lives of individuals.

When Joseph Smith went into the grove we now call sacred, he was seeking forgiveness and direction in his life.¹⁷ In one sense, He was



The Lord is now preparing the world for His Second Coming, just as He prepared the world for the Restoration of His eternal gospel. Left: Title page of an 1830 Book of Mormon.

NOTES

1. Brigham Young, in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 544; see also Brigham Young, "Remarks," *Deseret News*, Oct. 26, 1859, 266.
2. Transportation, communication, engineering, and medical advances are a significant part of the Lord's preparation for the Restoration of His gospel and Church.
3. See L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 4th ed. (2013).
4. For example, the U. S. Declaration of Independence, official Acts of the British Parliament, Torah scrolls used in Jewish synagogues, and diplomas from some universities.
5. See Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins, *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2010) and Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (2005).
6. Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints, A Study Bible* (2019), 2.
7. See Diana Childress, *Johannes Gutenberg and the Printing Press* (2008).
8. See, for example, M. Russell Ballard, "The Miracle of the Holy Bible," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2007, 80–82.
9. See Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1980), 703.
10. See James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper, eds., *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 1, From the Beginnings to 600* (2013); see also vols. 2–4.
11. This fourth-century Latin translation became the Catholic church's official version; see Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death* (1999).
12. See David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (1994).
13. Tyndale's dead body was then burned at the stake.
14. William Tyndale's English translation, although unacknowledged, is preserved in the 1611 King James Version of the Bible.
15. See David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (2011).
16. See *Saints, Vol. 1: The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days* (2018), 6.
17. See "First Vision Accounts," Gospel Topics, topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
18. See Joseph F. Smith, in M. Russell Ballard, "The True, Pure, and Simple Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2019, 29.

responding to the Lord's inspired invitation recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

I testify that in the very beginning, the Lord's hand prepared the world for the Restoration of the "true, pure, and simple gospel" of Jesus Christ, the "saving doctrines of Christ" that are available to all God's children.¹⁸ I also testify that the Lord's hand is in our individual lives inviting us to follow Him, serve others, and love Him as He prepares the world for His glorious Second Coming. ■